

# An Erotic-Ecphrastic Pastiche: *Anth.Pal.* 12.61–62

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Ἄθρει· μὴ διὰ παντὸς ὄλαν κατάτηκ' Ἀρίβαζε  
τὰν Κνίδον· ἅ πέτρα θρυπτομένα θέρεται.

Ματέρες αἱ Περσῶν καλὰ μὲν καλὰ τέκνα τέκεσθε,  
ἀλλ' Ἀρίβαζος ἐμοὶ κάλλιον ἢ τὸ καλόν.

Look. Don't melt all of Cnidos completely, Aribazus,  
the stone is crumbling in the heat.

Mothers of Persians, you bear beautiful beautiful sons,  
but Aribazus is more beautiful to me than beauty itself.

THESE TWO anonymous couplets in Book 12 of the *Palatine Anthology* have long troubled interpreters, and have yet to receive a satisfactory interpretation.<sup>1</sup> It is not even clear whether these lines make up one poem or two. The couplets appear together in the Palatine manuscript but their seemingly unrelated content has led most editors to consider them as separate distichs, variations on the beauty of a Persian boy called Aribazus, whose name appears nowhere else in the *Anthology*.<sup>2</sup> The goal of this study is to demonstrate their unity

<sup>1</sup> *Anth.Pal.* 12.61–62 = A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, *Hellenistic Epigrams* (Oxford 1965): Anon. 17–18. All translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> According to Gow and Page, *Hellenistic Epigrams* II 568, the couplets should be separated because when read together “the resulting quatrain is incoherent.” On the two couplets as variations on a theme, see R. Aubreton and F. Buffière, *Anthologie Grecque XI* (Paris 1994) 22 n.3. K. Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands: Hellenistic Epigrams in Context* (Berkeley 1998) 288, treats them as a

and to identify the sort of epigram that these four lines constitute. Hellenistic epigrams rarely confine themselves to a singular generic affiliation,<sup>3</sup> so it is possible to explain the lines as a mixture of ecphrastic and erotic material. Such a combination is not uncommon, but these poems offer a novel, highly allusive approach to the mixture. Ancient Greek epigrams, and ancient literature in general, often employ a multivalent system of allusion and sophisticated refashioning of previous material.<sup>4</sup> Because of the partial nature of the extant ancient literary record, such allusions and refashionings are often impossible to identify, but in the case of these lines, we have all that is necessary to successfully identify and interpret them as a unified epigram, an erotic-ecphrastic pastiche.

The lines likely date back to the *Garland* of Meleager of Gadara. They are preserved in a section of the *Palatine Anthology* that features exclusively Meleagrian authors (*AP* 12.37–168),<sup>5</sup> which tells us that these lines were known to and preserved by Meleager in his collection. Kathryn Gutzwiller has even pointed to the epigram by Meleager which immediately follows them as a variation on these lines (*AP* 12.63 = Meleager *HE* 91):

Σιγῶν Ἡράκλειτος ἐν ὄμμασι τοῦτ' ἔπος αὐδᾶ·  
 “Καὶ Ζηνὸς φλέξω πῦρ τὸ κεραυνοβόλον.”  
 ναὶ μὴν καὶ Διόδωρος ἐνὶ στέρνοις τόδε φωνεῖ·  
 “Καὶ πέτρον τήκω χρωτὶ γλαινόμενον.”  
 δύστανος, παίδων ὃς ἐδέξατο τοῦ μὲν ἀπ' ὄσσων  
 λαμπάδα, τοῦ δὲ πόθοις τυφόμενον γλυκὸν πῦρ.

single unit; cf. K. Gutzwiller, “Genre and Ethnicity in the Epigrams of Meleager,” in S. L. Ager et al. (eds.), *Belonging and Isolation in the Hellenistic World* (Toronto 2013) 67 n.26.

<sup>3</sup> A. Sens, *Hellenistic Epigrams: A Selection* (Cambridge 2020) 2–3.

<sup>4</sup> See Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands* 236–276 (on Antipater) and 276–322 (on Meleager). See also S. L. Tarán, *The Art of Variation in the Hellenistic Epigram* (Leiden 1979), and P. Laurens, *L'Abeille dans l'ambre: Célébration de l'épigramme de l'époque alexandrine à la fin de la Renaissance*<sup>2</sup> (Paris 2012) 103–138.

<sup>5</sup> See Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands* 326–327, Table II.

Staying silent, Heraclitus voices this word with his eyes:

“I will set ablaze even the thunderbolt-fire of Zeus.”

Why yes and Diodorus utters this with his chest:

“I melt even the stone that is warmed by my skin.”

Unlucky, whoever has received a torch from the eyes of this boy, and from that, the sweet fire seething with desires.

This poem does seem to draw upon *AP* 12.61 in its hyperbolic references to the fire of love and particularly in the melting of stone in line 4,<sup>6</sup> but there is a poem by Antipater of Sidon that also helps to illuminate the anonymous lines (*API* 167 = Antipater *HE* 44):<sup>7</sup>

Φάσεις, τὰν μὲν Κύπριν ἀνὰ κραναὰν Κνίδον ἀθρῶν,  
 ἄδε που ὡς φλέξει καὶ λίθος εὖσα λίθον·  
 τὸν δ' ἐνὶ Θεσπιάδαϊς γλυκὺν Ἴμερον, οὐχ ὅτι πέτρον  
 ἀλλ' ὅτι κῆν ψυχρῶ πῦρ ἀδάμαντι βαλεῖ.  
 τοίους Πραξιτέλης κάμε δαίμονας, ἄλλον ἐπ' ἄλλας  
 γᾶς, ἵνα μὴ δισσῶ πάντα θέροίτο πυρί.

You will perhaps say, seeing Cypris in rocky Cnidos,  
 that this one, although being stone herself, will melt stone,  
 and the sweet Desire among the Thespians, that it will throw fire  
 not only into stone but into cold steel.

Such gods Praxiteles made, each in a different land,  
 so that everything not be melted by a double fire.

This poem, unlike Meleager's, is ecphrastic, and helps make sense of the command to look that opens the anonymous couplets. Such a command to look is a common feature of ecphrastic epigram. Antipater's epigram offers an ecphrasis on two statues, Praxiteles' Cnidian Aphrodite and Thespian Eros, praising their beauty as producing flames that could melt stone, and which if combined would risk burning up the entire country. The flames which Aribazus gives rise to are of the same quality

<sup>6</sup> Gutzwiller, in *Belonging and Isolation* 55; see also her *Poetic Garlands* 288.

<sup>7</sup> Aubreton and Buffière, *Anthologie Grecque* 22 n.1. Gow and Page, *Hellenistic Epigrams* II 68, suggest that the poem's “[poor] quality” may be a reason to assign it to Antipater of Thessalonica, but Argentieri, *Gli Epigrammi degli Antipatri* (Bari 2003) 33, cf. 216, accepts the ascription to the Sidonian as genuine.

that one finds in Antipater—they can break down stone and even threaten to consume all of Cnidos. The shared location in Cnidos may even reveal an intentional allusion of one poem to the other. The difficulty of dating the anonymous lines precisely prevents us from determining the direction of the allusion,<sup>8</sup> but one might recognize the anonymous lines as a transition between Antipater's more explicitly ecphrastic poem and Meleager's more explicitly erotic poem. Regardless, the comparison with Antipater's poem helps to draw out an ecphrastic dimension in the anonymous couplets. Aribazus is a spectacle to be seen, and he arouses a reaction not only in the viewer but in the environment around him.<sup>9</sup> Recognition of this likeness between the two poems does not, however, demand that a reader interpret Aribazus as a statue, but rather suggests that these lines mix erotic and ecphrastic tropes.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Argentieri, *Gli Antipatri* 88–89, on the relationship between Antipater's epigram and the anonymous *AP* 159. On the large number of anonymous epigrams from Meleager's *Garland* in Book 12 of the *Anthology* and their relation to Meleager, see A. S. F. Gow, *The Greek Anthology: Sources and Ascriptions* (London 1958) 24–25.

<sup>9</sup> The significance of vision in *AP* 12.61 may be brought out by its placement after a couplet by Meleager, which repeatedly emphasizes the lover's gaze upon the boy (*AP* 12.60 = Meleager *HE* 95):

Ἦν ἐσίδω Θήρωνα, τὰ πάντα' ὀρώ· ἦν δὲ τὰ πάντα  
βλέψω, τόνδε δὲ μή, τὰμπαλιν οὐδὲν ὀρώ.

If I look at Theron, I see everything. If I should behold  
everything, but not him, then conversely I see nothing.

The preceding epigram (*AP* 12.59 = Meleager *HE* 100) also reflects on the visual impression of the beloved boy. On the sophisticated role that sequences of epigrams contribute to the interpretation of individual poems, see K. Gutzwiller, "The Poetics of Editing in Meleager's *Garland*," *TAPA* 127 (1997) 169–200.

<sup>10</sup> The fear that Aribazus will ignite all of Cnidos may itself be a sign of another ecphrastic trope, viz. the naïve viewer: see S. Goldhill, "The Naïve and Knowing Eye: Ecphrasis and the Culture of Viewing in the Hellenistic World," in *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture* (Cambridge 1994) 197–223. An apposite example is the viewer in Leonidas of Tarentum's epigram on a statue

Such a combination of erotic and ecphrastic modes is common in ancient epigram, especially in the poems of Asclepiades of Samos and Meleager himself.<sup>11</sup> Meleager, for example, does this in two poems which appear shortly before our anonymous couplets: *AP* 12.56–57 describe a boy named Praxiteles in terms that evoke the art and artistry of the famous homonymous sculptor.<sup>12</sup> The poems do not describe an artwork, but employ references to artwork and ecphrastic material as a means to express the erotic allure of the beloved boy. This identification of the erotic-ecphrastic nature of the first couplet leaves unanswered the question of how the second couplet on the beautiful children of Persian mothers can be read together with the first. Antipater’s epigram features a beautiful mother (Aphrodite) and beautiful child (Eros), but there is a more direct parallel in another well-known ecphrastic epigram.

Nossis of Locri was a celebrated epigrammatist from the early Hellenistic age, from whom has been transmitted a slender corpus of twelve epigrams, among which are several prominent

of a drunken Anacreon, who is convinced that the statue may fall down (*AP* 307.1–2, 7 = Leonidas *HE* 90): Ἴδ’, ὡς ὁ πρέσβυς ἐκ μέθας Ἀνακρέων / ὑπεσκέλισται ... φύλασσε, Βάκχε, τὸν γέροντα, μὴ πέση, “Look how old Anacreon trips himself from drunkenness ... Protect the old man, Bacchus, lest he fall.”

<sup>11</sup> On Asclepiades and erotic ecphrases see A. Sens, “An Ecphrastic Pair: Asclepiades *AP* 12.75 and Asclepiades or Posidippus *AP* 68,” *CJ* 97 (2002) 249–262. On Meleager’s deployment of ecphrastic themes in an erotic context see K. Gutzwiller, “Art’s Echo. The Tradition of Hellenistic Ecphrastic Epigram,” in A. M. Harder et al. (eds.), *Hellenistic Epigrams* (Groningen 2002) 107. On the ecphrastic dimension of eroticism in Leonidas of Tarentum see J. J. H. Klooster, “Leonidas of Tarentum,” in C. Henriksen (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Epigram* (Medford 2019) 315–316.

<sup>12</sup> On these poems see I. Männlein-Robert, *Stimme, Schrift und Bild. Zum Verhältnis der Künste in der hellenistischen Dichtung* (Heidelberg 2007) 107–115, and, most recently, “Illusion und Phantasie – Zur Poetologie der Aisthesis in der ekphrastischen Dichtung des Hellenismus,” in A. Gerok-Reiter et al. (eds.), *Andere Ästhetik. Grundlagen – Fragen – Perspektiven* (Berlin 2022) 377–383.

ecphrases.<sup>13</sup> Nossis' ecphrastic poems may have already had an influence on her approximate contemporary Asclepiades of Samos,<sup>14</sup> and her influence can also be recognized in *AP* 12.61–62. An epigram of Nossis, which most certainly predates the anonymous couplets, also consists of two seemingly unrelated couplets (*AP* 6.353 = Nossis *HE* 8):

Ἀυτομέλινα τέτυκται· ἴδ', ὡς ἀγανὸν τὸ πρόσωπον.

ἀμὲ ποτοπτάζειν μειλιχίως δοκέει.

ὡς ἐτύμως θυγάτηρ τῆ ματέρι πάντα ποτῶκει·

ἢ καλόν, ὅκκα πέλη τέκνα γονεῦσιν ἴσα.

Melinna herself is made. Look how gentle the face is.

She seems to watch us serenely.

How truly the daughter resembles the mother in every way.

It's good when children are like their parents.

The first two lines praise a portrait of the girl Melinna, whose beauty is expressed in her serenity and grace. The first couplet offers several parallels with *AP* 12.61. First, the command to look. Then the description of a quality of the subject (here, serenity rather than burning beauty).<sup>15</sup> Both lines also include an *adunaton*: for Nossis, a picture that can gaze back; for the anonymous lines, beauty that can melt stone. This comparison with Nossis helps to further confirm the ecphrastic coloring of *AP* 12.61, but these elements are all fairly common in ecphrastic epigram. The more significant parallel is to be seen in the transition between the first and second couplet. The second couplet of Nossis' epigram shifts abruptly to the relationship of mother and

<sup>13</sup> On Nossis see M. Skinner, "Nossis *Thelyglossos*; The Private Text and the Public Book," in S. B. Pomeroy (ed.), *Women's History and Ancient History* (Chapel Hill 1991) 20–47, and Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands* 74–88. On the ecphrases see Männlein-Robert, *Stimme* 45–53, and E. Prioux, *Petits musées en vers: Épigramme et discours sur les collections antiques* (Paris 2008) 151–158.

<sup>14</sup> Sens, *CJ* 97 (2002) 256–260.

<sup>15</sup> *θρυπτομένα* in *AP* 12.61 could even refer to the coyness of a stone image of the boy (for this sense of the verb see LSJ s.v. II.c), cf. Theocritus *Id.* 6.15 *διαθρύπτεται*. For this form of the participle in particular see Xen. *Symp.* 8.4, 8.8.

child, just as in the anonymous lines. In Nossis, this filial relationship ultimately serves as an artistic metaphor, but the reader must first puzzle this meaning out.<sup>16</sup> The final line of Nossis' epigram seems to open with a statement about beauty (ἡ καλόν), which ultimately turns into a banal statement of approbation about the likeness between parent and child. *AP* 12.62 inverts this order by opening with a statement about the relationship between mother and child and concluding with an explicit statement about Aribazus' beauty. Acknowledging Nossis as a model for the anonymous couplets allows one to read them as a coherent whole, but unlike in Nossis, the final couplet of the anonymous epigram need not be read as ultimately ecphrastic. As in the first couplet, this couplet too focuses on the boy as a beautiful sight and the ecphrastic coloring only serves to emphasize the erotic content. The explicitness of this erotic content becomes even more clear when one recognizes a final allusion in these lines to another illustrious predecessor.

The duplication of the adjective καλός in the final couplet of the anonymous epigram evokes none other than Callimachus of Cyrene. Callimachus' epigram on the "Cyclic poem" was famous in antiquity,<sup>17</sup> and its final couplet is echoed in the final couplet of the anonymous epigram (*AP* 12.43.5–6 = 28 Pf. = Callimachus *HE* 2):

<sup>16</sup> See Männlein-Robert, *Stimme* 51, and M. A. Tueller, *Look Who's Talking: Innovations in Voice and Identity in Hellenistic Epigram* (Leuven 2008) 169–172. Later scoptic epigrams would pick up on Nossis' play with this figure, see L. Floridi, "Greek Skoptic Epigram, Ecphrasis, and the Visual Arts," in M. Kanellou et al. (eds.), *Greek Epigram from the Hellenistic to the Early Byzantine Era* (Oxford 2019) 307–323.

<sup>17</sup> The duplication of καλός also appears in *AP* 12.130 (= Anon. *HE* 27, cf. C. Radinger, *Meleagros von Gadara* [Innsbruck 1895] 28–29), *AP* 6.278 (= Rhianus *HE* 8), and *AP* 12.154 (= Meleager *HE* 107), as well as in [Theocritus] *Id.* 8.72–75, all of which certainly post-date Callimachus. On such doubling of καλός as a recurrent motif in Hellenistic poetry see A. Wifstrand, *Studien zur Griechischen Anthologie* (Lund 1926) 56–57; Gow and Page, *Hellenistic Epigrams* II 377; J. D. Reed, *Bion of Smyrna, the Fragments and the Adonis* (Cambridge 1997) 235. I intend to treat this topic more fully in a future study.

Λυσανίη, σὺ δὲ ναίχι καλὸς καλός—ἀλλὰ πρὶν εἰπεῖν  
τοῦτο σαφῶς, Ἥχώ φησί τις· “ἄλλος ἔχει.”

Lysanies, you are so beautiful, beautiful—but before I can say it  
clearly, some Echo says, “another has him.”

The epigram which these lines come from has been a source of much scholarly debate, and a new interpretation is not within the bounds of this study.<sup>18</sup> What is important is simply that the significant repetition of καλός in the penultimate line is picked up by the anonymous epigram, where the parallel echoing of τέκνα τέκεσθε makes the doubling of καλά seem even more emphatic.<sup>19</sup> The seemingly abrupt shift between the themes of the anonymous couplets is also a characteristic of Callimachus’ poem, in which the final couplet comes as a surprise.

Callimachus’ famous epigram has a less well-known companion piece,<sup>20</sup> which also includes the repetition of καλός, though not consecutively as in *AP* 12.62. The significant lines are (*AP* 12.51.3–4 = 29 Pf. = Callimachus *HE* 5):

Καλὸς ὁ παῖς, Ἀχελῶε, λίην καλός, εἰ δέ τις οὐχί  
φησὶν—ἐπισταίμην μόνος ἐγὼ τὰ καλά.

The boy is beautiful, Achelous, too beautiful. If someone  
denies it, I alone would understand beauty.

<sup>18</sup> Indispensable is, still, P. Krafft, “Zu Kallimachos’ Echo Epigramm (28 Pf.),” in *RhM* 120 (1977) 1–29. See also Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands* 218–222; Männlein-Robert, *Stimme* 312–331; R. Pretagostini, “Vita e poetica negli epigrammi 1 e 28 Pf. di Callimaco,” in G. Lozza et al. (eds.), *L’epigramma greco: problemi e prospettive* (Milan 2007) 137–147.

<sup>19</sup> This parallel between Callimachus and the anonymous *AP* 12.62 is already pointed out by Männlein-Robert, *Stimme* 314 n.30.

<sup>20</sup> On the two poems as companion pieces see L. Koenen, “The Ptolemaic King as a Religious Figure,” in A. Bulloch et al. (eds.), *Images and Ideologies: Self-definition in the Hellenistic World* (Berkeley 1993) 87 n.145; Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands* 223; A. Sens, “Some Aspects of Closure in Callimachus’ Epigrams,” in J. J. H. Klooster et al. (eds.), *Callimachus Revisited: New Perspectives in Callimachean Scholarship* (Leuven 2019) 315–316.



This poem, like the final couplet of Callimachus' other epigram and like *AP* 12.61–62, refers to a beautiful boy and emphasizes his beauty by repeating the adjective *καλός* in the next line. The poem's final statement concludes with an abstract neuter substantive referring to beauty, and seems to be the model for the final statement in the last line of the anonymous epigram. The claim that Aribazus is more beautiful than beauty itself is a variation and escalation of the claim to be the only one to understand beauty. Neither of these Callimachean epigrams is particularly ecphrastic and both serve to corroborate the primarily erotic content of the final lines of the anonymous epigram. In the end, the beauty of the boy, which both transcends a seemingly Platonic category in the final couplet<sup>21</sup> and is capable of destroying the material world in the first couplet, is the element which ties the whole poem together.

When one considers the various antecedents of the four anonymous lines preserved in Book 12 of the *Palatine Anthology*, their nature as a coherent epigram becomes clear. These lines praise a boy for his beauty and draw upon a bevy of important early Hellenistic predecessors to craft a poem which blends erotic and ecphrastic modes. The redeployment of this earlier material is admittedly somewhat jejune, which may be the source of the confusion about how all of the material hangs together. The opening couplet twists an ecphrastic motif, potentially borrowed from Antipater of Sidon, into an erotic frame in a way that seems to have inspired Meleager. The following couplet combines elements of Nossis' ecphrastic and Callimachus' erotic epigrams to produce a novel erotic-ecphrastic assemblage. Modern sensibilities are often dismissive of this type of poetic pastiche, but it was not uncommon in the ancient world. This epigram is the product of a learned poet and one who places value on the reuse of traditional material. The poet has combined elements

<sup>21</sup> For the treatment of τὸ καλόν in Platonic circles see *Hippias Maior*. A poem by Meleager (*AP* 12.94.6 = Meleager *HE* 76) also concludes with this term, which Gow and Page, *Hellenistic Epigrams* II 640, find out of place.

from several major authors to create a new work, which Meleager himself found both worthy of imitation and worthy of a place in his collection.<sup>22</sup>

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