

## **Dioscorides and his “mythological epigrams”: the rediscovery of a hitherto neglected poet**

Veronica Piccirillo

*(University of Cagliari)*

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### **Abstract**

Unlike other Hellenistic poets, Dioscorides (3rd c. BCE) has been rather neglected by the scholars throughout the centuries. His remaining epigrams are traditionally divided into five thematic areas: erotic, funerary, dedicatory, descriptive, and satirical. However, through an in-depth analysis of his production, it is possible to identify new different topics. In some compositions, indeed, the poet tends to draw attention towards several mythical events: in *AP* 5.138, the well-known *topos* of the *flamma amoris* becomes the most convenient metaphor to depict the Trojan fire; while in *AP* 12.37, Dioscorides presents a comparison between the handsome Sosarchos and Ganymede, Zeus’ mythical cupbearer. Nevertheless, his interests focus on the etiological nature of these legends as well: in *AP* 9.340, indeed, he takes a precise position within the mythological tradition describing the invention of the *aulos*; in *AP* 6.220, instead, he retraces the origins of the Great Mother Cybele’s rituals; and in *AP* 7.407, he eventually contributes to the birth of a brand-new goddess: Sappho the tenth Muse.

**Key Words** – Dioscorides; Epigrams; Hellenistic Age; Mythology; Commentary

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## 1. Attempts at a biographical reconstruction

To our knowledge, Dioscorides was a refined epigrammatist who belonged to the Hellenistic Age. Unfortunately, in comparison with many of his contemporaries, his artistic merits have been rather neglected by the scholars throughout the centuries<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand, it is not simple to reconstruct the crucial moments of his life, since he did not use to enrich his works with information about it. In fact, even his name appears to be doubtful (cf. *infra*). Both his personality and his *modus vivendi* are therefore completely unknown to us, because, while composing his epigrams, he generally exploited numerous literary masks in order to describe erotic or parodic situations which were very different from his actual experiences. The only certain detail we can deduce from his works is his interest in erudite<sup>2</sup> and religious<sup>3</sup> matters.

However, a more careful reading of his compositions shall provide further biographical elements: for instance, given the presence of several references regarding the traditional customs<sup>4</sup> pertaining the Alexandrian environment, it can be supposed that he either was born, or at least lived, in that same city.

Moreover, in order to identify the exact time span to which Dioscorides belonged, it is useful to consider the function of *terminus post quem* exerted by AP 7.708 = HE 1617-1622, an epitaph<sup>5</sup> dedicated to Machon, who died around 240 BCE<sup>6</sup>, and the function of *terminus ante quem* exerted by the influence of his production over Antipater of Sidon's and Damagetus' epigrams (e.g., Antip. Sid. AP 6.219 = HE 608-631, Damag. AP 7.9 = HE 1379-1386, and 7.432 = HE 1387-1390)<sup>7</sup>. Thus, this last evidence allows us to affirm that he most certainly lived during the second half of the 3rd c. BCE<sup>8</sup>.

Furthermore, as previously anticipated, there are two different hypotheses concerning his name:

<sup>1</sup> The first systematic study on Dioscorides' works was edited by Galán Vioque in 2001. Other brief analysis can be found in earlier editions: cf. Reiske (1754), Brunck (1772-1776), Jacobs (1794-1814, 1813-1817), Dübner (1864-1890), Stadtmüller (1894-1906), Paton (1916-1918), Waltz, Buffière, Aubreton *et al.* (1928-2011), Beckby (1965), Gow and Page (1965); as well as in partial commentaries and studies: cf. Reitzenstein (1905), Veniero (1905), Weinreich (1941), Gow (1963), Fraser (1972), Buffière (1977), Cresci (1977, 1979), Vezzali (1989), Di Castri (1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b), Degani (1997), Iordanoglou (2003, 2009), Fantuzzi (2006: 69; 2007a: 105-123; 2007b: 477-495), and Sens (2020).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Diosc. AP 7.31 = HE 1575-1584, 7.37 = HE 1597-1606, 7.351 = HE 1555-1564, 7.407 = HE 1565-1574, 7.410 = HE 1585-1590, 7.411 = HE 1591-1596, 7.450 = HE 1629-1636, 7.707 = HE 1607-1616 and 7.708 = HE 1617-1622.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Diosc. AP 5.53 = HE 1475-1478, 5.193 = HE 1479-1482, 6.220 = HE 1539-1554, 7.485 = HE 1623-1628 and 11.195 = HE 1691-1696.

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to notice the frequent use of proper names linked to Alexandria (cf. Diosc. AP 5.52.2 = HE 1492: Ἀρσινόη, and AP 11.363.1 = HE 1697: Πτολεμαῖος), the reference to festivities dedicated to Adonis (cf. Diosc. AP 5.53 = HE 1475-1478, and 5.193 = HE 1479-1482), as well as the mention of the river Nile (cf. Diosc. AP 7.76 = HE 1671-1676, 7.166 = HE 1707-1712, 7.708 = HE 1617-1622, and 9.568 = 1677-1684).

<sup>5</sup> According to Athenaeus' reference (cf. 6.40), this epigram was inscribed on Machon's tomb. However, «the literary/funerary poems include imaginary epitaphs on poets, archaic, attic and contemporary»: Whitby (2004: 46). Cf. also Gabathuler (1937: 29), Kassel and Austin (1986, 5: 623).

<sup>6</sup> Dioscorides survived Sositeus as well: cf. AP 7.707 = HE 1607-1616. Cf. Preger (1891: 32), and Rostagni (1955-1956, 2: 209 and 382).

<sup>7</sup> Both of them were also probably inspired by the *Marmor Parium*: cf. Reitzenstein (1970 [1893]: 164).

<sup>8</sup> In particular, Rostagni (1956, 2: 384-385) suggests the time span relating to Ptolemy Philopator's reign (221-203 BCE); while Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1924, 1: 222) proposes the last years belonging to Ptolemy Euergetes' one (246-221 BCE). According to Fraser (1972, 1: 595), instead, he would have been the last Alexandrian epigrammatist to live during the Ptolemaic period.

1. Διοσκορίδης, which appears to be the most common variant<sup>9</sup>, written without diphthong in accordance with the Byzantine pronunciation characterized by the absence of open vowels<sup>10</sup>;
2. Διοσκουρίδης, as Meleager referred to him within the preface of his Στέφανος, through a play on words: cf. *AP* 4.1.23-24 = *HE* 3948-3949 (...ιδ' εὔμουσον κυκλάμινον, / ὃς Διὸς ἐκ κούρων ἔσχεν ἐπωνυμίην, 'and the melodious cyclamen / which took its name from Zeus' sons')<sup>11</sup>. This variant is also testified on coins and inscriptions from the last years of the 5th c. BCE<sup>12</sup>, and on papyri from the 3rd c. BCE<sup>13</sup>.

However, even though his actual name may have been Διοσκουρίδης, as attested by several literary and archaeological testimonies, the scholars usually prefer to adopt the form Διοσκορίδης, transmitted by the Byzantine lemmatists themselves.

Besides, all that remains of Dioscorides' production consists of a selection of epigrams collected within the *Palatinus Heidelbergensis* gr. 23 (10th c. CE), and the *Venetus Marcianus* gr. Z. 481 (P1), dated to September 1301 at the end of its revision<sup>14</sup>. The first one, together with the *Parisinus Supplementarius* gr. 384, forms the notorious *codex P* which contains the *Palatine Anthology*. The second one, instead, collects all the epigrams pertaining the *Planudean Anthology*<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, although these are certainly the most important Dioscoridean testimonies, there are some independent manuscripts which have to be considered, such as the one known as *Matritensis* 4562 (*olim* 24), from the 15th c. CE, which transmits *AP* 7.37 = *HE* 1597-1604.

Albeit the direct tradition ascribes to Dioscorides only 34 epigrams, to these, others might be added: (i) *AP* 7.178 = *HE* 1703-1706, 7.76 = *HE* 1671-1676, and 9.734, respectively assigned to Διοσκορίδου Νικοπολίτου, Διοσκόρου, and Διόκριδου; (ii) *AP* 7.166 = *HE* 1707-1712, and 7.167 = *HE* 1713-1718, characterised by a double ascription; (iii) and *AP* 5.193 = *HE* 1479-1482, 7.352 = *HE* 4742-4749, and 9.735, whose authorship is still uncertain.

## 2. A new topic: the “mythological epigrams”

As it is easy to imagine, Dioscorides' activity was profoundly influenced by the literary trends pertaining the Hellenistic age, such as *brevitas*, *varietas*, *labor limae*, and *imitatio cum variatione* of themes and motifs coming from the earlier traditions.

Within his production a reader shall spot (i) erotic epigrams, both heterosexual and homosexual; (ii) funerary epigrams, dedicated to literary authors from the past, ancient warriors, devoted people, castaways, women, and slaves; (iii) dedicatory epigrams, concerning various subjects; (iv) descriptive epigrams, regarding the floods of the Nile

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Plut. *Lyc.* 11.9: ἔνιοι μέντοι τὸν Λυκοῦργον, ὃν καὶ Διοσκορίδης ἐστὶν ὁ συντεταγμένος τὴν Λακωνικὴν πολιτείαν, πληγῆναι μὲν φασιν, οὐ τυφλωθῆναι δὲ τὸν ὀφθαλμόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἱερὸν τῆ θεῶ τῆς ἀκέσεως χαριστήριον ἰδρύσασθαι.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Di Castri (1995: 173).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. also v. 44 = *HE* 3969 (ὕμνοθέταν, Ἑρμοῦ δῶρον ἀειδόμενον) relating to Ἑρμόδωρος; v. 34 = *HE* 3959: Βακχυλίδεω; and v. 46 = *HE* 3971: Σικελίδεω.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Fick-Bechtel (1894: 357).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *P.Col.Zen.* 59215, 59041, *P.Col.Zen.* 58, *P.Ent.* 25 and *P.Hib.* 199.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Meschini (1978: XL).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Cameron (1993: 300-307), Martínez Manzano (1998: 183), Galán Vioque (2001: 34-36), and Beta (2017).

and the role of the artists; (v) and satirical epigrams, which anticipate Lucilius, Martial and Juvenal's mocking tone.

However, through an in-depth analysis of his *corpus*, it is still possible to identify new literary interests, such as the ones towards Greek theatre<sup>16</sup> and ancient mythology. In the first case, he focused his attention towards the origins and the evolution of the dramatic genre<sup>17</sup>; while, in the second case, as the following analysis will show, he managed to combine several mythical traditions with themes belonging to his own contemporaneity.

In AP 5.138 = HE 1471-1474, Dioscorides declared his love towards the beautiful Athenion, while she was performing a song dedicated to the fall of Troy. He expressed his passion through the well-known metaphor of the *flamma amoris*<sup>18</sup>, thanks to the association with the burning of Ilium. However, unlike the Trojan city, the poet claimed to suffer not because of the fire of destruction, but because of the flames of passion for the young lady. Furthermore, if Ilium, the prototype of the impenetrable city, tried to resist a ten-years siege before being destroyed, Dioscorides burned with love as soon as he heard Athenion's voice:

Ἴππον Ἀθήνιον ἦσεν ἐμοὶ κακόν· ἐν πυρὶ πᾶσα  
Ἴλιος ἦν, κἀγὼ κείνη ἄμ' ἐφλεγόμαν,  
οὐ δείσας Δαναῶν δεκέτη πόνον· ἐν δ' ἐνὶ φέγγει  
τῷ τότε καὶ Τρῶες κἀγὼ ἀπωλόμεθα.

The reason why this epigram drew the scholars' attention<sup>19</sup> is the innovative contamination between the erotic and funerary themes. It is clear, indeed, that the poet combined the element of the *flamma amoris* (cf. vv. 1-2: ἐν πυρὶ πᾶσα / Ἴλιος ἦν, κἀγὼ

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the funerary epigrams dedicated to ancient tragedians like Thespis (cf. AP 7.410 = HE 1585-1590), Aeschylus (cf. AP 7.411 = HE 1591-1596), and Sophocles (cf. AP 7.37 = HE 1597-1604), as well as to more recent authors like Sositheus (cf. AP 7.707 = HE 1607-1616), and Machon (cf. AP 7.708 = HE 1617-1622).

<sup>17</sup> On this topic cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1913: 231), Webster (1963: 532), Fraser (1972, 1: 599-600), Cresci (1979: 247-257), Bing (1988: 40), Argentieri (1998: 6), Gutzwiller (1998: 23), Galán Vioque (2001: 266-299), Fantuzzi (2006: 69; 2007a: 105-123; 2007b: 477-495).

<sup>18</sup> It is important to remember that the *flamma amoris* metaphor pertained all the literary traditions belonging to both the ancient and recent ages: cf. *Il.* 24.321, Sapph. fr. 31, 38, and 48 Voigt, Alc. fr. 148. 1-2 C., Ibyc. fr. 286 Davies, Aeschyl. *Pr.* 590-591, Soph. *Tr.* 368, fr. 474 R<sup>2</sup>., Aristoph. *Lys.* 221, 839, and 844, Theoc. 2 and 3, Call. fr. 67 Pf., AP 5.6.5 = HE 1095, A. R. 3.286-287, Mel. AP 12.80.4 = HE 4085, 12.92.7-8 = HE 4626-4627, 12.109.4 = HE 4311, Phld. AP 5.115.6 = GP 3201, 5.131.2 = GP 3225, and Marc. Arg. AP 5.89.5 = GP 1317, Ach. Taz. 4.7.3, Catul. 72 and 83, Hor. *Carm.* 3.9, Verg. *Georg.* 3.258-259, *Ecl.* 2.68, Prop. 3.6.39, 3.24.13, Ov. *Am.* 3.2. However, during the Hellenistic period, it gained a deeper value, since it started to navigate the human feelings, in order to find new expressions to describe the emotions, as it occurs in Dioscorides' epigram. On this topic, cf. Lanata (1966: 77), Maggiulli (1989: 185-197), Rousset (1989), Maehler (1990, 3: 1-12), Galán Vioque (2001: 141), Bonanno (2002: 5-17), Spatafora (2006: 449), Sens (2020: 221-222).

<sup>19</sup> Even though both the images *flamma amoris* and the *mors amoris* were very much exploited within the erotic literature, according to Barrette (1996: 5-6), Dioscorides probably took specific inspiration from Asclepiades' production: cf. AP 5.210.1-2 = HE 828-839 (τῷ θαλλῷ Διδύμη με συνήρπασεν ὃ μοι. ἐγὼ δὲ / τήκομαι, ὡς κηρὸς πᾶρ πυρὶ, κάλλος ὀρῶν) where the passion of love melted Asclepiades like wax before the fire, as soon as he met Didyme, and AP 5.162.3-4 = HE 844-845 (οἶχοι', Ἐρωτες, ὄλωλα, διοίχομαι· εἰς γὰρ ἑταίραν / νυστάζων ἐπέβην, οἶδ', ἔθιγον τ' Αἶδα), where the hetaera Philaenion was compared to a cruel viper, whose venomous bite sent the author to death. The last epigram's opening (ἡ λαμυρὴ μ' ἔτρωσε Φυλαίνιον), in particular, was also a model for both the *incipit* of Diosc. AP 5.53 = HE 1475-1478 (ἡ πιθανὴ μ' ἔτρωσεν Ἀριστονόη) and 193 = HE 1479-1482 (ἡ τρυφερὴ μ' ἤγγρευσε Κλεῶ), which is still of uncertain authorship. On this subject, cf. Galán Vioque (2001: 150-151); while on Asclepiades' epigrams, cf. Sens (2011: 27-36 and 49-56).

κείνη ἅμ' ἐφλεγόμαν, 'the whole Ilium / was set on fire, and I burned with her) with the idea of *mors amoris* (cf. vv. 3-4: ἐν δ' ἐνὶ φέγγει / τῷ τότε καὶ Τρῶες κάγω ἀπωλόμεθα, 'in that one day / both the Trojans and I fell'). Thus, he claimed to instantly perish because of the flames of love, just like Troy burned because of the flames of war.

Among the linguistic peculiarities concerning this composition, it would be appropriate to recall the contrast between the epic and the erotic languages: firstly, the opening ἵππον Ἀθήνιον ἦσεν resembles the Homeric ones (cf. *Il.* 1.1: μῆνιν ἄειδε θεά; and *Od.* 1.1: ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε), thanks to the initial position of the accusative ἵππον, and the presence of the verb αἰίδω, which «suggests the performance of an epic or lyric narrative»<sup>20</sup>; secondly, the expression ἐν πυρὶ πᾶσα / Ἴλιος ἦν, describing the total destruction of Ilium, is certainly taken from the *Iliad* (cf. 7.428-429: νεκρούς πυρκαϊῆς ἐπινήνεον ἀχνύμενοι κῆρ, / ἐν δὲ πυρὶ πρήσαντες ἔβαν προτὶ Ἴλιον ἱρήν). On the other hand, the use of πῦρ and πόνοσ is not only linked to the fire of Troy and to the pain suffered by the Greeks during the war<sup>21</sup>, but also to the flames of love and the angst felt by the author. Besides, the erotic meaning of these verses is underlined by the presence of verbs like φλέγω<sup>22</sup>, 'burning with love', and ἀπόλλυμαι<sup>23</sup>, 'perish for love'. Moreover, another relevant sequence is οὐ δείσας (cf. v. 3), whose meaning and interpretation has been much discussed<sup>24</sup>. Dübner and Hecker, in particular, assumed that it highlights the simultaneity between Athenion's performance and Dioscorides' infatuation, since he was emotionally conquered as soon as she lifted her voice<sup>25</sup>. Additionally, it also implies that, unlike the Trojans recalled by her words, he was taken without fearing the Greek offensive and, most of all, without being a Trojan himself<sup>26</sup>. Veniero, instead, tried to explain the hidden metaphor of this composition, by affirming that if in this comparison the poet was actually equal to Troy, because he was consumed in the same fire, Athenion (whose name means 'Little Athena') must be equal to the Greeks who attacked the ancient

<sup>20</sup> Sens (2020: 222). Cf., also with accusative, Hom. *Il.* 1.473, 9.189, *Od.* 1.326 and *h. Cer.* 1.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Aeschyl. *Ag.* 555; Soph. *Aj.* 1185; Q. S. 12.1-2 e 12.45-46; Apollod. 5.8, Catul. 64.345, Hor. *Carm.* 2.4.11 and Verg. *Aen.* 2.109.

<sup>22</sup> The verb φλέγω is therefore connected with the *flamma amoris* metaphor: cf. Soph. *OT.* 189-192, Mel. *AP* 139.6 = *HE* 1451, Phld. *AP* 5.123.6 = *GP* 3217, Rufin. *AP* 5.87.6 and Paul. Sil. *AP* 5.288.4.

<sup>23</sup> With the same meaning, cf. Rufin. *AP* 5.66.3-4.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Jacobs (1813-1817, 3: 80) suggested οὐδενίσας: «[οὐ δείσας] Absurda lectio. Scripsi, una littera inserta: οὐδενίσας. Decennis ille Danaorum labor quam nihil sit ostendens. i. e. meo exemplo docens, frustra Danaos decem annos Trojae expugnandae impendisse. Verbum οὐδενίζειν lexicis addendum; ἔξουδενίζειν et οὐδενούιν passim obvium»; Dübner (1864-1890, 1: 84, 134) translated it with *non cum metu perpessus*; Paton (1916-1918, 1: 195), instead, with *I had braved the ten years' effort of the Greeks*; Meineke (1842: 161) recommended οὐδὲ ἴσας («ignarus decennis oppugnationis quippe uno die expugnatus»); Hecker (1843: 54) stated: «simul cum Troia incendio absumptus sum, licet non per decem annos Graecorum expugnationem timuissem, i. e. Troianus non essem»; Stadtmüller (1894-1906, 1: 136) suggested either οὐδ' εἰσδὺς or οὐ μείνας; Gow and Page (1965, 2: 237) affirmed that «possibly συστείλας, *contracting, shortening*, might be considered»; and Di Castri (1997a: 3) proposed ἐκπλήσας, since «Dioscoride si accende del fuoco dell'eros come se fossero già trascorsi per lui in un lampo dieci anni di travaglio militare».

<sup>25</sup> This image brings to mind the famous theme of love at first sight and of seduction through the gaze, originally exploited in Ibyc. fr. 287.1-4 Davies, «che costituisce una delle prime attestazioni del tema di Afrodite cacciatrice e della seduzione esercitata da Eros, il quale con la potenza dello sguardo, funge da richiamo, come in una battuta di caccia, attirando la preda [il poeta] nelle reti senza scampo della dea»: Drago (2007: 607).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Dübner (1864-1890, 1: 84, 134) and Hecker (1843: 54).

city. The only difference is that, before burning, Troy endured a ten-year siege, while the poet burned with love immediately<sup>27</sup>.

In *AP* 12.37 = *HE* 1511-1514, the author recreated the parallel between an attractive young man and the figure of Ganymede:

Πυγὴν Σωσάρχοιο διέπλασεν Ἀμφιπολίτεω  
 μυελίνην παίζων ὁ βροτολογιὸς Ἔρωσ,  
 Ζῆνα θέλων ἐρεθίζαι, ὀθούνεκα τῶν Γανυμήδους  
 μηρῶν οἱ τούτου πούλῳ μελιχρότεροι.

This is a traditional theme also exploited by Alcaeus Messenius (cf. *AP* 12.64 = *HE* 48-53), Meleager (cf. *AP* 12.65 = *HE* 4530-4533, 68 = *HE* 4588-4597, 70 = *HE* 4534-4537, and 133 = *HE* 4446-4451), and other anonymous epigrammatists (cf. *AP* 12.67 = *HE* 3752-3755, and 69 = *HE* 3734-3737). However, unlike them, Dioscorides did not consider Sosarchos just as simple substitute of Ganymede in his role of Zeus' cupbearer<sup>28</sup>, but he tried to deify<sup>29</sup> his lover, by making him superior both in beauty and in charm. This is the reason why the poet defined his thighs as μελιχρότεροι, 'sweeter', than those of Ganymede (cf. vv. 3-4), accordingly to the well-known topic of the καλλίπτυγος<sup>30</sup>: cf. vv. 1-2: πυγὴν... / μυελίνην, 'the soft as marrow body'.

Speaking about the vocabulary, by placing πυγή and Σωσάρχος next to each other (cf. v.1), Dioscorides generated a contrast between the vulgarity of the contest and the high-sounding name of his lover; as well as he created an oxymoron, by associating two opposite terms to the figure of Eros: the participle παίζων, underlining his typical playful attitude, and the epithet βροτολογιός, 'plague of man', generally associated to Ares<sup>31</sup> (cf. v. 2). Furthermore, the presence of the *hapax* μυελίνος (cf. v. 2) is also significant<sup>32</sup>. It derived from the addition of the suffix -ινε/ο<sup>33</sup> to the noun μυελός, which takes on the specific meaning of 'marrow', the place where, according to ancient theories, the feeling of love was kept<sup>34</sup>. The term μυελός was never associated with an explicit erotic context before the Hellenistic period<sup>35</sup>, when it started to identify a real *locus eroticus*<sup>36</sup>. Thus, the

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Veniero (1905: 118). Cf. also Sens (2020: 221), who shares the same opinion: «like some lyric poems, the epigram applies heroic themes and language to erotic experience, drawing a parallel between Troy, destroyed by the intervention of Athena, and the speaker, ruined by a woman called "Little Athena"».

<sup>28</sup> On the presence of Ganymede within the erotic epigrams, cf. Friedländer (1910: 738-739), Shiternmann (1953), and Tarán (1979: 41-43).

<sup>29</sup> Naturally, this recalls the famous motif of *puer divinus*, which can also be found in Hom. *Od.* 6. 242-243, in relation to Odysseus.

<sup>30</sup> The theme derived from the ancient Greek comedies: cf. Eub. fr. 10 K.-A. Within the *Greek Anthology*, cf. Strat. 12.6, 12.15, 12.227, Rufin. 5.35.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Hom. *Il.* 5.31 and *Od.* 8.115.

<sup>32</sup> «*AP* 12.37 si può considerare pertanto un piccolo "gioiellino" all'interno della produzione di Dioscoride; spicca per l'originalità della *pointe* e per la raffinata commistione del lessico, che mescola epicismi, dettagli di matrice tragica e il raffinato neologismo μυελίνος, realizzando così un abile e divertito impasto di registri espressivi e di toni»: Di Castri (1997b: 54).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Heilmann (1963: 123).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Eur. *Hipp.* 253-255, Theoc. 3.17, 30.20-22. Moreover, on the encephalogenetic theory, according to which both the brain and the marrow had a pivotal role in the creation of the sperm, cf. Plat. *Tim.* 91a-b, and Plin. *NH* 11.67.178.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Pichon (1991: 198) *s.v. medullas*: «exedere amantium dicitur seu ignis, cui comparatur saepe amor»; Rosenmeyer (1999: 19-47).

<sup>36</sup> Afterwards, due to the Latin erotic elegy this image achieved an enormous success and became extremely popular: cf. Catul. 35.14-15, 64.92-93, 66.23, Verg. *Aen.* 1.660, 4.66, 4.191, 8.388-390, *Georg.* 3.27, *Dirae* 101, Ov. *Am.* 3.10.27, *Met.* 14.351, *Tr.* 1.5.9.

ultimate point of this epigram was to take into account the image of a powerful god, as Eros certainly was, in order to: (i) identify who actually gave life to such a godlike creature as Sosarchos, and (ii) to underline the supremacy of love over anything and anyone, even over the same Zeus (cf. the *enjambement* between v. 2 and v. 3: Ἔρως / Ζῆνα)<sup>37</sup>.

In AP 9.340 = HE 1685-1690, referring to both the Phrygian cults and the ancient myth of Apollo's and Marsyas' musical contest, Dioscorides took a position within the tradition relating to the invention of the *aulos*<sup>38</sup>. He tried to explain that this instrument was invented by Hyagnis, and not by Marsyas, at the time when the Great Mother Cybele gave origin to her cults:

Αὐλοὶ τοῦ Φρυγῶς ἔργον Ἰάγνιδος, ἠνίκα Μήτηρ  
 ἱερὰ τὰν Κυβέλοις πρῶτ' ἀνέδειξε θεῶν,  
 καὶ πρὸς ἐὸν φώνημα καλὴν ἀνελύσατο χαίταν  
 ἔκφρων Ἰδαίης ἀμφίπολος θαλάμης·  
 εἰ δὲ Κελαινίτης ποιμὴν πάρος ἴουπερ ἀείσας  
 ἐγνώσθη, Φοίβου κεινὸν ἔδειξεν ἔρις†.

In fact, according to what he stated in this composition, Marsyas obtained his title as πρῶτος εὔρετής only thanks to the fame derived from his dispute with Phoebus<sup>39</sup>. However, he believed that this recognition should have rightfully belonged to his father Hyagnis, who actually introduced the *aulos* for first: cf. vv. 5-6, which are unfortunately corrupted<sup>40</sup>, εἰ δὲ Κελαινίτης ποιμὴν πάρος ἴουπερ ἀείσας / ἐγνώσθη, Φοίβου κεινὸν ἔδειξεν ἔρις†, 'if the shepherd of Celaenae [Marsyas<sup>41</sup>] obtained this fame, even though he did not play it formerly, / the dispute with Phoebus made him known'.

Among the linguistic features, it is important to notice the *incipit* αὐλοὶ τοῦ Φρυγῶς ἔργον Ἰάγνιδος, which is a typical periphrasis to indicate the author or the inventor of something<sup>42</sup>. Dioscorides' production, in particular, often reports the origins of new genres or objects<sup>43</sup>: cf., for example, AP 7.410 = HE 1585-1590, where Thespis was defined as the inventor of the tragedy<sup>44</sup> (cf. v. 1: Θέσπις ὄδε, τραγικὴν ὅς ἀνέπλασε

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Hom. *Il.* 14. 198-213, Plat. *Symp.* 197b, Asclep. AP 5.64 = HE 854-859, Mel. AP 12.117 = HE 4092-4097, and 12.101 = HE 4540-4545. The idea of *amor vincit omnia* (whose expression derived from Verg. *Ecl.* 10.69: *Omnia vincit amor et nos cedamus amori*) can also be found in Sapph. fr. 130 Voigt, Ibyc. fr. 286 and 287 Davies, Plat. *Phdr.* 253c, *Rep.* 9.575a, 588c-590d, and Soph. *Ant.* 781-790 which starts with Ἔρως ἀνίκατε μάχαν. On this topic, cf. Tosi (2017: n. 1843).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Diod. 3.58, 5.75; Apollod. 1.4.2; Hyg. *Fab.* 165, 191, 373; Ov. *Met.* 6.382-400, *Fast.* 6.703-708; Tolom. *Efest.* 3; Nonn. *D.* 41. 374; Plut. fr. 1133e.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Gow and Page (1965, 2: 266).

<sup>40</sup> There are several conjectures to emend the sequence πάρος ἴουπερ ἀείσας: cf. Brunck (1776: 117): πάρος οἷος αἰοδαῖς (*solus, carminibus decantatus*); Hecker (1843: 326): πατρὸς οὗ πέρα ἄσας (*magis quam Hyagnis cantu inclaruit*); and Gow and Page (1965, 2: 266): πάρος ὡσπερ ἀείσας (*as though he had preceded Hyagnis*). However, the opinion of Galán Vioque (2001: 374) seems to be more interesting: he read the sequence ἴουπερ as οὗ περ, considering it as a «negación raforzada con el significado homérico de “no en absoluto”». On the other hand, the meaning of the sentence Φοίβου κεινὸν ἔδειξεν ἔρις† is also not entirely clear. Probably, as already stated, the author wanted to underline the role of this mythical episode in granting the reputation of πρῶτος εὔρετής to Marsyas.

<sup>41</sup> The expression κελαινίτης ποιμὴν refers to Marsyas, who has been traditionally linked to the city of Chileans: cf. Gow and Page (1965, 2: 265-266).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Hom. *Il.* 6.289 (οἱ πέπλοι παμποϊκίλα ἔργα γυναικῶν), 19.21-22 (οἱ ἐπιεικὲς / ἔργ' ἔμεν ἀθανάτων), *Od.* 4.617 (ἔργον δ' Ἡφαιστοῖο), Aeschyl. *Ch.* 231 (ὑφασμα τοῦτο, σῆς ἔργον χερρός), Theodorid. AP 9.743.3 = HE 3578 (Φράδμωνος ἔργον), Alc. Mess. *AP* 8.3 (Τριτωνίδος ἔργον Ἀθάνας).

<sup>43</sup> On the *topos* relating to the πρῶτος εὔρετής, cf. Kleingünther (1933) and Arnott (1966: 122).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. also Diosc. AP 7.411.1 = HE 1591: Θέσπιδος εὔρεμα τοῦτο.

πρῶτος αἰοιδὴν, ‘I am Thespis, who first molded the tragic song’). On the other hand, the expression *καλὴν ἀνελύσατο χαίταν* (cf. v. 3) is noteworthy as well. Letting the hair down, indeed, is a typical act pertaining to funerary contests, as a sign of mourning, or to Dionysus’ and Cybele’s celebrations, as a proof of wildness<sup>45</sup> (cf. Diosc. *AP* 6.220.2 = *HE* 1540: *μαιομένην δοῦς ἀνέμοισι τρίχα*). This is also clarified by the presence of the adjective *ἔκφρων* (cf. v. 4), meaning ‘in a state of *furor*’, in reference to the ἀμφίπολος Ἰδαίης θαλάμης, that is Attis, the Great Mother’s priest (cf. *infra*). Hence, Dioscorides tried to portray the image of Attis going wild, while hearing for the first time the *aulos* melody when Hyagnis invented it.

Once again, in *AP* 6.220 = *HE* 1539-1554, the poet showed his interest towards the etiological topic<sup>46</sup>, since this composition, often labelled as an elegy rather than an epigram<sup>47</sup>, transmits the original account of the consecration of the drum to the Great Mother Cybele<sup>48</sup>:

Σάρδις Πεσσινόεντος ἀπὸ Φρυγὸς ἦθελ’ ἰκέσθαι  
 ἔκφρων, μαιομένην δοῦς ἀνέμοισι τρίχα,  
 ἀγνὸς Ἄτυς, Κυβέλης θαλαμηπόλος· ἄγρια δ’ αὐτοῦ  
 ἐψύχθη χαλεπῆς πνεύματα θευφορίας,  
 ἐσπέριον στείχοντος ἀνὰ κνέφας· εἰς δὲ κάταντες 5  
 ἄντρον ἔδου, νεύσας βαιὸν ἄπωθεν ὁδοῦ.  
 Τοῦ δὲ λέων ὄρουσε κατὰ στίβον, ἀνδράσι δεῖμα  
 θαρσαλέοις, Γάλλω δ’ οὐδ’ ὀνομαστὸν ἄχος,  
 ὃς τότε ἄναυδος ἔμεινε δέους ὕπο, καί τινος αὔρη  
 δαίμονος ἐς στονοῦν τύμπανον ἦκε χέρας· 10  
 οὗ βαρὺ μικήσαντος, ὁ θαρσαλεώτερος ἄλλων  
 τετραπόδων ἐλάφω ἔδραμεν ὀξύτερον,  
 τὸν βαρὺν οὐ μείνας ἀκοῆς νόφον, ἐκ δ’ βόησεν·  
 “μῆτερ, Σαγγαρίου χεῖλεσι πὰρ ποταμοῦ  
 ἱρὴν σοὶ θαλάμην, ζωάγρια, καὶ λαλάγημα 15  
 τοῦτο, τὸ θηρὶ φυγῆς αἴτιον, ἀντίθεμαι”.

According to Dioscorides’ report, the goddess received it as a sort of *ex-voto* by her minister Attis, who wished to thank her for eloping the brutal attack of a lion, while traveling from Pessinus to Sardis<sup>49</sup>: cf. vv. 14-16: *μῆτερ, Σαγγαρίου χεῖλεσι πὰρ ποταμοῦ / ἱρὴν σοὶ θαλάμην, ζωάγρια, καὶ λαλάγημα / τοῦτο, τὸ θηρὶ φυγῆς αἴτιον, ἀντίθεμαι*,

<sup>45</sup> Cf., concerning Dionysus’s rituals, Theoc. 15.134 (*λύσσασι δὲ κόμαν*), and Alc. Mess. *AP* 7.412.2 (*ἄπλεκτον χαίταν ἐν χροῖ κειραμένα*); while, concerning Cybele’s ones, Eryc. *AP* 6.234.6 = *GP* 2261 (*βόστρυχον, ἐκ λύσσας ἄρτια παυσάμενος*), and anon. *AP* 6.51.3-4 = *HE* 3834-3835 (*σοὶ τάδε θῆλυς Ἄλεξις ἐῆς οἰστρήματα λύσσης / ἄνθετο, χαλκοτύπου παυσάμενος μανίης*). Cf., in general, Nestle (1973: 334) and Pachis (1996: 193-222).

<sup>46</sup> On the Phrygian cults, cf. Reinach (1989: 543-560), Naumann (1983: 136), Roller (1988: 43-50).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Di Castri (1996: 53).

<sup>48</sup> On the religious cults dedicated to the Great Mother Cybele, cf. Graillot (1930), Vermaseren (1977), and Bremmer (1979: 9-22).

<sup>49</sup> The celebration of an escape from dangerous situations is a recurring theme within a type of composition traditionally known as *σωτηρία*: cf. Leon. Tar. *AP* 6.221 = *HE* 2291-2300; Call. *AP* 6.301 = *HE* 1175-1178; Alc. Mess. *AP* 6.218 = *HE* 134-143; [Simon.] *AP* 6.217 = *HE* 3304-3313; Antip. Sid. *AP* 6.219 = *HE* 608-631; Antist. *AP* 6.237 = *GP* 1101-1108; Lucill. *AP* 6.164 and 6.166. It can be considered as a sort of thanksgiving, often characterize by a religious offer addressed to a divine being, for saving someone’s life. On this topic, cf. Galán Vioque (2001: 222).



‘Mother, by the banks of the river Sangarias / a dwelling place sacred to you, in thanks for my life, and this noisy instrument / that made the lion flee, I dedicate to thee’.

Linguistically, both the use of ἔκφρων and reference to the loose hair (cf. v. 2), as well as the identification of Attis as Κυβέλης θαλαμηπόλος (cf. v. 3) resemble *AP* 9.340.3-4 = *HE* 1687-1688, which can be considered as a draft, or sort of «*canovaccio stilistico*»<sup>50</sup>, at least for these first verses. The second section of this work, describing the encounter between the priest and the lion, is also relevant. In fact, thanks to the deep sound of his drum, Attis unexpectedly managed to scare the beast away (cf. vv. 7-13). It is significant that the same lion, previously defined as ὁ θαρσαλέωτερος ἄλλων / τετραπόδων (‘the bravest beast of all’) causing δειμα (‘terror’) and ἄχος (‘pain’), is suddenly forced to flee away like a deer (cf. v. 12: ἐλάφω ἔδραμεν ὀξύτερον), only because of a dark sound. This is obviously a mixture between two of the most famous Homeric images: the fearless lion and the coward deer, often put in contrast within metaphors<sup>51</sup>: cf., for instance, *Il.* 11.113-119. Eventually, the last couplet contains the priest’s direct words to the Great Mother and his final offer to her, as a sign of gratitude. The most remarkable term, in this case, is the *hapax* λαλάγημα (cf. v. 15) that gives rise to a brilliant metonymy alluding to Attis’ tambor. Its meaning identifies the act of chirping or chatting and, consequently, the “stammering sound” of the drum. It derives from verbs like λαλαγέω and λαλέω, of which the first one typically indicates the prattling of humans (cf. Pind. *O.* 2.97) and the chirruping of insects and birds (cf. Theoc. 5.48, 7.139)<sup>52</sup>, while the latter is witnessed in relation to musical instruments (cf. Theoc. 20.29 e Aristot. *Aud.* 801a). Most importantly, this term also inspired the name of *Lalage*, the young lady described in Horace’s *carmen* 1.22<sup>53</sup>, which is clearly influenced by Dioscorides’ piece<sup>54</sup>: cf. v. 1 (*integer vitae scelerisque purus*) that reminds of Attis’ chastity, v. 9 (*namque me silva lupus in Sabina*) that draws the attention towards a dangerous environment and an aggressive beast, vv. 10-11 (*ultra / terminum*) alluding to the decision of not following the main path, and v. 13, where the wolf is called *portentum*, as the lion was previously defined δειμα and ἄχος.

Lastly, within *AP* 7.407 = *HE* 1565-1574, Dioscorides adopted the same scheme of the Hymns, in order to praise Sappho’s image. In fact, the main purpose of this sepulchral epigram is to associate the Lesbian poetess with the Olympian gods and, most of all, to finally identify her as the tenth Muse<sup>55</sup>:

<sup>50</sup> Di Castri (1996: 53).

<sup>51</sup> On this subject, cf. Schnapp-Gourbeillon (1981), Lonsdale (1990: 56-60), Glenn (1998: 107-116), Curti (2003: 9-54), Mastromarco (2003: 107-126) and Piccirillo (2021: 61-78).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Sens (2020: 214).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Bonanno (1978: 94-98).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. also the influence of Diosc. *AP* 6.220 = *HE* 1539-1554 over Antip. Sid. *AP* 6. 219 = *HE* 608-631, Antist. *AP* 6. 237 = *GP* 1101-1108, the votive epigram placed at the end of the *Culex* (cf. vv. 413-414: *parve culex, pecudum custos tibi tale meranti / funeris officium vitae pro munere reddit*), and the prologue belonging to the *Orphei lithica* (cf. vv. 105-159). In general, cf. de Gregori (1901: 164), Hubaux (1939: 105), and Gow and Page (1965, 2: 84-86 and 145-146). Moreover, on the relationship between this epigram and Catul. 63, cf. Harder (2005: 65-86), and Harrison (2005: 11-24).

<sup>55</sup> Including the Lesbian poetess among the Muses is a recurring practice within the *Greek Anthology*: cf. Antip. Sid. 7.14 = *HE* 236-243, 9.66 = *HE* 244-245, Tull. Laur. 7.17 = *GP* 3909-3916, and anon. 9.571 = *FGE* 1204-1211. This trend is also recognized in [Plat.] *AP* 9.506 = *FGE* 624-625, the most ancient epigram among the others, probably considered authentic by Dioscorides, who imitated it: cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1913: 41; 1922: 447), and Page (1981: 173-174). On Sappho’s relationship with the Muses and divinization, cf. Plut. *Amat.* 762f, *Q. Conv.* 646e, and 711d. On this topic, cf. Mariotti (1966: 1086-1093), Dörrie (1975: 231), Heintze (1977: 53-61), Lausberg (1982: 262-264), Yatromanolakis (1999: 179-195), Galàn Vioque (2001: 242-253).

Ἥδιστον φιλέουσι νέοις προσανάκλιμα<sup>56</sup> ἐρώτων,  
 Σαπφώ, σὺν Μούσαις ἧ ῥά σε Πιερίη  
 ἧ Ἑλικῶν εὐκισσος, ἴσα πνεύουσιν ἐκεῖναις,  
 κοσμεῖ, τὴν Ἐρέσφω Μοῦσαν ἐν Αἰολίδι,  
 ἧ καὶ Ὑμῆν Ὑμέναιος ἔχων εὐφραδέα πύκην 5  
 σὺν σοὶ νυμφιδίων ἴσταθ' ὑπὲρ θαλάμων  
 ἧ Κινύρεω νέον ἔρνος ὀδυρομένη Ἀφροδίτη  
 σύνθρηγος, μακάρων ἱερὸν ἄλσος ὄρησ'  
 πάντη, πότνια, χαίρε θεοῖς ἴσα· σὰς γὰρ αἰοιδὰς  
 ἀθανάτων ἔχομεν νῦν ἔτι θυγατέρας. 10

Following the Hymns' standard structure, the composition opens with the invocation to the goddess through her epithet προσανάκλιμα<sup>56</sup>, which is an interesting *hapax* underlining Sappho's supporting role towards every lover. The next section contains, instead, the typical reference to the homeland (cf. v. 4: Ἐρέσφω... ἐν Αἰολίδι) and the list of her prerogatives, highlighted by the triple anaphor of ἧ. Naturally, the most noteworthy entitlement, among the others, is the one concerning her inspirational power: this makes her equal to the Muses (cf. v. 3: ἴσα πνεύουσιν ἐκεῖναις), and provides her the opportunity to be worshipped as such by Pieria and Helicon (cf. vv. 2-3: σὺν Μούσαις ἧ ῥά σε Πιερίη / ἧ Ἑλικῶν εὐκισσος)<sup>57</sup>. Eventually, the piece ends with an element of novelty: the last couplet, indeed, celebrates Sappho through her own motifs and stylistic features<sup>58</sup> (cf. vv. 9-10 σὰς γὰρ αἰοιδὰς / ἀθανάτων ἔχομεν νῦν ἔτι θυγατέρας, 'for we still hold the odes, / your immortal daughters'). Hence, as a result, the eternity of Sappho's production allowed Dioscorides to acknowledge her as his πότνια, 'mistress', and then as a divine creature (cf. v. 9: θεοῖς ἴσα, 'equal to the gods').

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. the presence of ἀνάκλιμα in Poll. 1.90, and Apollod. *Poliorec.* 173.11.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. also the *hapax* εὐκισσος, 'ivied', linked to the Mount Helicon.

<sup>58</sup> Cresci (1979: 248).

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*Veronica Piccirillo*  
*Università di Cagliari (Italy)*  
[veronica.piccirillo@unica.it](mailto:veronica.piccirillo@unica.it)