

## MARTIAL'S ΕΓΚΩΜΙΟΝ ΕΙΣ ΔΟΜΕΤΙΑΝΟΝ? A NOTE ON MART. 9.20

Abstract: In this paper I will discuss how an epigram by Martial (Mart. 9.20) can be connected to a passage of Theocritus' *Encomium to Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Theoc. Id. 17.58–76); the analysis will be developed in detail in order to enable the reader to perceive all the intertextual links existing between the two texts and will lead to a wider consideration of the literary background of the encomiastic epigram.

Keywords: Martial, Theocritus, encomiastic literature, Domitian, Jupiter

In Martial's Book 9, epigrams 1, 20, and 34 can be isolated from the others since they all deal with the same topic, the Flavian Temple;<sup>1</sup> a particular feature, however, distinguishes Mart. 9.20 from the other two poems of this short cycle. Both Mart. 9.1.8 (*altum Flaviae decus gentis*) and Mart. 9.34.2 (*Flavia templa*), in fact, present a precise reference to the praised building, while in 9.20 there is no direct evidence of this architectural structure:

*Haec, quae tota patet tegiturque et marmore et auro,  
infantis domini conscia terra fuit.  
felix o quantis sonuit uagitibus et quas  
uidit reptantis sustinuitque manus!  
hic steterat ueneranda domus quae praestitit orbi        5  
quod Rhodos astrifero, quod pia Creta polo.  
Curetes texere Iouem crepitantibus armis,  
semmiuri poterant qualia ferre Phryges:  
at te protexit superum pater et tibi, Caesar,  
pro iaculo et parma fulmen et aegis erat.        10*

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1) On the definition of this cycle cf. the introduction of C. Henriksen, *A Commentary on Martial, Epigrams Book 9* (Oxford 2012) xl and R. R. Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons. Literary Communication in the Age of Domitian* (Leiden / Boston / Köln 2002) 373–374. On the building see F. Coarelli, *Gens Flavia, Templum*, in: E. M. Steinby (ed.), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* (Roma 1995) 2.368–369. In this note I will not deal specifically with the ideological importance of the temple in the context of Flavian architecture, which has recently been treated by L. Roman, *Martial and the City of Rome*, *JRS* 100, 2010, 109–113.

As we see, the temple is evoked only allusively by means of its raw materials (*marmor* and *aurum*), because the poet, by deconstructing the building, aims to put the whole emphasis on the *terra* which hosted the *ueneranda domus* where Domitian had grown up.

The history of the infancy of the illustrious dweller is also the way to embed in the text a more ambitious comparison between the emperor and two gods (the Sun<sup>2</sup> and Jupiter, referred to by their birthplaces *Rhodos* and *Creta*), which discloses an agonistic relationship towards them. In particular, mentioning Jupiter's childhood is the way to enhance the difference between the father of the gods and the god-on-earth Domitian: the former was simply protected by the weapons (a *iaculum* and a *parma*) of *Curetes* – not a very strong military guard, according to Martial's remark *semi-iri* –, while the latter was protected by the mighty Jupiter himself with his *fulmen* and *aegis*.<sup>3</sup>

Martial's choice of celebrating the birthplace of the emperor is by no means an oddity; mentioning the place of birth was typical of the so-called βασιλικὸς λόγος (the encomium in praise of a king) and it was highly recommended by ancient rhetorical treatises, which explicitly suggest treating this topic after the exordium of the speech (see Men. Rh. 3.369.18 Sp. = 78.18 R.-W. Μετὰ τὰ προοίμια ἐπὶ τὴν πατρίδα ἤξεις).<sup>4</sup> This topos is applied in the best known encomium of the Hellenistic age, Theocritus' *Encomium to Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Theoc. Id. 17.58–76):

καί σε Κόως ἀτίταλλε βρέφος νεογιλλὸν ἔοντα,  
 δεξαμένα παρὰ ματρὸς ὅτε πρώταν ἴδες ἄω.  
 ἔνθα γὰρ Εἰλείθυιαν ἐβώσατο λυσίζωνον  
 Ἄντιγόνας θυγάτηρ βεβαρημένα ὠδίνεσσιν·  
 ἢ δέ οἱ εὐμενέοισα παρίστατο, κὰδ δ' ἄρα πάντων  
 νοδυνίαν κατέχευε μελῶν· ὃ δὲ πατρὶ εἰοικώς

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2) The exact identification of the god born in Rhodes with the Sun was made by A. E. Housman, Notes on Martial, CQ 13, 1919, 75 (= J. Diggle and F. R. D. Goodyear [eds.], The Classical Papers of A. E. Housman [Cambridge 1972] 3.989).

3) Cf. J. Leberl, Domitian und die Dichter. Poesie als Medium der Herrschaftsdarstellung (Göttingen 2004) 305.

4) On this point see F. Sauter, Der römische Kaiserkult bei Martial und Statius (Stuttgart / Berlin 1934) 66.

παῖς ἀγαπητὸς ἔγεντο. Κόως δ' ὀλόλυξεν ἰδοῖσα,  
 φᾶ δὲ καθλαπτομένα βρέφους χεῖρεσσι φίλησιν· 65  
 ὄλβιε κοῦρε γένοιτο, τίους δέ με τόσσον ὅσον περ  
 Δῆλον ἐτίμησεν κυανάμπυκα Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων·  
 ἐν δὲ μιᾷ τιμῇ Τρίοπον καταθεῖο κολώναν,  
 ἴσον Δωριέεσσι νέμων γέρας ἐγγυὺς εὐδυσιν·  
 ἴσον καὶ Ῥήνιαν ἄναξ ἐφίλησεν Ἀπόλλων.' 70  
 ὧς ἄρα νᾶσος ἔειπεν· ὁ δ' ὑπόθεν ἔκλαγε φωνᾷ  
 ἐς τρεῖς ἀπὸ νεφέων μέγας αἰετός, αἴσιος ὄρνις.  
 Ζηνός που τόδε σᾶμα· Διὶ Κρονίωνι μέλοντι  
 αἰδοῖοι βασιλῆες, ὁ δ' ἔζοχος ὄν κε φιλήσῃ  
 γεινόμενον τὰ πρῶτα· πολὺς δέ οἱ ὄλβος ὀπαδεῖ, 75  
 πολλᾶς δὲ κρατεῖ γαίας, πολλᾶς δὲ θαλάσσας.

Even at first sight, the interpreter can perceive some similarities between the two texts quoted above. From a mere theoretical viewpoint, these coincidences can be explained as casual if we think that both the Hellenistic poet and the Flavian epigrammatist were writing poems that comply with the conventions of a well established literary genre. Nonetheless, I hope that an in-depth analysis of the two texts and the evaluation of some meaningful points will lead to conjecture a specific debt of the latter towards the former: this would mean not denying that Martial was adhering to conventions typical of the encomiastic literature (we can consider them as the “Modello-Codice”),<sup>5</sup> but considering Martial’s encomiastic epigram as a way to pay homage to the most representative predecessor in this field, Theocritus (who would become the “Modello-Esemplare”).<sup>6</sup>

5) I here use the terminology drawn from G. B. Conte, *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario*. Catullo, Virgilio, Ovidio, Lucano (Torino 21985) 121–122.

6) The problem of intertextuality and commonplaces is discussed by S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext. Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge 1998) 34–47. Some meaningful cases of reception of Theocritus’ *Encomium* in Latin literature are analysed by A. Barchiesi, *Poetry, Praise, and Patronage: Simonides in Book 4 of Horace’s Odes*, *CLA* 15, 1996, 13–15 (Theocritean echoes in Horace), and by R. Hunter, *Virgil and Theocritus: A Note on the Reception of the Encomium to Ptolemy Philadelphus*, in: R. Hunter, *On Coming After. Studies in Post-Classical Greek Literature and its Reception. Part 1: Hellenistic Poetry and its Reception* (Berlin / New York 2008) 378–383.

A close examination of the two texts can prove the validity of the hypothesis just exposed: the first point concerns the synchronism between Domitian's and Ptolemy's age. Martial starts his epigram mentioning the place where the young Domitian was fed (*infantis domini conscia terra fuit*), just as Theocritus, at the beginning of the eulogy of Cos, began the praise from the birth of Ptolemy (Κόως ἀτίταλλε βρέφος νεογιλλὸν ἔοντα). Although the precise moment of the birth is not described by Martial, the equivalence between the Greek adjective νεογιλλός (meaning 'new-born'; on this point and for other parallels, see the entry νεογιλός in LSJ) and Latin *infans* (an adjective which can be used in poetry with reference to new-born children: cf., for example, Lucr. 5.222–224 *tum porro puer ... / ... nudus humi iacet, infans, indigus omni / uitali auxilio ...* and Ov. Met. 15.221 *editus in lucem iacuit sine uiribus infans*) is striking: by mentioning the infancy of Domitian, Martial makes it clear that his epigram fits in with encomiastic conventions on the paths of Theocritus, mildly suggesting that we could see Domitian as a new Ptolemy.

Another interesting convergence between the two texts is the presence of three precise sensorial faculties (hearing, sight, and touch): in Martial we have them collected in the synesthetic distich (3–4) describing Domitian's whimpers (*uagitibus*) and crawling (the movements of *manus* to which the earth provided grip) under the thoughtful look of the personified land (*uidit*). All these items are already present in Theocritus, even in the same order: first of all, we have the auditory perception (60–63), then the gaze of the island (64), and finally the handling (65). As regards the sight, the correlation between *uidit* and ἰδοῖσα is evident (in both cases we have the personification of the land which is represented as a nurse worried about his pupil), while the other two details are slightly different.

However, these differences could be well explained if we think of the specific aim of the two poems. Theocritus seems to be fond of Homeric intertextuality for encomiastic purposes. On the one hand, he drew the description of Ptolemy's mother's cries from h. Hom. Ap. 115–119<sup>7</sup> in order to identify Berenice with Leto and

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7) See R. Hunter, *Theocritus. Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London 2003) 145–147 and N. Richardson, *Three Homeric Hymns. To Apollo, Hermes and Aphrodite* (Cambridge 2010) 31–32 and 99.

Ptolemy with Apollo, on the other hand, he possibly modelled Cos' prayer on that of Hector for Astyanax (Hom. Il. 6.466–481).<sup>8</sup> In both passages, in fact, the protagonist of the scene cradles a child with his hands (compare Hom. Il. 6.474 ἀντάρ ὁ γ' ὄν φίλον υἷον ἐπεὶ κύσε πῆλέ τε χερσίν with Theoc. Id. 17.65 φᾶ δὲ καθαρτομένα βρέφους χεῖρεσσι φίλησιν, where the line-end is Homeric<sup>9</sup>) and then prays for the future of the infant: by this subtle allusion, the Hellenistic poet suggests a military future for the young Ptolemy, well expressed later in the poem (see the last line quoted above and especially lines 77–94, where the poet describes the military power of the Hellenistic king).<sup>10</sup>

Martial, conversely, employs the Theocritean elements in order to put the focus only on the extraordinary qualities of the young emperor: Domitian's house echoes the loud stirrings of the future emperor (*quantis ... uagitibus*), not the cries of pain made by his mother, and the earth gives support to his hands, which, even if not yet strong enough, belong to a child-god destined to a glorious future (*quas ... manus*).<sup>11</sup>

The last part of the epigram seems to present no literal resemblance with Ptolemy's encomium; nonetheless, it is possible to find a similarity of content in two significant elements. In the prayer that Cos solemnly pronounces, the island wishes the future king to honour her just as Apollo honoured Delos (see above lines 66–70), blatantly providing Ptolemy's identification with the god. In Martial, the house is said to have given to the world *quod*

8) It is true that the idea of the prayer of the island might have come to Theocritus from Call. hDel. 264–273, as suggested by A. S. F. Gow, *Theocritus* (Cambridge<sup>2</sup>1952) 2.336–337, but it is possible to think that here Theocritus alludes to the text of Homer via Callimachus (a sort of window reference).

9) See again Hunter (n. 7 above) 147: the line-end is drawn from Hom. Il. 17.620. In the two quoted hexameters note the presence of the adjective φίλος and the instrumental dative of the word χεῖρ (in Homer we have φίλον υἷον and χερσίν, while in Theocritus the two expressions are conflated into χεῖρεσσι φίλησιν).

10) A significant difference between the two episodes can be perceived as well: in Homer, Hector's prayer was not followed by a divine sign, while in Theocritus the success of what Cos is praying for is assured by the ominous eagle sent by Zeus.

11) The presence in these lines of the topic of the χεῖρ θεοῦ was recognized by O. Weinreich, *Studien zu Martial. Literarhistorische und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Stuttgart 1928) 145.

*Rhodos astrifero, quod pia Creta polo*, that is to have provided a new Sun and a new Jupiter: here, we have correspondence with Theocritus as regards the matching of the emperor with the first god mentioned (the Sun is frequently identified with Apollo<sup>12</sup>), but Martial goes beyond the alluded text comparing Domitian to the king of the gods, who is set by Theocritus on a different level from men (cf. Theoc. Id. 17.1–4 Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα καὶ ἐς Δία λήγετε Μοῖσαι, / ἀθανάτων τὸν ἄριστον, ἔπην φᾶείδωμεν αἰοδαῖς / ἀνδρῶν δ' αὖ Πτολεμαῖος ἐνὶ πρώτοισι λεγέσθω / καὶ πύματος καὶ μέσσοις· ὃ γὰρ προφερέστατος ἀνδρῶν).<sup>13</sup>

The protection of the father of gods is the last point of contact between the two texts. The power of both kings is sanctioned by a sign coming from the mighty god: in Theocritus, the thrice repeated cry of the eagle is a sign of Zeus' approval for Ptolemy, just as, in Martial, Jupiter's vigilance is the real proof of the legitimacy of Domitian's divine power. Here again we can see Martial's agonistic attitude towards his Greek model: Jupiter's weapons (*fulmen* and *aegis*) are traditional symbols of the supreme deity just like the eagle, but the Flavian poet might have intended them to complete the enumeration of the traditional attributes of Jupiter by choosing exactly what the Hellenistic poet did not mention.<sup>14</sup>

In conclusion, all these textual convergences can hardly be due to casual reference (especially the verbal correspondences noted above), but they are more likely the traces of a particular allusive

12) The association Sun-Domitian in Martial's books is studied by Henriksén (n. 1 above) xxx–xxxii, but the presence of the Sun in Latin imperial panegyrics has been common at least since Horace: on this topic see E. Doblhofer, *Die Augustuspanegyrik des Horaz in formalhistorischer Sicht* (Heidelberg 1966) 86–91.

13) Similarly, at the end of the poem (Theoc. Id. 17.135–137 Χαίρε, ἄναξ Πτολεμαῖε· σέθεν δ' ἐγὼ ἴσα καὶ ἄλλων / μνάσομαι ἡμιθέων, δοκέω δ' ἔπος οὐκ ἀπόβλητον / φθέγγομαι ἐσομένοις· ἀρετὴν γε μὲν ἐκ Διὸς αἰτεῦ), Ptolemy is considered worthy of being counted 'among other demigods', but he is not explicitly compared to Zeus himself.

14) These symbols are widespread topical items: on the weapons mentioned by Martial see again the commentary of Henriksén (n. 1 above) 92, and on Zeus' eagle, which was often represented in association with the Ptolemies, cf. Gow (n. 8 above) 2.337–338. Nonetheless, due to the aforementioned link between the two texts, I think that Martial's choice not to mention the same ominous sign of Theocritus, but other characteristic symbols can be considered as a means both of hinting at his predecessor and of differentiating from him.

link between the two texts, which has a double scope. As regards the topic, the reader is made to think of Domitian not only as a new Ptolemy, but also as a more powerful one, since he is superior to mighty Jupiter; by achieving this effect, Martial thus succeeds in surpassing his Greek predecessor in the encomiastic genre.

Having examined this intertextual background, we can now go back again to the function of the excursus on Domitian's infancy in this epigram. At the beginning of the epigram, the choice to describe the archaeology of the place, which held the house where the young Domitian was fed, is a way to express a tie between the metaphorical infancy of the temple and the one of its owner: just as in Sen. Ep. 12.1 the old age of the owner is reflected into the decay of the *suburbanum* (*Quocumque me uerti, argumenta senectutis meae uideo. Veneram in suburbanum meum ... Ait uilicus mihi ... uillam ueterem esse*), Martial's invocation to *terra* is a significant means to establish a "metonymic association between the building and personal identity"<sup>15</sup> and to merge in one epigram the encomium for the temple and that for its divine dweller, the emperor Domitian.<sup>16</sup>

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15) See C. Newlands, *Architectural Epiphany in Roman Poetry*, in: T. D. Papanghelis / S. J. Harrison / S. Frangoulidis (eds.), *Generic Interfaces in Latin Literature. Encounters, Interactions and Transformations* (Berlin / Boston 2013) 57.

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