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EZRA POUND AND THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY

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The last two decades before the First World War mark an interesting period in the history of the classical tradition. The writers of this generation had still received an education based on a solid learning of the classical languages and of classical literature. This is attested by their constant allusions to and quotations from Greek and Roman poetry. Classical allusions, however, were not mere testimonies to the modernists' education; indeed, such an education enabled them to interpret the culture of antiquity in fresh new ways and to use various aspects of the classical heritage for their artistic purposes. Due to new archaeological discoveries, they had access to material which was unknown to previous generations and which changed the general conception of Greek and Roman culture, which had been based on Winckelmannian ideals. Arthur Evans's excavations on Crete yielded new information for the use of the writers who were interested for instance in the story of Daedalus, the constructor of the labyrinth and of the wings used to escape the island. Evans, a former war correspondent, also efficiently communicated his discoveries, sending for instance reports and telegrams to *The Times* (Cottrell 87-88, 113-130). Needless to say, James Joyce

Quaderni di Palazzo Serra 15 (2008): 181-194.

was the most notable author to write about Daedalus, Icarus and the labyrinth; these in fact took on a new topicality through Evans's archaeological work (Fortune 123-134; Hayman 33-54).

Another important factor was the discovery of papyri in Hellenistic Egypt, bringing to light masses of new documents on the everyday life of the Greeks, but also fragments of ancient Greek poetry, especially poems by Sappho. Such fragmentary papyri were a source of inspiration for Ezra Pound, as shown by his famous poem "Papyrus," an adaptation of one of Sappho's fragments (Highet 517; Kenner 5-6, 54-55). As Hugh Kenner (55-59) reminds us, Pound's interest in Sappho was inspired by Richard Aldington, whose rendering of Sappho's "To Atthis" was not approved by Paul Shorey, the leading classical scholar in Chicago.

In the process of adapting classical material for the purposes of modern poetry, the so-called *Greek Anthology* (*Anthologia Graeca*), or *Palatine Anthology*, as its somewhat shorter earlier version is called, proved to be surprisingly inspiring. I will give some examples of the role of the *Greek Anthology* in literary history, followed by a discussion of Pound's versions of the epigrammatic art of the Greek poets. I will also briefly refer to the influence of Pound on the translation of Greek poetry.

The Charm of the Greek Anthology

The charm of the *Greek Anthology* may depend on its variety: it contains about 4100 epigrams by over 360 poets, from the Alexandrian period until Late Antiquity. The *Anthology* is based on a mixture of such great epigrammatists as Meleager, Crinagoras, Callimachus, Leonidas, Palladas and Paulus Silentiarius, along with poetry by lesser talents. It is also a real store-house of literary topoi: conventional phrases, similes, metaphors and images, rhetorical devices, moral philosophical ideas, etc.

As a whole, the *Greek Anthology* gives us a many-sided pic-

ture of Greek culture in its different stages; the Finnish poet and translator Pentti Saarikoski (1937-1983) regarded it as a complete testimony to the youth, maturity and decline of Greek culture (155). Ezra Pound, for his part, wrote in a letter from Rapallo to Harriet Monroe in 1931: "Obviously in the last analysis the grade of any period depends on one, two or a few of the best writers. The Greek anthology is not a contradiction; it does not represent the mediocrity of one decade but the florilegium of a long series of decades" (*Letters* 232). Commenting in *The Spirit of Romance* on the culture of Provence, Pound was ready to compare the *Greek Anthology* with the works of the troubadours. According to him, the Provençal spirit was Hellenic (90).

Although the *Greek Anthology* was eagerly studied, translated and imitated by Renaissance poets and humanists, it came into fashion in the whole of Europe through the translations of the German Neo-Humanists. A central figure in this respect was J. G. von Herder, who in the section of his *Zerstreute Blätter* entitled "Blumen aus der griechischen Anthologie" published his translations of a selection of the *Anthology* (Trevelyan 114-116). Goethe, unlike Herder, did not translate epigrams, but his interest in the epigrammatic genre was greatly inspired by his reading of the *Anthology*: "The urbanity of the Greek epigrams, their refined variety of subject and mood and the thoughtful daintiness of their expression all attracted Goethe," writes Trevelyan (117-118) in his book on Goethe and Greek culture. Since then, many scholars in European universities have translated epigrams from the *Anthology* and commented on the epigram as a poetic genre. Selections from the *Greek Anthology* were also used in schools; in the nineteenth century there were for example over twenty such selections available for use in British schools (Skelton XI). It is possible that Pound first became acquainted with Greek epigrams through *The Bibelot*, an anthology edited in 1895-1915 by Thomas Bird Mosher (Espey 324).

The first complete English translation, however, was not published until 1916-1918. W. R. Paton's prose translation in five

volumes in the Loeb series was a landmark in the history of the epigram in English, even though the rather literal and old-fashioned translations were not of any particular artistic merit. Some audacious erotic poems, for instance from the "Musa puerilis" by Strato in the twelfth book, were translated into Latin, which was the common Victorian way to deal with morally dubious material.

Even before Paton's translation, several poets and writers in the beginning of the twentieth century, like Edgar Lee Masters and Virginia Woolf, were interested in the *Anthology* as well as in Alexandrian poetry and the poetry inspired by the Alexandrian style, most notably Catullus. As early as 1902, Virginia Woolf's brother Thoby Stephens had given her a selection of the epigrams of the *Anthology* as a birthday present (Farrell 33-36; Poole 173-184). Woolf also wrote an enthusiastic review of the second volume of Paton's translation of the *Anthology* for the *TLS*. Richard Aldington, for his part, translated a poem by Anyte; the translation was published in the *Egoist* one year before Pound's version of the same epigram (Ruthven 82). The *Greek Anthology* has also been a source of inspiration in later Modernist movements. Among Scandinavian Modernists, especially Gunnar Ekelöf (1907-1968), Bo Carpelan (b. 1926) and Pentti Saarikoski were readers and translators or imitators of the *Anthology*. In the case of Saarikoski, the translator of Joyce's *Ulysses* into Finnish, it is obvious that his interest in the *Anthology* was at least partly aroused by the example of Ezra Pound. The epigrammatic tradition was also continued by neoclassical poets in different countries.

Pound's Translations from the Greek Anthology

Although Ezra Pound's translations and adaptations of Greek and Roman literature, especially his translation of Propertius' elegies, have been studied from many perspectives by scholars, less attention has been paid to Pound's relation to the *Greek Anthology*. His interest in the *Anthology* and

the poets of the Alexandrian tradition is attested by his translations and adaptations, as well as by his allusions and references to Catullus.

Pound's translations from the *Anthology* in the suite "Homage to Quintus Septimius Florentis Christianus" are not numerous, but they are interesting in many ways. They originate from the same period when the first volume of Paton's translation was published. Quintus Septimius, who in the suite is honored by Pound, was Florent Chrétien, a 16th-century French humanist who was also known by his Latin name Quintus Septimius Florens Christianus. He was a pupil of Henri Estienne at Geneva and he corresponded for instance with the great classical scholar Scaliger. Along with epigrams, he translated several Greek plays into Latin. Florent Chrétien's collection of epigrams was published under the title *Epigrammata ex libris Graecae Anthologiae*; the selection contained 825 epigrams in Latin verse translation. As a response to one of the epigrams in his collection he wrote an epigram of his own in Greek, which was then translated into Latin by Robert Estienne. It may also be mentioned that another of his contemporaries, Pierre Ronsard, was influenced by the *Greek Anthology* (Hutton, *Anthology in France* 167-170; Ruthven 81).

From the title of Florent Chrétien's selection Pound has adopted three words as an epigraph to his suite: *Ex libris Graecae*. In themselves these words make no sense; in order to be proper Latin, the phrase should read either *Ex libris Graecis* (From Greek books) or *Ex libris Graecae Anthologiae* (From the books of the Greek Anthology; the Anthology was divided into 16 books). It is probable that Pound used as his starting-point the Latin versions of Florent Chrétien, as can be concluded from some of his mistranslations.

The poets in the "Homage" are Simonides, Anyte, Palladas, Agathias Scholasticus and Nicarchus. Palladas, who lived at the turn of the third and fourth century AD, seems to

have been Pound's favorite; moreover, in his essay on Horace, Pound spoke of "the charm of Palladas' impartial pessimism" (Ruthven 82). As Ruthven (81-83) has pointed out in his valuable *Guide to Ezra Pound's* Personae (1926), the poems have their counterparts in the *Greek Anthology* as follows (enumerated here in the same order as they occur in Pound's "Homage"):

> Simonides GA X 105
> Anyte GA IX 144
> Palladas GA X 59
> Agathias Scholasticus GA IX 153
> Palladas GA XI 381
> Nicarchus GA XI 118 (the poem is probably written by Callicter)

Furthermore, Pound's poem "The Cloak" (in *Ripostes*), consisting of two strophes, is actually a paraphrase of two epigrams, one by Asclepiades (GA V 85), the other by Julianus Aegyptus (GA VII 39) (Ruthven 51). According to Ruthven (93), Pound's "Phyllidula" originally had a subtitle, which acknowledged the poem as a translation from Antipater of Cos; Ruthven has been unable to trace the Greek original.

In the following I give three examples of these poems, in order to illustrate Pound's way of translating Greek epigrams. In the first epigram in the suite "Homage to Quintus Septimius" the poet's name is not given, but it is known to be by Simonides. Pound translates Simonides' epigram as follows:

> Theodorus will be pleased at my death,
> And someone else will be pleased at the death of Theodorus,
> And yet everyone speaks evil of death. (*Personae* 161)

The literal prose translation by W. R. Paton runs like this: "A certain Theodorus rejoices because I am dead. Another shall rejoice of his death. We are all owed to death." In the first line Pound has transformed the present tense into the speaker's

idea of what will happen in the future. In the original the speaker is dead, speaking now from his grave; this is a common practice in Greek epigrams. In Pound's version the speaker is still alive. Pound has also broken the metrical structure of the epigram (one hexameter followed by a pentameter) by expanding Simonides' two lines into three.

The longest epigram in the suite is by Agathias Scholasticus. It deals with the fate of Troy, although the name of the city is not mentioned in the text itself. The epigram is also a variation on the "ubi sunt" theme, so common in Medieval and Renaissance poetry. Pound's version is as follows:

> Whither, O city, are your profits and your gilded shrines,
> And your barbecues of great oxen,
> And the tall women walking your streets, in gilt clothes,
> With their perfumes in little alabaster boxes?
> Where is the work of your home-born sculptors?
>
> Time's tooth is into the lot, and war's and fate's too.
> Envy has taken your all,
> Save your douth and your story. (*Personae* 161)

W. R. Paton has translated Agathias' poem as follows:

> Where are those walls of thine, O city, where thy temples full of treasure, where the heads of the oxen thou wast wont to slay? Where are Aphrodite's caskets of ointment and her mantle all of gold? Where is the image of thy own Athena? Thou hast been robbed of all by war and the decay of ages, and the strong hand of Fate, which reversed thy fortunes. So far did bitter Envy subdue thee; but thy name and glory alone she cannot hide.

Pound has dropped out the names of the two goddesses and replaced the references to rituals with more everyday practices. The last aphoristic lines of the translation are more condensed than in the original. As such Pound's version is even more daring than that of Dudley Fitts, who otherwise was

influenced by Pound's method of translating (see below). Fitts's version, which is entitled "On Troy Fallen" is as follows:

> O City, whre are the once proud walls, the temples
> Heavy with riches? Where are the sacred heads
> Of oxen slain at the altars? Where
> Are the Paphian's precious jars and her golden cloak?
> Where is the image of your own Athenê?
>
> Gone, gone, lost to War and Time,
> And to bleak Fate, reverser of happy fortunes,
> And to harsh Envy.
> But the name of Troy
> And the glory of Troy shall live to see these die. (7)

Fitts's translation is located somewhere between the versions of Pound and Paton. At least in one respect he is more accurate than Paton, using the eponym Paphian instead of Paton's Aphrodite. Both Paton and Fitts have abondoned the name Tritogenes in the original and translated it by the more familiar Athene.

My third example is Nicarchus's poem about his doctor Phidon. The poem was probably written by a certain Callicter, although Florent Chrétien had ascribed it to Nicarchus (Ruthven 83). Like Simonides' poem, it is one of those numerous Greek epigrams where a dead man speaks from his grave. Pound's version runs as follows:

> Nicarchus upon Phidon his Doctor
>
> Phidon neither purged me, nor touched me,
> But I remembered the name of his fever medicine and died.
> (*Personae* 162)

In a way Pound's version is simpler than the original. Where in Pound's version the speaker says that Phidon did not purge

him, the original is more specific, or as Paton translates: "Phidon did not purge me with a *clyster*" (my emphasis). In the second line of Pound's epigram the first-person speaker states that he died when he remembered the name of his fever medicine. Nicarchus (Callicter) for his part writes that feeling feverish, he remembered Phidon's name and died. The effect of Pound's translation relies on hinting at the medicine without telling what it was.

Among Ezra Pound's epigrams, there are also some poems which are not translations but rather pastiches of the poems of the *Greek Anthology* and written in the same style as his translations of the *Anthology*. One of the most interesting poems among Pound's imitations of ancient sepulchral epigrams is his "Stele" (from the sequence "Moeurs Contemporaines":

> After years of continence
> he hurled himself into a sea of six women.
> Now, quenched as the brand of Meleagar,
> he lies by the poluphloisboious sea-coast.
> Παρα θινα πολυφλοισβοιο θαλασσεες.
> SISTE VIATOR (*Personae* 179)

The poem runs like a sepulchral epigram in satirical tone, and as such it would resemble any epigram in the *Greek Anthology*. On the other hand, the poem is a mixture of three languages, English, Greek and Latin. The Greek phrase is taken from the *Iliad* (I 34). In his essay on the early translations of Homer, Pound referred to this phrase as a magnificent onomatopoeia, and found it untranslatable (*Literary Essays* 250). On the basis of the Homeric word Pound coined the neologism "polyphloisboious", which recurs frequently in his writings. The last words, "SISTE VIATOR", are a conventional phrase in sepulchral inscriptions. They are written in block letters, imitating the manner of ancient inscriptions (Janus Lascaris even published the *Greek Anthology* in capi-

tal letters in 1494, see Hutton, *Greek Anthology in Italy* 117). As Ruthven (173) reminds us, in *The Spirit of Romance* Pound had translated, from the Renaissance Latin poet Andrea Navagero (1483-1529), lines which begin with the words "siste, viator".

Ezra Pound's interest in the epigrams of the *Greek Anthology* can also be seen in the larger context of his poetics. Pound often used various forms of inscriptions, such as epitaphs or sepulchral epigrams. The titles of his poems often contain words which are related to the inscription tradition, the places or objects to which inscriptions are usually attached. Such words include for instance "altar", "stele" and "tomb", and even the word "inscription" itself ("Horae Beatae Inscriptio"). Such inscriptions can of course be found not only in Greek and Roman antiquity but in other cultures as well. Pound's poetry also includes epitaphs to the Chinese poets Fu I and Li Po.

Among the epigrams of the *Greek Anthology* a great number describe various kinds of objects and things, especially objects which had been sent as gifts. It is no coincidence that Pound himself wrote about many objects, one ironic poem even carrying the title "An Object": "This thing, that hath a code and not a core, / Hath set acquaintance where might be affections, / And nothing now / Disturbeth his reflections" (*Personae* 60). Interestingly, Pound also wrote a poem entitled "Phasellus ille", where he described a thing made of "pâpier-maché" (*Personae* 59). The title is a quotation from Catullus' fourth poem, which according to some interpretations describes a model of a ship rather than a real ship.

Late in life, Pound was fascinated by Callimachus's Epigram 6, in which a nautilus is made to tell its story: after sailing the seas its shell has been offered to Aphrodite in a temple near Alexandria, Zephyrium. As Massimo Bacigalupo has shown (*The Forméd Trace* 442-43; "Who Built the Temple?" 54-56) Pound used phrases from this poem (and

from the footnotes in the Loeb Callimachus) to build up the climactic finale of canto 106, one of his last visionary writings.

Pound's poetry also contains a number of Greek or Greek-sounding personal names, which come close to those in the *Greek Anthology*. Such names are Arides (in "Arides"), Leucis ("Epitaph"), Nikoptis ("The Tomb at Akr Çaar") and Rullus ("Quies"). They testify to Pound's interest in the everyday world of the Greeks, which has come down to us through fragmentary papyri and through the *Greek Anthology*. It may also be mentioned here that the Greek name Strato (Greek Straton), whom we know as the author of homosexual poems in the twelfth book of the *Greek Anthology*, occurs in Pound's translation of Fontenelle's "Twelve Dialogues." The dialogue in question brings together two people from different periods, Strato from ancient Greece and the Renaissance painter Raphael of Urbino (*Pavannes and Divagation*s 135-138). The dialogue, however, does not refer to Strato as a writer of erotic epigrams.

Ezra Pound's admiration for the Greek epigrammatists was a consequence of his antagonism to such representatives of Augustan culture as Virgil and Horace and their classicism. Minor forms of poetry, such as the epigram, and the fragmentary poetry of antiquity, preserved in papyri, offered him a vast playground not only for poetic experiments and innovations but also for cultural criticism.

Pound's Influence on Later Translations

Pound's idiosyncratic approach to the translation of Greek and Roman poetry greatly influenced other poets and methods of translating. In his book *The Translator's Invisibility* Lawrence Venuti (208-211) refers to Dudley Fitts (1903-1968), whose translations include *Poems from the Greek Anthology in English Paraphrase* (1938) and who obviously was influenced by Pound's approach to translation. His translations from the *Greek Anthology* were published by New Directions, one of Pound's

principal publishers (Venuti 210). According to Fitts, his translations involved cutting, altering, expansion and revision, in order to compose English poems. Except for expansion, this was precisely the method used by Pound in his versions of the Greek epigrams.

Both Pound and Fitts had followers, such as Mary Barnard, whose version of Sappho (1958) was published with Fitts's foreword (Venuti 212-213). They also had followers in other countries, including Scandinavia. In 1958, at the same time that Mary Barnard produced her Sappho, Pentti Saarikoski translated the Greek poet into Finnish, breaking totally with the tradition of metrical translation. Saarikoski's versions of the epigrams of the *Greek Anthology* in his collection *Jalkapolku* (1977) are even freer adaptations than Pound's. He deliberately used anachronisms and slang words, sometimes even smuggling in poems written by himself and ascribing them to Greek poets.

While Pound included his translations of the *Greek Anthology* in his own collections, as imitations rather than translations, the question arises of how to deal with them in translating Pound's poetry into other languages. To take one example: the Finnish translator of Pound's poetry, Tuomas Anhava (1927-2001), included Pound's selection from the *Greek Anthology* in his translation. Anhava translated them from Pound's text, leaving the names out, for instance in Agathias' Troy epigram. On the other hand, in Nicarchus' epigram about Phidon he followed Paton, translating the word "clyster" instead of Pound's "medicine."

Conclusion

The number of Pound's translations from the *Greek Anthology* is less than ten; as such they occupy only a minor place in his work as a translator of Greek and Roman literature. They are, however, interesting in many ways. They exemplify Pound's interest in minor forms of poetry as well as in the selective nature of anthologies, which offers an opportunity for a

great variety of themes, motives and styles. The epigram is also a suitable vehicle for the satirical discussion of the many forms of human folly. Epigrams, as also seen from Pound's poetry, originate in the thought of one's death. This is aptly expressed in the last line of the poem "Epigram" by the Finnish poet and translator Pentti Saarikoski, commenting ironically on how one's death can inspire others to write epigrams:

> One man's death is another man's epigram.
> (trans. Herbert Lomas)

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