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► **To cite this version:**

Évelyne Prioux. Theocritus and the Visual Arts. Poulheria Kyriakou; Evina Sistikou; Antonios Rengakos. Brill's Companion to Theocritus, Brill, pp.387-427, 2021, Brill's Companions to Classical Studies, 978-90-04-46671-5. 10.1163/9789004466715_018 . halshs-03419971

HAL Id: halshs-03419971

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03419971>

Submitted on 10 Oct 2023

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Theocritus and the Visual Arts

Évelyne Prioux

Even though the relationship between Theocritus' poetry and art has been studied by several scholars¹, there is only one description of a work of art (*ecphrasis*²) in the *Idylls*. Nevertheless, other works of art are present in Theocritus' poetry in the form of short allusions and, sometimes, our knowledge of ancient works of art may help us shed light on the meaning of a given passage: the poets and the artists of the Alexandrian court indeed shared some common interests and preoccupations. It is also important to mention the few but remarkable cases in which Theocritus' poetry inspired the artists and was illustrated, both in ancient and modern times.

1. «Ecphrasis» in Theocritus

1.1. Precious artworks as metapoetic symbols

The only *ecphrasis* in the *Idylls*, the goatherd's cup (*Id.* 1.27-60), has been repeatedly interpreted as a metapoetic allegory that Theocritus designed to present his poetic agenda. Cups are known to be one of the many metaphors that ancient authors used to speak about poetry³. Moreover, the goatherd's cup of *Idyll* 1 ends with the image of a boy weaving a cage for cicadas, and weaving and cicadas are both frequent symbols for poetry⁴. The strong links between the cup's three vignettes and archaic poetry also suggest that Theocritus intended to make a statement about his relationship to *epos*: the cup is finely wrought, as the divine shields that were made for Achilles in *Iliad* 18 and for Heracles in the pseudo-hesiodic *Aspis*, but it is in the hands of a goatherd and is made of wood, not of precious materials⁵. As was shown by Ott⁶, the three motifs engraved on the cup are nevertheless derived from these famous archaic *ecphraseis*: motifs 1 (32-38) and 3 (45-54) echo scenes from the shield of Achilles⁷, and motif 2 (39-44) comes from the *Aspis*. As Cairns has also demonstrated, this *ecphrasis* encapsulates a poetic programme that the reader would have been able to identify through the presence of varied metaphors and hints in the entire *Idyll*⁸.

Idyll 1 was probably the first poem in Theocritus' poetry book⁹ and, as such, it contains a number of programmatic details. Concerning the cup itself, we learn that it has been washed in the well of the Horai (150), which could be a Theocritean equivalent of the programmatic water imagery known from other hellenistic poems. The *ecphrasis* also plays on the equation between a cup and its contents with poetry itself, a metaphor present in archaic lyric poetry. Wax and ivy, the two materials used by the cup's maker, have complex literary connotations and are connected in other programmatic texts, while the wood-working and the old fisherman evoke the idea of *πόνος*. The

¹ On interactions between art and Theocritus' poetry, see Brunn (1906); Gow (1913); Adriani (1966); Nicosia (1968); Belloni (2010); Cozzoli (2010); Linant de Bellefonds - Prioux (2018), chap.7. For the similarity of interests between Theocritus and contemporary artists, see Zanker (2004); Prioux (2012a); Fulińska (2013); Robert (2015).

² I here take *ecphrasis* in its modern and restrictive meaning: description of a work of art. See Webb (2009).

³ One of the clearest examples is *Anacreontea*, 4. See Faber (1995); Nünlist (1998) 136, 197, 205; Faber (2000); Gutzwiller (2014); Prioux (2016); Faber (forthcoming, a and b); Prioux (forthcoming). The cup metaphor is related to the many metaphors that equate poetry with a drink or libation (especially of water, wine or milk) and the making of poetry with a state of drunkenness or soberness (Nünlist [1998] 178-205). Since cups are often decorated and are man-made artifacts, it is also related to the various metaphors that assimilate the art of the poet to visual arts and craftsmanship (Nünlist [1998] 83-125).

⁴ Segal (1981) 27.

⁵ Dubel (2010); Belloni (2010) 319.

⁶ Ott (1969) 99-110. Compare motif 1, l.32-38, with *Il.* 18.490-508; motif 2, l.39-44, with *Aspis*, 207-15; motif 3, l.45-54, with *Il.* 18.561-86.

⁷ Motif 3 may also recall the anecdote on Aeschylus' poetic initiation, that happened in his childhood, as he was guarding grapes in a vineyard (Paus. 1.21.2).

⁸ Cairns (1984); Prioux (2012b).

⁹ The three families of manuscripts (Vatican, Ambrosian and Laurentian) all place *Idyll* 1 at the beginning of the book. See Gutzwiller (1996).

way in which the vegetal and ornamental motifs run around the cup is described through the weaving metaphor (29), a motif well attested in metaliterary contexts. Furthermore, Posidippus seems to allude to the goatherd's cup of *Idyll* 1 in an epigram which is set in a programmatic place in the Milan papyrus¹⁰.

As we have seen, this ornate ivy cup is a complex mixture of rusticity and refinement, two characteristics that may define Theocritus' literary program. The topic of the *Idylls* (their ὕλη – material/subject matter) is rustic or pastoral, but they are written with τέχνη (art). As Belloni has correctly noted¹¹, the same alliance between rusticity and refined art recurs in *Idyll* 5.104-105, when Comatas claims to possess a milk-pail made of cypress and a crater wrought by Praxiteles. It seems pointless to note that a real-life goatherd would never have owned silverware made by Praxiteles or to wonder whether Theocritus rather refers to one of the great artist's namesakes. The objects that Comatas mentions indeed form a voluntarily contrasting pair, in which the milk-pail serves as a symbol of the pastoral ὕλη of the *Idylls*, whereas the crater – a perfect symbol of mixture – can be interpreted as an emblem of Theocritus' refined art (an art that can be equated to that of Praxiteles) and of the erotic dimension of his poetry (Praxiteles was indeed famous for his representations of the Thespian Eros and the Cnidian Aphrodite).

In *Idyll* 1, the goatherd's cup is described as νεοτευχές (28), an adjective that brings to mind the hellenistic claim to novelty and originality. Interestingly, this characteristic is shared by several «works of art» or man-made objects that Theocritus mentions fleetingly in other *Idylls*: the banquet beds in *Idyll* 7.133-134 are made of «sweet reeds» (ἀδείας σχοίνιοι) and «newly cut» (νεοτμάτοι) vine leaves. In *Idyll* 18.3 Menelaus' bedchamber is described as νεογράφω («newly painted»), but no further details are provided¹². In *Idyll* 24.44, Amphitryon reaches out for his «newly woven» (νεοκλώστου) belt. Several epigrams ascribed to Theocritus also use similar compounds: in epigram 3, Daphnis' stakes have been recently made or planted (ἀρτιπαγεῖς) in the mountains¹³; epigram 4 describes a rustic statue of Priapus as newly carved (ἀρτιγλυφές). This praise of newly wrought objects can be understood as metapoetic: Theocritus stresses the beauty and interest of new and recent works of art and, similarly, the *Idylls* can be valued for representing a new form of poetry.

Other works of art are praised for the richness of their material or for the work that went into their elaboration: the spindle that Theocritus intends to offer to the wife of his friend Nicias (*Id.* 28) is not described and the reader is left to imagine «an object made of ivory wrought which much toil» (8). As in the case of the cup, Theocritus is interested in an object that evokes weaving and spinning, two actions that are also metaphors of poetry¹⁴. Being presented as a gift offered to his hostess by a poet who travels to a new town, the spindle may also represent the travel of the book itself and provide a nice closure for a poetry book. *Idyll* 15 also mentions works of art that are showcases of their makers' πόνος (toil) and ἀκρίβεια (precision): although Theocritus does not provide us with any details about the woven tapestries that are exhibited in the Royal Palace, it is easy to understand them as metaphors for the vividness of Theocritus' poetry. This possibility is made clear by the insistence on the vocabulary of painting/writing (γράφειν) and on the lifelike quality and movement of figures that inevitably recalls Theocritus' representation of the Syracusan women and their interactions with one another and with other characters (80-83).

1.2. Art seen through the eyes of women and rustics

Idyll 15 introduces us to one of the important aspects of Theocritus' references to art: when artifacts are mentioned in the *Idylls*, they are seen through the eyes and emotional reactions of women or

¹⁰ See Posidippus 3 A.-B., with the commentary of Belloni (2015).

¹¹ Belloni (2010).

¹² Lamari (1998) claimed that this word was in fact a hint suggesting that the entire *Idyll* 18 was the ecphrasis of a contemporary painting showing Menelaus' bedchamber. Nothing supports that hypothesis.

¹³ See also the imitation of Theocritus in *Id.* 26.8 (νεοδρέπτων).

¹⁴ On the spinning metaphor, see Gutzwiller (forthcoming); on the weaving metaphor, see Nosch (2014); Fanfani (2017); Peigney (forthcoming). Erinna was famous for having written a poem called *The Spindle*.

rustics and are «read» by people who are very much unlike the scholarly *milieu* of the Alexandrian court: the cup of *Idyll* 1 is marvelled at by a goatherd and the tapestries of the Royal Palace are admired by the Syracusan women. Goldhill has argued convincingly that this focus on the fictional onlooker was one of the major characteristics of hellenistic *ecphrasis*¹⁵.

By indicating the responses of his characters to art, Theocritus allows us to discover their *ēthos* and the result may be humorous, as when Boukaios imagines that, if he were a rich man, he would dedicate a gold statue of himself and his beloved Bombyca (*Id.* 10.33-35), a girl whose beauty seems quite questionable (*Id.* 10.27):

χρῦσει ἀμφοτέροί κ' ἀνεκείμεθα τᾶ Ἄφροδίτᾳ,
τὼς αὐλῶς μὲν ἔχοισα καὶ ἡ ῥόδον ἢ τύγε μᾶλλον,
σχῆμα δ' ἐγὼ καὶ καινὰς ἐπ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἀμύκλας.

Then should we both stand in gold as offerings to Aphrodite – thou with pipes, and a rosebud or an apple, and I with raiment new and new shoes of Amyclae on either foot¹⁶.

For Boukaios, the detail of the brand new shoes is apparently very important: with its gold and its attention to clothing, the statue must show the social status that he dreams of having.

References to the visual arts are also occasionally used by Theocritus' characters to express their emotions, and especially sexual desire: to express his emotion in front of Amaryllis' beauty, the goatherd of *Idyll* 3 states that she is πᾶν λίθος («all of marble», 18), that is to say that her skin is as white as a statue¹⁷ and that her sight provokes the same aesthetic pleasure as would a statue. In *Idyll* 6.36, Polyphemus contemplates his reflection in water, as if he were some new Narcissus, and states that his teeth seemed «brighter and whiter than Parian marble». Some ancient readers of Theocritus were even expecting his poems to contain more references to art than they actually do: in *Idyll* 6.18, it is said that Galatea's beauty τὸν ἀπὸ γραμμᾶς κινεῖ λίθον («is able to move the pebble from the line»). Although this phrase is likely a reference to a board game (πεττεῖα), several scholiasts thought that it meant that Galatea would be able to inspire love even to a stone¹⁸.

1.3. The works of art in the epigrams: votive offerings to the gods and metapoetic portraits of archaic poets

Unlike the *Idylls*, the epigrams that have been transmitted under the name of Theocritus mention a significant number of works of art, and especially statues. These fall mainly into two categories: votive offerings to the gods and portraits of archaic poets. The Theocritean epigrams were apparently assembled in a book somewhere between 100 and 40 BCE¹⁹ and this lost book served as a source both for the *Palatine anthology* and for the Bucolic manuscripts of the Ambrosian family. Book 6 of the *Palatine anthology* provides us with a group of four epigrams on votive statues of gods (6.337-340); they also stand close to one another in the Ambrosian manuscript (epigrams 8, 10, 12-13), but not as the continuous series that we know in the *Anthology*. The gods that Theocritus mentions in these epigrams are especially the ones that were important for the Ptolemaic dynasty (gods with which the queens or the kings were identified) and for poetry. The reader comes across the following votive offerings: a statue of Asclepius —a god much honored in Cos, where Ptolemy was born (*AP* 6.337); a group representing the nine Muses (338); a statue of Dionysos and a tripod (339); a statue of Aphrodite Ourania (340) — Arsinoe II received a cult as Arsinoe-Aphrodite and Aphrodite Ourania was famously honored in the sanctuary of Elis, that held authority over the Olympic games and thus interested the Ptolemies as a panhellenic site. Theocritus promotes

¹⁵ Goldhill (1994).

¹⁶ All translations of the *Idylls* are by Gow.

¹⁷ See the *Scholia in Theocritum* 3.18a.

¹⁸ See e.g. *Scholia in Theocritum* 6.18-19a: καὶ λίθινον, φησὶν, ἄγαλμα δύναται εἰς ἔρωτα αὐτῆς ἐπισπάσασθαι· τὴν δὲ τοῦ κάλλους ὑπερβολὴν θαυμάζει (a statue, he says, would even be allured and move for the love of her; he marvels at her extraordinary beauty).

¹⁹ Gutzwiller (1996a).

contemporary art and a conception of the τέχνη in which excellence in one art can be compared to excellence in the other: his epigram on the statue of Asclepius offered by his friend Nicias suggests that the man who became, with the help of the god, such an accomplished doctor asked an accomplished sculptor to carve a beautiful statue. Moreover, the critical vocabulary that Theocritus uses to celebrate this statue could also apply to poetry and to the stylistic qualities of the epigram: Eetion has put all his art (πᾶσαν... τέχνην) in this statue and his «hand» (his manner, his style, and his work) is characterized with the term γλαφυρά, a word which is pervasive in hellenistic literary criticism²⁰. All these epigrams revolve around the notion of χάρις (grace, gratitude, favour, goodwill) – a term which applied both to ethics (society was based on the exchange of χάρις between mortals and between the king and his subjects, while religion was based on the exchange of χάρις between gods and mortals) and to aesthetic (a work of art/poem seduces its viewer/reader because it is full of «grace»). For instance, Nicias is characterized as a pious man (he offers sacrifices to Asclepius each day) and the god acknowledges this by visiting him; to thank the god, Nicias then offers a statue, and promises an extraordinary reward (χάριν... ἄκρον) to the artist, who, in turn, puts all his art in the statue.

Theocritus' epigrams also contain a poem on a statue of Priapus (AP 9.437). The statue, located in a sacred precinct in a garden, receives the prayer of the speaker. The poet plays on humorous references to the god's unbridled sexuality: the newly-cut (ἀρτιγλυφές) statue is made of fig-wood (figs are often a sexual symbol) and has «three legs» (the size of his penis equates that of his two legs!). It is the work of a rustic, since it still has its bark on (αὐτόφλοιον) and has no ears (ἀνούατον). This series of adjectives contribute to the poem's *enargeia* by providing many details (ἀκριβολογία). The speaker prays for an end to his desire, but the reader can easily infer that a god with no ears will not be able to listen (18: ἄιοι [«listen!»]), and that a god with such an imposing organ will not be willing to alleviate the speaker's sexual desire.

After these epigrams on statues of gods, another coherent group of sculptures is offered by the epigrams on archaic poets (AP 7.664, 9.598-600 = 17-18 and 21-22 in the Ambrosian manuscript). These epigrams deal with bronze statues of the following poets: Anacreon, Epicharmus, Archilochus and Pisander. The reader is repeatedly asked to look intently as if the statues were under his eyes (7.664.1; 9.599.1-2). These four epigrams are not written in elegiac distichs, but imitate, by their varied metric, the poetry and meters of the authors under consideration. But unlike other epigrammatists who accurately described certain visual details of the portraits that they cited (see especially Leonidas of Tarentum 31 G.-P. = AP 1 306, on the statue of Anacreon), Theocritus provides us with no information about the appearance of these statues, either forcing his readers to recall portraits that they may have seen in cultural institutions or even demonstrating playfully, through the vanity of his ecphraseis, the impossibility of knowing what these poets of the distant past were truly like²¹.

2. Theocritus and *enargeia*

2.1. *The visual koinē of Theocritus' readers*

2.1.1. Royal portraits, humble people and pastoral landscapes: a new sensibility shared by artists and poets?

A number of studies have noted general thematic similarities between Theocritus' *Idylls* and hellenistic or Roman art. In most cases, these similarities are very general and merely show that the poet shared the sensibility of contemporary visual artists. The complex interplay of divine and humane features that characterizes Theocritus' representation of Ptolemy II and of his family is one of the many manifestations of this shared sensibility: hellenistic royal portraits often combined

²⁰ See Pollitt (1974) s.v. γλαφυρός. This adjective implies qualities such as subtlety, precision, and polish. It is also Dionysius of Halicarnassus' term for the middle style, along with «flowery» (ἀνθηρός).

²¹ See Bing (1988); Rossi (2001); Prioux (2007) 12-18.

individual and «idealized» features, and repeatedly introduced divine attributes in royal portraits²². It seems that Theocritus' numerous references to the flora of the pastoral landscape and the humble social background of many of his characters were also part of this new sensibility. When commenting on the pastoral *Idylls*, several scholars have indeed suspected that Theocritus shared an eye for the new with contemporary artists and have speculated on the possible existence of landscape paintings and reliefs in third-century Alexandria²³. The cup of *Idyll* 1 and the general atmosphere of the *Idylls* have thus been rightly compared to two *skyphoi* discovered in the House of the Menander in Pompeii. One of these cups shows three scenes, two of which appear on the same side: on one side, a man is rowing in a small boat, while a goatherd struggles with a strong he-goat; on the other, one can see a countryside sanctuary, with a passerby and a sacrifice (PLATE 1). The other cup bears two scenes: on one side, a cowherd is resting near his flock, a peasant is carrying baskets full of fruit or vegetables, and a cow is drinking from a pool under a tree; on the other, a traveler (?) and a bearded man are drinking from a cup and listening to an ugly old woman (interpreted, since Maiuri's publication, as a sorceress²⁴) while another woman (a *pharmakeutria*?) seems to be preparing a beverage (PLATE 2). Although Maiuri's interpretation is convincing and provides a striking parallel with Theocritus' *Idyll* 2, one can wonder if his reading was not mainly based on the existence of this poem: we have no labelled representation of a *pharmakeutria* and are therefore bound to making hypotheses. As for Theocritus' fishermen, they have been compared to hellenistic and Roman statues of fishermen, such as the Vatican-Louvre fisherman²⁵. A number of his characters thus have parallels in the visual arts, which certainly helped his readers form mental images corresponding to the various passages of his poetry.

When describing the goatherd's cup, Theocritus playfully combined elements that encouraged visualization with elements that made it impossible. Theocritus was well-aware that his readers would attempt forming an image of the cup, since he knew of the debates of his contemporaries on the aspects of various artifacts described by Homer, such as Nestor's cup and Athena's *aegis*²⁶. Several iconographic details had parallels in material culture and may therefore have encouraged Theocritus' readers to visualize the cup: as was first noted by Gow²⁷, the ivy and helichryse tendril (*Id.* 1.29-31) is a well-known motif on hellenistic vases and is frequently found on late Apulian ceramics (PLATE 3). Apulian vases, and especially *skyphoi*, also often show genre scenes featuring three characters, and scenes connected with seduction and marriage are of course frequent (PLATE 4): a reader who knew similar images could thus easily visualize the girl and her two suitors (32-38). We also know of objects representing a fox in a vineyard (PLATE 5)²⁸ or looking into a basket²⁹, motifs that Theocritus uses in his third vignette (45-54). Theocritus' readers thus had the possibility of recalling everyday objects bearing genre scenes, animal vignettes, or floral ornaments

²² Prioux (2012a). Another parallel between text and images is offered by the representation of Ptolemy II as Heracles strangling the serpents. One can indeed compare *Idyll* 24 with the early hellenistic bronze *protomai* that were found in Egypt and that represent a baby Heracles with individualized features, perhaps those of Ptolemy II (see New York, Brooklyn Museum, 63.185; New York, private collection [Moshe Bronstein]): Laubscher (1997) 150-159; Prioux (2008) 294; Linant de Bellefonds - Prioux (2018) 292-296.

²³ Adriani (1959); Nicosia (1968) esp. 84; Zanker (2004). Although Zanker emphasizes the pictorial aspects of Theocritus' poetry, he shows scepticism when it comes to comparing the *Idylls* with landscapes in the visual arts. Despite the poor amount of evidence on Alexandrian landscapes, we should note that the chorographic mosaic of Palestrina probably derives from a third century archetype.

²⁴ Maiuri (1933).

²⁵ On fishermen in hellenistic sculpture and in Theocritus' poetry as manifestations of the so-called «hellenistic realism», see Webster (1964) 168-171; Onians (1979) 38-40; Hughes Fowler (1989) 9-12. For the comparison between the fisherman on the goatherd's cup and the Vatican-Louvre fisherman, see Gow (1952) 9-10; Manakidou (1993) 50-83. Cf. Robert (2015).

²⁶ On Nestor's cup and its reconstructions by ancient scholars and artists, see for instance Pagani (2007); De Angelis (2015). On Athena's *aegis*, see Aristotle, fr. 153 Rose = *Schol. ext. B ad Il.* 5.741.

²⁷ Gow (1913); Prioux (2018).

²⁸ See <http://collections.ashmolean.org/object/388950> and Gow (1913).

²⁹ Adriani (1966); Nicosia (1968) 31.

that would help them visualize at least some of the motifs described by the poet. Even though it is rather easy to visualize the various motifs, it proves much more difficult to visualize the shape of the vase and the three-dimensional organization of its ornamentation. I would argue that Theocritus consciously played with this problem: first, the vase is identified as a *kissubion* and this sets the reader on uncomfortable ground, since this word was most probably a puzzler for ancient scholiasts. Related to ivy in an unclear manner, the word *kissubion* was known to designate the vase from which Polyphemus drank the wine offered by Odysseus in *Odyssey* 9. Theocritus' readers possibly knew visual representations of the Cyclops drinking wine and such images represent the *kissubion* as a wooden *skyphos* or bowl with no ornament³⁰. Second, the goatherd states that the vase has two handles, which would involve two sides and therefore two scenes, but he in fact describes three scenes – a number of scenes often found on bowl without handles, such as the so-called «Homeric bowls»³¹. This problem opens the way for various reconstructions: one could either think that two scenes occupied the same side of the vase (as on the cup discovered by Maiuri and as in Flaxman's reconstruction), or that one of them was on a central medallion inside the vase: the symmetry between vignettes 1 and 2 that both involve three figures, and the frequency of sea and fish motifs on the central medallion of ancient cups and dishes was likely to encourage this last reading, in which the fisherman was supposed to come into view as the owner emptied his drink. Third, the goatherd provides us with confusing indications about the organization of the scenes on the surface of the cup. The girl and her two suitors are «on the inside» (ἐντοσθεν, 32): one wonders if they should be found on the inside of the cup, or rather on the outside, but in a zone delimited by the vegetal ornaments mentioned before; the fisherman is seen «after these» (τοῖς δὲ μέτα, 39) and the vineyard is located «just a little bit further away than the fisherman» (τυτθὸν δ' ὄσσον ἄπωθεν ἀλιτρώτοιο γέροντος, 45).

2.1.2. Allusions to famous artworks

One of the ways in which ancient poets could help their readers visualize a mythological scene was to allude to well-known or common visual representations. Ancient art is indeed based on the repetition of the same iconographic schemes on various media and in various formats: for a given myth, the same iconographies could be repeated through centuries. This means that it is still possible today, to have an idea of the visual culture of Theocritus' contemporaries, even if we know very few works of art stemming from third-century Syracuse and Alexandria: for instance, when many replicas of a given iconographic scheme have survived³², it is legitimate to think that this scheme was part of a visual *koinē* shared by all readers of hellenistic poetry. In some cases, the mere mention of an epicleris would suffice to trigger the visual memories of famous artworks. For instance, when Theocritus mentions, in his epigram 2 G.-P., the statue of Aphrodite Ourania that Chrysogona has dedicated to the goddess in her own home and states that this Aphrodite is not the Pandemos, it is probable that all ancient readers would have had in mind Pheidias' fifth century Aphrodite Ourania and Scopas' fourth century Aphrodite Pandemos that were both exhibited in the sanctuary of Aphrodite in Elis³³. Both works of art could thus be seen by those who attended the Olympic games and were probably copied during the hellenistic and imperial period³⁴. Even though

³⁰ Greek or Etruscan art: *LIMC* VI, s.v. Odysseus, n°67-68, and VIII (*Suppl.*), s.v. Polyphemos I, n°16, 18, 20, 24 (n°28 represents the Cyclops with a huge *pithos*). In Roman art, see *LIMC* VI, s.v. Odysseus, n°69-87, as well as a cup from the treasure of Berthouville (BNF, département des Monnaies, médailles et antiques, 56.6): one of its sides shows a krater adorned with Odysseus presenting wine to Polyphemus.

³¹ For instance, see Berlin, SMPK, V.I.3161n (as well as 3161r, destroyed during WW II).

³² Neo-Attic art, that flourished from the middle of the 2nd century BCE onwards, was based on the imitation of *opera nobilia*, lists of which were compiled by artists and theoreticians, such as Pasiteles. We thus know of many late hellenistic and Roman works of art that imitate a selection of archaic, classical or hellenistic archetypes; such works were made to fulfill the purchase orders of wealthy Roman art collectors. See esp. Fuchs (1999).

³³ Pausanias 6.25.1.

³⁴ See *LIMC* II, s.v. Aphrodite, n°177, 976. For small images of Aphrodite on a goat, see Ganszyniec (1923) 432-433,

Theocritus says nothing of the visual appearance of the statue dedicated by Chrysogona, his readers would have probably visualized it as a replica of Pheidias' masterwork. In a similar manner, *Idyll* 15 refers to a statue of Adonis on a silver bed, but provides little detail about the sculpture: we do read about «the first down spreading from (Adonis') temples» and the *paraphernalia* that were part of the decorative programme (flower-baskets, Erotes adorning a pergola, ivory furniture (?) with several (?) figures of Ganymedes carried on the wings of an eagle – a symbol of the deification of Adonis), but Adonis himself is not precisely described. Theocritus could indeed rely on his readers' knowledge of contemporary representations of Aphrodite's lover on his death-bed. Among the most ancient representations that we now know are terracotta statuettes discovered in a 2nd century BCE tomb in Veroia (PLATE 6) and in late 3rd (?) century tomb in Etruria³⁵. Similar images of the dying hunter were most probably known earlier, as is strongly suggested by the evidence on the cult of Adonis – a cult brought to Greece as early as the archaic period and that then spread through the West, and especially in Etruria. Archaeological remains of the 5th and 4th centuries³⁶ prove the existence of festivities involving the *agalma* of a dying Adonis, long before Theocritus wrote *Idyll* 15.

When reading *Idyll* 15, Theocritus' Alexandrian readers probably had a real statue in mind: there certainly was a famous cult statue of Adonis in the city, and it was possibly commissioned by Arsinoe II herself. The familiarity with such images played a role in the reader's response to *Idyll* 15: the way in which Theocritus' readers visualized the works of art mentioned in his poetry must have provided them with even more pleasure and amusement when reading the reactions of the Syracusan women in front of a similar image. By understanding precisely how these women reacted to a given work of art and what they found interesting (mostly the *paraphernalia*), the reader would have gained a better knowledge of the *ēthos* of the Syracusan women: possibly, for a reader who knew the stunning work of art commissioned by the Queen, the Syracusan women would have seemed to miss the central piece and focus not on the two major characters of the sculpture but on their surroundings, because they were not really able to grasp and analyze what they were looking at.

There are also several cases in which Theocritus seems to refer to a precise iconographic scheme by carefully describing the gestures, positions or attributes of several mythological characters: this is the case in *Idylls* 13 (death of Hylas), 26 (death of Pentheus), and 22 (Amycus sitting in the woods). Interestingly, for each of these episodes, a comparison can be made with ancient visual artifacts that were part of a shared visual culture.

The deaths of Hylas and Pentheus share similarities: in both cases, a man is murdered by three female figures. It is probable that Theocritus expected the reader of the *Idylls* to compare both scenes and that their similarities contributed to the unity and coherence of the collection. Both correspond closely to iconographic schemes that are known to us thanks to Roman works. Even if one cannot exclude the idea that a famous Alexandrian artist created a painting inspired by Theocritus' *Hylas* and that the Roman works of art were subsequently copied after this archetype, it seems more likely that Theocritus had an already famous work of art in mind and that he expected

esp. nr. 8 (4th c. relief). For a hellenistic replica of the Pandemos in small format, see for instance the votive discus of the Louvre, MA 2701; hellenistic period: <http://www.limc-france.fr/objet/10982>. <http://www.cn-telma.fr/callythea/extrait1014/>

³⁵ *LIMC Suppl.*, s.v. Adonis, Add. 12. See also <http://www.cn-telma.fr/callythea/extrait251653/> and <http://www.cn-telma.fr/callythea/extrait251654/>, as well as <http://www.limc-france.fr/objet/14737> and <http://www.limc-france.fr/objet/14738>. On the terracotta found in Veroia, see Tzavanari (1987). For the Etruscan statuette from the Val Vidone area, see Musei Vaticani, cat. 14147.

³⁶ See for instance the case of the recently discovered *Adonion* of Gravisca, founded around 480 BCE: the sanctuary comprises a garden where the *agalma* of the dying Adonis could be exposed under a *καλύβη* and a built-in coffin: Boitani/Torelli (1999) pl.III, 1.

his readers to visualize the scene thanks to the existence of this famous painting (46-51).

The two moments described in this passage (the Nymphs clinging on Hylas' hand as he dips his pitcher and the Nymphs holding Hylas on their laps) have *comparanda* in the visual arts³⁷. Several visual representations show Hylas in the middle or on the side of a group of three Nymphs³⁸. The boy holds a pitcher and the Nymphs are clutching his arm or leg³⁹. Sometimes, the scene is set in a lavish natural background, which might evoke the beautiful scenery described by Theocritus (PLATE 7)⁴⁰. In several images, Hylas is represented in the well-known *Pathosformel* (emotionally charged attitude) associated with the victims of human sacrifice, with one leg stretched and one knee bent⁴¹. If Theocritus' readers were to visualize Hylas in this position the relationship with the figure of Pentheus would have been all the more evident. As for the description of Nymphs comforting Hylas as he sits on their laps, it has a possible parallel in a painting of the tomb of the Nasonii in which a young man holding a reed (Hylas?) is seated among a group of three Nymphs⁴². The same visual quality characterizes Theocritus' account of the death of Pentheus (*Id.* 26.20-23):

μάτηρ μὲν κεφαλὰν μυκῆσατο παιδὸς ἑλοῖσα,
ὄσσον περ τοκάδος τελέθει μύκημα λεαίνας·
Ἴνώ δ' ἐξέρρηξε σὺν ὤμοπλάτα μέγαν ὤμον,
λάξ ἐπὶ γαστέρα βᾶσα, καὶ Αὐτονόας ῥυθμὸς ωῦτός·

His mother took her son's head and roared like a lioness with cubs; and Ino, setting her foot upon his stomach, tore off his great shoulder with the shoulder-blade, and in like fashion wrought Autonoea.

By using the word ῥυθμός, that was part of the terminology of ancient art criticism⁴³, Theocritus implicitly encouraged his readers to think of a work of art. His description suggests a strong effect of symmetry, with Ino and Autonoe adopting similar attitudes on each side of Pentheus⁴⁴. Even if there is no image of Ino setting her foot on Pentheus' stomach, the symmetry of the scene corresponds to a famous iconographic scheme, preserved in several works of the Roman period: in these images, Pentheus is always represented as a victim of human sacrifice, with one knee bent and one leg stretched (PLATE 8)⁴⁵. Sometimes one of the Bacchantes sets her foot on his thigh⁴⁶ or on his head⁴⁷. The Roman images probably go back to a lost masterpiece: although it is impossible to be certain that this archetype predates Theocritus' poetry, it seems that the poet had a similar image in mind and expected his readers to remember it.

When reading the descriptions of the deaths of Hylas and Pentheus, Theocritus' readers were thus implicitly encouraged to visualize paintings; the resemblance between Theocritus' descriptions and well-known iconographic schemes encourages us to think that his contemporaries knew famous masterpieces, now lost, that were the archetypes of the Roman images discovered by archaeologists. If we are right in supposing the existence of early hellenistic archetypes showing Hylas and

³⁷ It is possible to compare Theocritus' narrative with Apollonius of Rhodes' account of the same episode in *Argonautica* 1.1207-1239. Apollonius focuses on emotions and actions rather than descriptive details. His account bears little relationship to the visual images that have come down to us: according to Apollonius, Hylas falls victim to one specific Nymph, the Nymph of the fountain he visited, while many other Nymphs witness the scene from the background.

³⁸ Ling (1979); *LIMC* V, s.v. Hylas, n°7-30. One never sees all three Nymphs clutching Hylas' hand, but one Nymph may do so (see e.g. n°17).

³⁹ See e.g. the mosaic of Hylas in the musée de Saint-Romain-en-Gal, the *opus sectile* found in Rome, in the basilica of Junius Bassus (Rome, MNR), the mosaic from Volubilis (House of the Venus mosaic: *LIMC* V, s.v. Hylas, n°17).

⁴⁰ Pompeii, ins. IX.7.16, *cubiculum* (a).

⁴¹ Franzoni (2006) 75-104; for Hylas with one knee bent, see Lancha (1983) 382.

⁴² The *arcosolia* of the tomb of the Nasonii, today almost vanished, but known through Bartoli's engravings, represented both moments of the story.

⁴³ See Pollitt (1974), s.v.

⁴⁴ Brunn (1906) 225.

⁴⁵ See *LIMC* VII, s.v. Pentheus, n°27-30, 32.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, n°27-29.

⁴⁷ See n. 44.

Pentheus with one knee bent, the similarity between both scenes would have been known to at least some readers of Theocritus and would have contributed to build a strong link between two of his mythological poems.

When reading the description of Amycus in *Idyll* 22.44-52 the readers were rather encouraged to think of a sculpture:

ἔνθα δ' ἀνὴρ ὑπέροπλος ἐνήμενος ἐνδιάσκει,
δεινὸς ἰδεῖν, σκληρῆσι τεθλασμένος οὔατα πυγμαῖς·
στήθεα δ' ἔσφαιρωτο πελώρια καὶ πλατὺ νῶτον
σαρκὶ σιδηρεῖη, σφυρήλατος οἷα κολοσσός·
ἐν δὲ μύες στερεοῖσι βραχίουσιν ἄκρον ὑπ' ὤμων
ἔστασαν ἥτε πέτροι ὀλοῖτροχοι οὔστε κυλίνδων
χειμάρρους ποταμὸς μεγάλαις περιέξεσε δίναις·
αὐτὰρ ὑπὲρ νότιοιο καὶ ἀχένος ἤωρεῖτο
ἄκρων δέρμα λέοντος ἀφημμένον ἐκ ποδεῶνων.

There a monstrous figure was seated in the sun. Terrible to look on was he; his ears were crushed by the blows of hard fists; his mighty chest and broad back rounded with iron flesh, as it were some colossus of *hammered* metal, and beneath his shoulder-points the muscles in his brawny arms stood out like rounded boulders which some winter torrent has rolled and polished in its mighty eddies. A lion-skin fastened by the paws swung on his back and neck.

Theocritus makes clear references to sculpture by using the verb περιζέω (polish or scrape all round, e.g. with a chisel, rasp or file) and the phrases σαρκὶ σιδηρεῖη and σφυρήλατος οἷα κολοσσός. A lot of ink has been spilled on this last phrase: it indeed involves several connotations, which are, up to some point, contradictory.

On the one hand, for hellenistic readers, the mention of a κολόσσοις would most certainly imply the idea of an over-life-size sculpture: in connection with the seated attitude (ἐνήμενος) and the lion-skin – which was the common attribute of Heracles –, the word would certainly bring to mind the famous fourth century colossus of Heracles made by Lysippus for the Acropolis of Tarentum⁴⁸. Several scholars, starting with Nicosia (1968), have also compared Theocritus' description with an obvious reworking of Lysippus' colossus, the famous Terme boxer, who is characterized as an experienced pugilist by his hands wrapped up in *cesti*, his crushed and deformed ears (*cf. Id.* 22.45), the copper inlays that represent a series of bloody gashes on his skin, and the use of a darker bronze to add a bruise under the eye. Nicosia obviously goes too far when he states that the Terme boxer and the so-called hellenistic prince, two bronzes that were discovered together on the Quirinal, were part of one and the same group, that this group was an early hellenistic representation of Pollux and Amycus and that it was the source of inspiration for Theocritus' dialogue between both figures. In fact, the Terme boxer was probably supposed to represent a real-life boxer rather than the terrible Amycus and we know nothing about its date of creation or that of its hypothetical archetype: the sculpture has been variously dated at the very beginning of the hellenistic period (because of its Lysippean character⁴⁹) or at its very end, around 50 BCE (it would then be a late hellenistic reworking of Lysippus' Heracles). If we accept the earlier date for the boxer or its archetype, it may well have been known to Theocritus and to his contemporaries. If we accept the later date, we cannot exclude that at least some Roman readers of Theocritus would have visualized the seated Amycus as this bronze boxer. Personally, I would like to think that the Terme boxer's archetype was, as suggested by Moreno, a famous «portrait» of a pankratiast designed by Lysippus or one of his students. For an almost legendary pankratiast such as Polydamas of Skotoussa, one would well understand why the artist chose to imitate the design of the famous Heracles of Tarentum. If so,

⁴⁸ See Cozzoli (2010) 278. Lysippus' colossus was already reproduced on other media and in other formats by the beginning of the early 3rd century BCE: see London, BM, 1855,0306.16.

⁴⁹ Moreno (1994), who believes the Terme Boxer derived from a Lysippean original, notes (I, 63) that the basis for the «portrait» of the long-dead pankratiast Polydamas of Skotoussa that was made by Lysippus in Olympia was wide enough to bear an over-life-size statue such as the one discovered on the Quirinal.

Theocritus may have wanted his readers to think of this statue when reading Amycus' depiction. On the other hand, the technical term σφυρήλατος refers very precisely to a kind of sculpture that has nothing in common with the Heracles of Taranto or the Terme Boxer, and predates the dissemination of lost wax casting techniques. A σφυρήλατος is normally an archaic sculpture made of hammered metal (especially thin plates of gold or bronze hammered over a wooden core or beaten into relief on a bed of pitch). This *repoussé* technique limited the size of sculptures: the phrase σφυρήλατος... κολοσσός was therefore a kind of *oxymoron*, unless one decides that the word κολοσσός was here used with a very broad meaning. I would rather argue that the contradiction was voluntary and that Theocritus wanted his reader to think to a κολοσσός similar to the Heracles of Tarentum or to the Terme boxer, but also wanted to introduce, through the word σφυρήλατος, the idea that Amycus had the roughness of a primitive artwork. By mentioning the «hammered» surface of his skin, he poet also helped the reader visualize the many bruises and bumps of the pugilist.

2.1.3. The Dioscuri and the Apharetids: a lost masterpiece known to Lycophron and Theocritus?

In other cases, Theocritus may also refer to works of which we do not have any trace or that are only known to us through isolated imitations. While reading certain lines of the *Idylls*, the ancient readers may well have remembered famous works of art that are now entirely unknown to us. For instance, *Idyll* 22 shows Pollux looking for water in the Bebrycian forest. We now know nothing of Theocritus' inspiration for these lines, but it seems that Etruscan artists of the fifth century BCE also knew about the Dioscuri looking for water: at least two Etruscan intaglios show Castor (CA 4 TVP) with an amphora near a lion-mouth fountain (PLATE 9)⁵⁰. Should we think that these intaglios are isolated replicas of a famous work of art or that they were inspired by an archaic poem which Theocritus also knew?

Another intriguing case in which Theocritus' poetry can be compared to a painted image is provided by *Idyll* 22.181-213. In these lines, Theocritus narrates Castor's combat against his cousins Idas and Lynceus, a myth also told by Pindar (*N.* 10.60-74) and Lycophron (535-568). In Pindar's version, Castor is responsible for the loss (?) of Aphareus' cattle and the Dioscuri are therefore attacked by Aphareus' sons, Idas and Lynceus. Pindar's account of the battle does not distinguish the actions of one brother from those of the other. Almost all actions are in the dual form.

Although Theocritus and Lycophron both imitate Pindar's account, their versions of the myth differ from their model. Both poets see the battle as a consequence of the rape of the Leucippids whom the Apharetids were supposed to marry. They also carefully differentiate the actions of the various warriors: the brothers no longer act in pairs, but engage in the battle in an individual manner. Even if the two poets do not describe the same line of events, they seem to have a similar image in mind when describing the final scene of the battle: both show Idas brandishing a stele or a sculpture and threatening one of the Dioscuri, while another warrior lies dead, face on the ground. Interestingly, their accounts bear a striking resemblance to a scene known from an Apulian lekythos ascribed to the Underworld Painter (PLATE 10)⁵¹. Such a vase could echo a lost masterpiece; if so, the hellenistic poets were likely to expect their readers to know it, be it directly, or indirectly, thanks to copies and imitations in the decorative arts.

On the vase, the connection between the battle and the rape of the Leucippids is made clear by the presence of two chariots on the sides of the main scene. The four cousins are unlabelled: although it is clear that Idas is the one holding the stele and about to be thunderstruck, the three other warriors could be variously identified. If one follows Theocritus' account, the warrior against whom Idas is throwing the stele would be Castor (207-209), whereas Lynceus would be the figure lying dead on his face on the right side of the scene (203-204: «and Lynceus bowed him and fell on his face, and heavy the sleep that sped down upon his eyes»). By elimination, the wounded warrior on the left

⁵⁰ One exemplary is still known (PLATE 9), while the other is lost. See *LIMC* III, s.v. Dioskouroi/Tinas Cliniar, n°94 [<http://www.limc-france.fr/objet/15791>]

⁵¹ Linant de Bellefonds – Prioux (2018) 241-244.

should then be Pollux, but Theocritus does not mention his role during the battle: in Theocritus' new version of the myth, the Dioscuri are victorious in all the battles that they wage and are not killed or wounded by the Apharetids.

If one follows Lycophron's version, the result is quite different. Since Lycophron does not name the four cousins but mentions them through metaphors that are directly inspired by Pindar's account of the myth, one has to compare his poem to the Nemean ode in order to understand the development of the action. A close reading of Lycophron would thus lead one to think that the dead body on the right is Castor who died at the very beginning of the battle (553-554); the wounded warrior on the left would be Lynceus (556-557), while Idas, in the center, threatens the life of Pollux. This version provides the most convincing identification for the various figures since the various brothers fall into pairs on each side of the painting.

Although this is only a hypothesis, one could think that Theocritus and Lycophron had both in mind a masterwork illustrating this battle and that the absence of name-labels opened the possibility for several reconstructions of the events: was it Castor or Lynceus who died first and fell on his face? Which of the Dioscuri did Idas threaten with the stele?

2.2. Signaling *enargeia*

All the passages that we have just studied are characterized by their *enargeia*. A number of techniques that ancient authors could use to achieve an effect of *enargeia* were listed in Demetrius' treatise *On style* (209-220). Probably written towards the end of the hellenistic period⁵², Demetrius' treatise draws on earlier material and a number of his ideas on *enargeia* were possibly already present in some treatises of the third century BCE. Demetrius provides his readers with a series of recipes for *enargeia*: providing many details (*akribologia*), mentioning the stimulation of several senses at the same time, the repetition of a given word (*dilogia*) or syntactic structure, narrative suspense, precise description of the *parepomena* (chain of events), *onomatopoeia* and use of «mimetic» words and sonorities.

Castor's battle against the Apharetids and the death of Hylas are good examples of Theocritus' attention to *parepomena*. In *Idyll* 13.40-42, the naming of the various species of plants that grow around the spring may illustrate the poet's mastery of *akribologia*, while the movement (*energeia*), instantaneity and fluidity of the action are conveyed through the repetition of the verb (κατ)ήριπε(ν) (49-50) and the adjective ἄθροος (50-51); Theocritus also signals the pictorial quality of the scene by introducing many patches of contrasting colors (41, 49-50). The comparison between the drowning Hylas and a shooting star seems to be meant to signal the *enargeia* of the entire scene. In this simile, Theocritus not only insists on the *chiaroscuro* of the star falling in black water, but also makes sure that the reader simultaneously receives several sensations, by visualizing the star and by «hearing» a sailor who reacts to this sign by shouting (52). Theocritus thus designed a simile full of *enargeia*, and one should probably remember that the Greek word for a simile (*eikōn*) was also used for images such as paintings and sculptures.

As for the descriptions of Pentheus' death and of the seated Amycus, they explicitly refer to the pictorial or sculptural quality of the scene by using artistic terminology. Pentheus' death combines auditory and visual sensations, with the mention of Agave's lion-like roar and the precise description of the positions of the various characters. The depiction of Amycus' muscles (22.48-50) could be cited as an example of *akribologia*. By using the words ὀλοίτροχοι and χειμάρρους, Theocritus alludes to a well-known Homeric simile (*Il.* 13.136-142) that compares Hector rushing to battle to a boulder rolling down a winter torrent. The ancient commentators considered this simile a model of *mimesis* and carefully studied its sonorities⁵³. By imitating a passage renowned for its *enargeia*, Theocritus signaled the visual quality of his own poem.

The same strategy can be observed in *Idyll* 24.11-28, in a passage that later inspired, as we will see,

⁵² See esp. Chiron (1993) xxxix.

⁵³ Eust., *Comm ad Il.* 13.136-145 (III, 452 van der Valk). See also Prioux (2017) 184-185 and (2018).

the creation of a work of art. These lines are indeed modelled on the opening of the description of Achilles' shield (*Il.* 18.486-489)⁵⁴. Such a remarkable allusion to Achilles' shield certainly called the reader's attention to the vividness of the scene described in *Idyll* 24.

2.3. Was Theocritus famous for his *enargeia*?

Theocritus' attention to *enargeia* was apparently well-known to his ancient readers. For instance, his ecphrasis of the cup was a model both for hellenistic and Augustan poets⁵⁵ and the Elder Philostratus considered *Idylls* 6 and 11 to be remarkable examples of *enargeia*: the imaginary painting described in *Imagines* 2.18 is a *phantasia* based on combined allusions to *Odyssey* 9 and to these two *Idylls*. In Philostratus' view, Theocritus was a master of *enargeia*⁵⁶.

The way in which Theocritus alludes to famous statues and pictures while describing the gestures and attitudes of the Nymphs (*Id.* 13), the Bacchantes (*Id.* 26) and Amycus (*Id.* 22) was imitated by the anonymous author of *Idyll* 25 (*Epyllion of Heracles*). In lines 145-149, this imitator of Theocritus describes the way in which Heracles tamed the bull Phaethon. The passage shows the same attention to details (*akribologia*) as Theocritus' depiction of Amycus: in both cases, the poet focuses on anatomical details. As was the case in *Idylls* 13, 22 and 26, this passage still brings to mind famous images of Heracles fighting Achelous, or Theseus fighting the Marathonian bull⁵⁷ or the Minotaur. For instance, a small bronze that may be a small-scale replica of an early hellenistic Alexandrian archetype⁵⁸ represents Theseus pushing down the left horn of the Minotaur⁵⁹; his shoulder is raised in effort (PLATE 11). Theocritus' imitator thus replicated what he probably identified as a characteristic feature of the *Idylls*: the quotation of famous iconographic schemes.

The *scholia* to Theocritus' *Idylls* also seem to share this attention to possible references to artworks and this would confirm that Theocritus' ancient readers believed that his poems contained allusions to sculptures and paintings. For instance, the *scholia* to *Idyll* 7.5-9 are our only testimony on a statue of the local hero Chalcon of Cos, who pressed his knee against a rock and thus created a watermouth for the spring Burina. The scholiasts believed that lines 6-7 were in fact a description of this statue⁶⁰.

3. Works of art inspired by Theocritus' poetry

3.1. Theocritus' poetry: a source of inspiration for artists and amateurs?

In two specific cases, we know that the decoration of a *domus* or *villa* was inspired by Theocritus' poetry. In the so-called «House of Propertius» in Assisi⁶¹, a corridor, adorned with late 1st century BCE frescoes, was also enhanced with small mythological vignettes, painted *a tempera* on the yellow background of the walls (PLATE 12). Some of the vignettes form the subject of Greek epigrams that have been incised in the plaster of the walls. Such a dialogue between text and image is in itself exceptional in Roman art and indicates the presence of an educated owner in this house. Among the sixteen vignettes that were discovered, ten were commented by epigrams. Remarkably, the topics of the paintings and epigrams are closely related to poetry. For instance, one of the pictures illustrates a myth that is otherwise entirely unknown in the visual arts: the infancy of Iamus. The painting corresponds to a scene that Pindar describes very vividly in the 6th *Olympian ode* and was probably created as a pictorial tribute to Pindar's poetry and to its *enargeia*. Another vignette on the same wall (PLATE 13) represents Polyphemus and Galatea, and the corresponding

⁵⁴ See also *Od.* 5.272-274; on the mimetic quality of these lines, see Becker (1995) 101-106.

⁵⁵ See Belloni (2015) on Posidippus 3 A.-B.; the most famous imitation of the goatherd's cup is Vergil, *Ecl.* 3.36-42.

⁵⁶ Being a familiar of Julia Domna, Philostratus may also have played a role in the creation of the Emesa mosaic: see *infra* p. XXX.

⁵⁷ Cf. Callimachus fr.67.1 Hollis

⁵⁸ Moreno (1994) I, 325-326: «Theseus» perhaps has the features of Ptolemy II.

⁵⁹ See Boube-Piccot (1969) 311-313, pl.244-245, n°384; *LIMC*, VI/1, s.v. Minotauros, n°67.

⁶⁰ Nicosia (1968) 11.

⁶¹ Prioux (2008) 65-121.

epigram contains several allusions to Theocritus:

Ποιμαίν[ε]ι Πολύφημο[ς] ἀ<ε>ίδων καὶ Γαλάτεια /
κυρτ[ὸ]ν ὑπὲρ ς{ε}μοῦ νῶτον ἀγαλλομένη.
‘ἦόσι’ (vac.) ‘ἦόσι’

Polyphemus and Galatea are herding their flocks: he is singing and she is showing off, while sitting on the curved back of the pug-nosed beast.

This two-line epigram presents corrections or alternative readings that are inscribed underneath the text: line 2 could also read as ἦόσι ὑπὲρ ςμοῦ νῶτον ἀγαλλομένη (she is showing off near the seashore, while sitting on the back of the pug-nosed beast) or κυρτ[ὸ]ν ὑπὲρ ςμοῦ ἦόσι ἀγαλλομένη (she is showing off near the seashore, while sitting on the curve of the pug-nosed beast).

This epigram combines several allusions to bucolic poetry: the syntax of the first line clearly imitates *Idyll* 6.6-7 (βάλλει τοι, Πολύφαμε, τὸ ποιμνιον ἅ Γαλάτεια / μάλοισιν: Galatea pelts thy flock with apples, Polyphemus)⁶². Other possible models are *Idyll* 11.13-14 (ὁ δὲ τὰν Γαλάτειαν αἰίδων / αὐτὸς ἐπ' αἰόνος κατετάκετο: he was singing of Galatea and wasting away on the shore) and Bion, fr.2 Gow, 3 (ἄεισεν Πολύφαμος ἐπ' ἄόνι τᾷ Γαλατεΐα: Polyphemus sang for Galatea from the shore). These literary allusions were probably meant to encourage the viewers to remember the hellenistic poems while contemplating the small painting.

Even more remarkable is the case of a mosaic pavement discovered in Homs/Emesa in what may have been an imperial villa of the Severan period (PLATES 14-15)⁶³. The pavement represented at least four scenes of the life of Heracles, two of which concern his birth (Agnouia [Ignorance] witnesses the meeting between Alcmena and Zeus disguised as Amphitryon; the infant Heracles strangles the snakes) and two others his apotheosis (Okeanos greets Heracles as he enters the garden of the Hesperides; Athanasia and Zeus welcome Heracles on Mount Olympus). The second and most important scene, the strangling of the snakes, has no comparanda among the other ancient visual representations of the same episode. It includes a series of details that are only mentioned in *Idyll* 24: Heracles' and Iphicles' crib is a large shield (4); by trying to flee the monsters, Iphicles has freed himself from the blanket (25-26); both children act in contrasting ways (26-28); Alcmena has arrived before all other adults (34); Amphitryon has taken his sword with him (42-43); the servants have also come along with burning torches (50-53). Long before the discovery of this mosaic, Brunn suggested that Theocritus' narrative was based on the contemplation of a painting that he saw in the palace of Alexandria⁶⁴. I would rather argue that the strong pictorial character of Theocritus' poem and its *enargeia* encouraged a rich *amateur* of the Severan period to order the creation of this mosaic. If a famous painting of Heracles' childhood existed in Alexandria and was still known, albeit indirectly, to a Syrian mosaicist of the Severan period, one would indeed expect some of the many images of Heracles' childhood that were created between the third century BCE and the third century CE to follow the same iconographic scheme. Moreover, we do have a possible explanation that would account for the creation, in Emesa, of a new visual representation of Heracles and his twin based on Theocritus' narrative. If the context of the mosaic is indeed, as its first publisher believed⁶⁵, an imperial villa of the Severan period, it is difficult not to think of Julia Domna, the wife of Septimius Severus⁶⁶. Born and raised in Emesa, Julia Domna was the mother of Caracalla and Geta, two boys born with only a year of difference, who became co-emperors at the death of their father in 211 CE. A few months later, Geta was murdered by his older brother and died in the arms of his mother. Given the frequent comparison between Hercules and Roman emperors, one

⁶² On the *enargeia* of this sentence, see Celentano (2010).

⁶³ Abdallah (2011); Linant de Bellefonds - Prioux (2018) chap.7.

⁶⁴ Brunn (1906) 223-224.

⁶⁵ Abdallah (2011) 12.

⁶⁶ Linant de Bellefonds - Prioux (2018) 298-299.

could be tempted to read the mosaic as a visual, albeit discrete and indirect tribute, to Julia Domna's courage and attachment to her deceased son (Alcmena is protecting Iphicles), as well as a confirmation of the elder son's superiority and predisposition to power and apotheosis. One should also remember that Philostratus the Elder, who demonstrates, in *Imagines* 2.18, a deep understanding of the visual potential of Theocritus' *Idylls* 6 and 11, claimed to be a member of the "circle" of the Empress (*Life of Apollonius*, 1.3) and apparently escorted the imperial family in some of its travels⁶⁷. If the mosaic was indeed conceived for the imperial family sometime after the death of Geta, it would reflect a fine understanding of the political meaning of *Idyll* 24. It has indeed been long suggested that Theocritus wrote this poem with a view to assert Ptolemy II's legitimacy⁶⁸: although he had an elder brother, Ptolemy Keraunos, Ptolemy II was chosen by his father to become his co-regent. As in the case of Amphitryo's twins, the superiority and exceptional talent of one of Ptolemy I Sôtêr's sons were thus believed to have been self-evident from his early years on.

Another scene from the Emesan pavement may be connected, albeit in a looser way, with Theocritus' poetry. Heracles on Mount Olympus could evoke *Idyll* 17 and the arrival of Ptolemy I Sôtêr on the same mountain. If Theocritus' poem insists on immortality by repeating the word ἀθανάτοισι at the beginning of lines 2 and 17, the mosaicist represented Immortality in flesh and blood with a personification labelled «Athanasia». The diptych formed by Heracles' childhood and his apotheosis could evoke the diptych formed by *Idylls* 17 and 24 in a lost poetry book. As we know thanks to the Antinoe papyrus, one of the editions of Theocritus that circulated in imperial times contained three books, the second of which ended precisely with these two *Idylls*. For the readers of this edition that brought together the mythological and political pieces written by Theocritus, the connexion between *Idyll* 24 and the *enkomia* of kings would have been obvious.

It is probable that several other works of art were read in light of Theocritus' poems or even directly created in order to illustrate his poetry. For instance, the owners of "bucolic cups" similar to those discovered in Pompeii may have been tempted to quote Theocritus in order to show off at a banquet. It is also possible that certain bookrolls designed for wealthy owners were illustrated, but we have no trace of them.

Although this goes beyond the scope of the present study, we know for sure that Theocritus' poetry inspired artists in modern times: *Idyll* 1 was for instance illustrated by Albrecht Dürer in a miniature on parchment⁶⁹. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Theocritus' *Idylls* played a role in the development of landscape painting and pastoral, but it is often impossible to distinguish between the influence of Virgil and that of Theocritus. Peculiarly interesting is the case of Peter-Paul Rubens, a painter who had an exceptionally rare knowledge of Greek and Latin literature and whose brother, Philip Rubens, was a keen reader of Theocritus. When commenting on the great festival decoration that Rubens conceived for the temporary buildings that lined the route of the Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand for his entry in Antwerp in 1635, Gaspar Gevartius, who was both a personal friend of Rubens and a famous philologist, quotes Theocritus' *Idylls*, along with other ancient authors, as sources for understanding the complex images of power elaborated by the painter⁷⁰.

Considerable attention was also given to Theocritus' epigrams on the portraits of ancient poets, and

⁶⁷ The author of the *Life of Apollonius* and the *Lives of the Sophists* is probably the same as the author of the *Imagines*; his grandson, Philostratus the Younger, described a work of art illustrating the infancy of Heracles (*Im.* 5). On the Elder Philostratus' relationship with the imperial family, see Bowersock (1969) 101-109; Hemelrijk (1999) 122-126; Whitmarsh (2007) 31-34; Levick (2007) 85.

⁶⁸ See for instance, Gow (1952) *ad loc.*; Laubscher (1997); Stephens (2003) 125; on Ptolemy I Sôtêr's plan for his own succession, see Müller (2009) 21-38.

⁶⁹ Washington, NGA, Woodner Collection, 2005 [<https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.75783.html>]. See Bach (1999).

⁷⁰ Gevaerts/van Thulden (1641) 106, 149. See also Saward (1982) 69; Prioux - Cojannot-Le Blanc (forthcoming) XXX, XXX.

a Venetian counterfeiter of the 16th century even copied his epigram on the portrait of Anacreon (*AP* 9.599) on stone in order to sell it to the humanist Sebastiano Erizzo⁷¹. This counterfeiter also reproduced a number of other ecphrastic epigrams to sell them to the same scholar.

Another type of reception is the creation in 1810-1813 by Paul Storr and John Flaxman of four silver gilt two-handled cups whose external designs correspond to the ecphrasis of the goatherd's cup of *Idyll* 1 (PLATE 16)⁷². A few years later, Jean-François Millet, who was well-known for his views of rustic life, had the project to illustrate Theocritus' poems: one of his drawings (possibly around 1863) represents the first scene from the goatherd's cup, the maiden and her two suitors⁷³.

3.2. A portrait of the poet as a young shepherd?

As Gow observes, «it is likely enough that busts with real or imaginary portraits of Theocritus may have decorated the libraries of Roman admirers of Pastoral, but no ancient portrait professing to represent him survives»⁷⁴. Interestingly, the few ancient artifacts that are believed, by some scholars, to represent Theocritus himself are based on a reading of the bucolic *Idylls* as autobiography. Is this autobiographic reading of the bucolic *Idylls* the result of our modern phantasies or was it shared by some ancient readers? Is it reasonable to think that these unlabelled artifacts were meant to represent Theocritus? In two cases, a lavish piece of silverware represents a figure which has been tentatively identified, by several art historians and philologists, as «Theocritus». In both cases, one can see a man, meditating in a natural setting: one of them holds a scroll and faces a Muse (?), whose crooked staff recalls the pastoral world; the other seems to be a simple goatherd who is tending his flock.

Among the silverware discovered in Berthouville-Bernay, a pair of *cantharoi* (PLATE 17) represent, on each of their sides, a poets or scholar: one is old, bearded and standing; the other one is juvenile, beardless and seated. Each poet is represented in an open-air (?) sanctuary and in the company of a female figure (his Muse, mistress or one of his fictional characters?). There has been much speculation on the identification of the various figures, who, apart from book-rolls, are surrounded by specific *paraphernalia* that were probably meant, in the first place, to encourage ancient viewers to make educated guesses about their identity⁷⁵. The figures on face 13a have been variously identified as the Muse Urania in company of Aratus, Callimachus, or Eudoxus; the figures on face 13b have been almost unanimously accepted as Cassandra and Lycophron⁷⁶. The figures on 14a have been variously identified. As for 14b, it has been interpreted as a representation of the Muse Thalia and Theocritus⁷⁷: a beardless man, seated on an elaborate stool, holds a scroll in his left hand. Behind him, one can see a pair of sandals (?) hanging from a stick – a possible reference to the sandals worn by comic actors (?). In front of him, a woman carrying a shepherd's staff leans on a pillar. In the background, one can see a monument with a vase (a krater?) and a box. If the poet depicted on this vase is really Theocritus, the fancy stool would possibly indicate that he did not really belong to the rustic world evoked by the hooked staff of his Muse. If it may seem, at first, preposterous to pair Lycophron (13b) and Theocritus (14b) and to link them through several visual echoes, we should remember that at least a part of the tradition associated Theocritus with riddle-poems: the *Syrinx* recalls playfully the mythological riddle and periphrastic designations so common in Lycophron's *Alexandra*.

⁷¹ Prioux (2002/2003).

⁷² For two of the cups, see Liverpool, Liverpool Museums, World Museum and Windsor Castle, RCIN 51538 (PLATE 19). The designs by Flaxman are kept in London (V&A, 2410; British Museum, 1900,0824.187) and Oxford (Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 65.6.59).

⁷³ Paris, musée d'Orsay (Louvre, département des Arts graphiques, RF 5877 r°).

⁷⁴ Gow (1952) I, xxix. It is possible that *Epigram* [27] Gow (*AP* 9.434) was initially composed for an edition of Theocritus, that might have included a portrait of the author in some copies.

⁷⁵ Lapatin (2015).

⁷⁶ Picard (1950).

⁷⁷ See Schefold (1997) 290-291.

A 6th century CE plate in the State Hermitage Museum⁷⁸, discovered in Perm, has been thought to represent Theocritus: an unlabelled shepherd with bulky muscles, short hair and apparently individualized features seems to be meditating, while sitting on a rock next to two goats and a little dog (PLATE 18). Nothing, except the meditative attitude, would indicate that this goatherd is a poet: it is therefore impossible to know if this identification is correct and if the Byzantine owners of the plate would have shared the point of view of 20th century art historians.

The only labelled «portrait» of Theocritus that has reached us is a miniature found in a Byzantine manuscript, apparently produced by the circle of Demetrius Triclinius, a prolific scholar of Thessaloniki⁷⁹. A rustic draped in a mantle presents a statue of Pan with a nine-hole pipe: the confusion between this pipe and the syrinx and the abnormal representation of Pan as a figure with a goat's muzzle instead of a human head seem to indicate that this miniature is an imaginative creation of the Byzantine period.

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⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 308-309.

⁷⁹ Paris, BNF, *Parisinus Gr.* 2832, (1st half of the 14th century). See f°47^v-48^v [<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10722903n/f57.image>]

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