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Gems, Metapoetics, and Value: Greek and Roman Responses to a Third-Century Discourse on Precious Stones

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SUMMARY: The recently published Milan papyrus opens with a striking sequence of epigrams devoted to stones. Its themes form the literary background for other ancient treatments of gemstones. An epigram from the papyrus itself and a poem by Phoenix of Colophon critique these themes from an ideological perspective. Maecenas, Augustus, and later Roman authors offer responses both moral and metapoetic. The new papyrus thus allows us to see in formerly isolated passages an ongoing engagement with the innovative subject matter of a third-century epigram collection.

THE RECENTLY PUBLISHED MILAN PAPYRUS, written towards the end of the third century B.C.E., transmits a collection of about 112 epigrams, most of them unknown previously, that some have wished to attribute to Posidippus of Pella.[1] One of the more remarkable features of the papyrus is the sequence of poems devoted to stones, which probably stood at the beginning of the collection and perhaps bore the title λιθικά.[2] The subject matter is surprising—at least for modern readers—and it may have been an innovation for the third

[1] Bastianini-Gallazzi (hereafter B-G) is the *editio princeps*. The *editio minor* of Austin and Bastianini offers a lightly revised text of the papyrus along with additional notes, facing translations, and all other poems attributed to Posidippus. I cite the papyrus according to the convenient numbering system of the *editio minor* (hereafter A-B). For more specifics on the dating and authorship see B-G 17, 22–24, and below.

[2] The heading is almost entirely effaced on the papyrus (see B-G *ad* I.1–IV.6). On possible precedents for the section headings of the Milan papyrus, and the relationship of these headings to those found in other epigram collections, see Argentieri 1998: 17–18, B-G 18, Gutzwiller 2004: 84–85. On damage to the beginning of the roll and the stichometric markings that show this section to be complete see Stephens and Obbink; Bing argues that the *lithika* appeared at the head of the collection (2002: 1; cf. B-G 13).

century as well: ecphrastic poems about gems are otherwise barely attested in this century,[3] nor are they particularly common in later epigram collections.[4] Whether the topic is novel or not, however, the *lithika* section challenges readers by virtue of its scope and position. At 126 lines and 20 or 21 epigrams,[5] it dwarfs the later group of *anathematica* (38 lines, 6 epigrams) and is slightly larger than even the *epitumbia* (116 lines, 20 epigrams),[6] so that it seems to claim equality with, if not preeminence over, these two more familiar categories of epigram. If the *lithika* did appear at the head of the entire roll, furthermore, we would be encouraged to read them as a programmatic introduction to the pieces that follow. Recent discussions have of course taken up these interpretive problems, and seem to agree that the *lithika* with their descriptions of glittering jewels might serve as an appropriately "brilliant" lead-in to the remainder of the collection.[7]

The *lithika* present a coherent group of conventions and themes related to the discussion of precious stones, a third-century discourse on gems of which we were earlier unaware; indeed, many of the subjects and themes that now appear on the Milan papyrus seem to have been systematically excluded from Meleager's *Garland*, our main source for the earliest epigrammatists, and as a consequence our understanding of how Hellenistic epigram influenced contemporary or later treatments of similar subjects, in both Greek and Roman literature, has been incomplete.[8] I show here that ancient authors, no less than modern scholars, responded to the conventions and issues revealed by the *lithika*. Indeed, these new poems about gems supply the literary background presupposed by Greek and Roman authors in their own discussions of precious stones.

[3] The only other possibly third-century ecphrasis of a gem is *AP* 9.752 (= Asclepiades 44 Gow/Page 1965 [hereafter *HE*]), but the epigram is ascribed in the *Anthology* either to Asclepiades or to Antipater of Thessalonica, a poet of the Augustan age. Gutzwiller 1995 argues for Asclepiades' authorship, Argentieri 2003: 196–99 for Antipater's.

[4] Beckby's index s.v. "Edelsteine" lists poems about gemstones in the *Anthology*; in this collection that spans over a millennium of Greek poetry, I count about fifteen epigrams that treat gems as a principal subject—five fewer than the group contained in our papyrus.

[5] Only the line endings of 10 A-B are preserved, and the piece should probably be divided into two epigrams (see B-G *ad* II.7–16).

[6] The heading is not preserved on the papyrus, but this section consists entirely of funerary epigrams.

[7] See esp. Bing 2002: 1, Hutchinson 2.

[8] On the tendentious nature of Meleager's selection, and his influence on ancient and modern ideas of what constitutes an epigram, see Cameron 1993: 15, Sider 39–41.

In general, I will not be claiming that other authors allude directly to material from the Milan papyrus. Any such claim immediately raises a number of thorny questions about how this collection was formed, questions that are at present probably insoluble. Not all scholars believe, for instance, that the epigrams on the papyrus are all by Posidippus, or even by a single author, nor is it clear who assembled the collection (the author(s) or an anthologist?).[9] The availability of the collection in the ancient world is another matter of uncertainty. The papyrus was probably written ca. 230–200 B.C.E.; Stephens and Obbink estimate that it had a useful life of about 30 to 50 years before being recycled as part of a mummy's wrappings around 176 B.C.E. Given such temporal constraints and the uncertainties surrounding the collection's creation, it is impossible to establish who might have had access to and read the text in the form in which we encounter it on the papyrus. These concerns obviously make it difficult to claim specific use of the Milan papyrus by other authors, and accordingly my investigation focuses more broadly on the ways in which the *lithika* talk about gems, and how this discourse is utilized in other contexts.

I begin by considering 16 A-B, which distances itself from the earlier poems in its section by questioning the criteria they use to determine the value of gems—a response to the *lithika* sequence from within the collection itself that allows us to observe in detail how the conventions of this sequence may be evoked and subverted. Phoenix of Colophon, a choliambic poet of the 3rd century B.C.E., likewise offers an evaluation of the worth of precious stones, in the course of a moralizing poem about the dangers of wealth and the proper way to value objects. His poem addresses a Posidippus of uncertain identity, and may constitute an early piece of evidence linking the name of Posidippus the epigrammatist with the distinctive subject matter of the *lithika*.

A few centuries later, writers of the Augustan era drew on the conventions of the *lithika* in elaborating their own approach to the symbolic significance of gems. As I will show, lists of gemstones in passages from Maecenas and Augustus draw out the metapoetic implications of such sequences and express a characteristically Roman combination of moral and aesthetic values. This imagery linking jewels with poetic criteria can be traced through later sources, and culminates in the notion of the "jeweled style," an influential metaphor that writers of late antiquity routinely employed to describe highly wrought passages of poetry. The Milan papyrus thus allows us to integrate treatments of jewels that would otherwise be enigmatic, and to see in formerly isolated passages a progressive, highly creative engagement with a third-century discourse on precious stones.

[9] See, e.g., Lloyd-Jones, Thomas 260. Fantuzzi is noncomittal; Sider considers objections but supports Posidippan authorship.

For the sake of clarity, I present at the outset the minimal assumptions required for each section of the following discussion to proceed. In the case of 16 A-B, my analysis relies on demonstrating how this epigram reworks the ideas about value implicit in the preceding poems of the *lithika* section; I assume therefore that the papyrus exhibits an intentional organization. The above-mentioned poem by Phoenix suggests that, in the third century, Posidippus' name was connected with poems about gems; this need not imply, however, that such poems were at the head of a collection, or that they were identical to the ones we now have. As for the Roman writers, my only assumption is that groups of gem poems like the one on the papyrus existed during the Augustan period, though I will offer some evidence suggesting that our *lithika* may in fact have been available.

CRYSTALS

Epigram 16 A-B begins the final quarter of the *lithika.* It asks why gems are precious, and whether our criteria for evaluating them are correct:

τὸν πολιὸν κρύσταλλον Ἄραψ ἐπὶ θῖνα κυλίει
πόντιον αἰεὶ σπῶν ἐξ ὀρέων ὀχετὸς
πλήθεϊ πολλὴν βῶλον· ὀθούνεκα νήπιοι ἄνδρες
τὸν λίθον εἰς χρυσέας οὐκ ἄγομεν βασάνους·
εἰ δ' ἦν ἐκ γενεῆς σπάνιος, τὸ διαυγὲς ἂν αὐτοῦ
τίμιον ἦν ὥσπερ καὶ καλὸς ἠέλιος.

The Arabian stream rolls the clear crystal to the shore of the sea, constantly tearing it from the mountains, a vast quantity of chunks—that's why we foolish men do not take it to the touchstone like gold. If it were scarce from its source, its splendor would be even as precious as the beautiful sun.[10]

As Bernsdorff 13–14 notes, this epigram serves a programmatic function within the *lithika* section. The preceding pieces all treat *precious* stones, but the epigram on rock-crystal inaugurates a sequence of poems on objects that are noteworthy for other reasons: a stone that can attract and repel iron (17), a place for reclining(?) made of stone (18),[11] and a huge boulder hurled from the sea (19). This organization into a "precious" followed by a "non-precious" section appears also in Theophrastus' *de Lapidibus* (written ca. 315–305 B.C.E.[12]), where the author turns from a list of gems (23–38) to a consideration

[10] My translations of the papyrus are adapted from those in Austin and Bastianini's *editio minor*; I justify important departures from their renderings.

[11] For this interpretation see Luppe.

[12] Eichholz 1965: 8–12.

of the properties of larger and non-precious stones (41–47) such as whetstones and touchstones. We will consider further connections to Theophrastus' technical treatise below.

In a manner typical for transitional pieces on the Milan papyrus, epigram 16 straddles the two sections it links.[13] Earlier poems had taken up the question of whether a given stone merits enrollment among the gems, but had always answered in the affirmative. Indeed, epigram 12 A-B seems to resort to special pleading in order to justify the inclusion of mother-of-pearl (12.1–2):

ἔστι θα]λάσσιος, ἔστι, καὶ ὅσ[τρακον, ἀ]λλ' ὑπὸ τέχνης
χρυσίτ]αις σφιγχθεὶς κρίν[εται ἡμίλι]θος.

[It comes] from the sea, it does indeed, and it is a shell, but artistically mounted with [gold] pieces it is considered a half-stone.

The text here is uncertain, but the new adjective ἡμίλιθος ("half-stone," perhaps "semi-precious"?) is securely attested at 5.2 (of lapis lazuli).[14] It implies a preoccupation with whether or not a stone should be allowed into the exclusive club of the λίθοι: there are, as it were, different degrees of membership. With the κρύσταλλος we encounter, uniquely, a failed application; this gemstone manqué seems a suitable transition to the remaining stones, which have no claims for admission into the ranks of the jewels.

The poem about the κρύσταλλος uses its diction and structure to play with the expectations set up by the preceding pieces. In essence, this epigram offers a rereading of the heretofore unquestioned connection between the beauty of precious stones and their worth, drawing out the ideas about value implicit in the *lithika* and subjecting them to criticism.

The poem's first couplet, in which an Arabian stream washes the rock-crystal to the sea,[15] is an evocation of the so-called "river topos,"[16] an opening gambit in several of the *lithika*. The first two words of the first epigram on the papyrus inaugurate this topos through a reference to the Indian river Hydaspes (1.1 A-B Ἰνδὸς Ὑδάσπης). 15 A-B, the epigram directly before the one on the crystal, opens with an emphatic negation of the topos (1–2):

[13] For transitional epigrams on the papyrus see, e.g., Gutzwiller 2004 *passim*, Petrain 381.

[14] For a different supplement to the beginning of 12.1 that does not alter the basic sense of the passage see Angiò 332, di Benedetto 1–2.

[15] Pliny the Elder (citing Xenocrates) likewise notes that crystal is often carried down by torrents (*Nat.* 37.25 *torrentibus saepe deportari*).

[16] See B-G *ad* II.9 and Hunter 2004: 97.

οὐ ποταμὸς κελάδων ἐπὶ χείλεσιν, ἀλλὰ δράκοντος
εἶχέ ποτ᾽ εὐπώγων τόνδε λίθον κεφαλή ...

It was *not* a river resounding on its banks, but the head of a bearded snake that once held this gem ...

The force of this opening depends on the convention established by earlier pieces. More relevant for our epigram, perhaps, is the use made of the topos in 7 A-B (1–4):

ἐξ Ἀράβων τὰ ξάνθ᾽ ὀ̣[ρέων κατέρ]υτα κυλίων,
εἰς ἅλα χειμάρρους ὦκ᾽ [ἐφόρει ποτα]μὸς
τὸν μέλιτι χροιὴν λίθ[ον εἴκελον, ὃ]ν̣ Κρονίο[υ] χεὶρ
ἔγλυψε·

Rolling yellow [rubble] from the Arabian [mountains], the winter-flowing [river] quickly [carried] to the sea this honey-colored gem engraved by the hand of Cronius ...

The start of 16 A-B is closely similar, which causes the reader to suspect that the κρύσταλλος will turn out to be as precious as the gem engraved by Cronius—or indeed as any of the other stones that the reader has encountered so far. It is particularly striking that both 7 A-B and 16 A-B refer to Arabia: as Theophrastus notes (*Lap.* 33–34), stones from distant locales tend naturally to be more valuable than those obtained closer to home, and the mention of an exotic provenance at 16.1 contributes to the reader's expectations regarding the rock-crystal's worth.

The next couplet offers further information about the κρύσταλλος: πλήθεϊ πολλὴν βῶλον, which I translate as "a vast quantity of chunks." By themselves, both πλῆθος and πολύς can refer to either quantity or size, though quantity is the more common and seems mandated when the two are placed together as here.[17] Translators of 16 A-B seem nevertheless to hesitate between the two senses, perhaps because the phrase πολλὴ βῶλος and the πολιὸς κρύσταλλος to which it refers are singular in form: Austin and Bastianini offer the somewhat equivocal renderings "a lump in vast quantities" and "in massa enorme," while Kosmetatou takes the words solely as an indication of size, "a massive piece." Yet the context demands a reference to quantity: the river rolls the crystal along πλήθεϊ πολλὴν βῶλον, and it is *for this reason* (ὀθούνεκα), the couplet continues, that we do not test it like gold; if it were rare (16.5 σπάνιος), it would be valuable. The conjunction ὀθούνεκα produces adequate sense only if the preceding words refer to the fact that the crystal is not rare, i.e., to its

[17] Cf., e.g., Hdt. 2.96, τὰ πλοῖα ταῦτα πλήθεϊ πολλά (also 3.11, 3.45, al.).

quantity. A mention of the massive size of a particular piece of crystal, by contrast, would leave ὀθούνεκα without point.[18]

The confusion between singular and plural that we have just considered is a symptom, I would argue, of the way in which our epigram's opening generates expectations that will be dispelled by the remainder of the piece. The poem begins with a phrase in the singular, τὸν πολιὸν κρύσταλλον. Among the *lithika* poems, singular articles that modify stones tend to have a deictic function, and to refer to *this* stone currently under discussion.[19] Such references generate a specificity vital to the thematics of the *lithika:* through their particular, remarkable qualities, the gems serve to commemorate the identities of specific individuals, evoking past owners, the amorous pairs who exchanged them as gifts, or the famous artisans who worked on them and the distinctive designs they engraved.[20] Similarly, in the first couplet of 16 A-B, the singular κρύσταλλος and the article, along with the river-topos, suggest that "the/this clear crystal" likewise refers to an individuated gemstone that is able to function as a bearer of identity. We can now recognize the significance of the striking pleonasm πλήθεϊ πολλήν: the article may be generalizing rather than particular, and this epigram, unlike the preceding ones, will treat both an entire class of stones and the mismatches between beauty and value that arise when a resplendent object is not individually distinctive.

The remainder of the second couplet introduces a generalization on the human level to complement the one just enacted in the case of the crystal itself: "that's why we foolish men do not take it (νήπιοι ἄνδρες /... οὐκ ἄγομεν) to the touchstone like gold."[21] ἄγομεν is the only first-person plural verb in the *lithika*, and it addresses a collective human subject that contrasts with the

[18] Such specimens were highly prized in the ancient world (cf. Plin. *Nat.* 37.27–28). See further below.

[19] The article with deictic force: 4.1(?), 6.4, 7.3, 8.1, 3; the article accompanied by a demonstrative: 5.1, 6.3, 15.3. Exceptions include 7.1 (quoted above), where the generalizing force of τὰ ξάνθ' ... [κατέρ]υτα ("the yellow [rubble]") is suggested by the plural number.

[20] All of the epigrams before 16 A-B preserve some reference either to human ownership or to the work of a human craftsman (though 1 A-B is too poorly preserved for us to be sure). 16 A-B and the remaining epigrams of the "non-precious" section (17–20), by contrast, contain no mention of specific human individuals (Πτολεμαίου at 20.5 is a rather special exception).

[21] The phrase εἰς χρυσέας ... βασάνους (16.4) is difficult, but seems adequately explained by B-G *ad* III.11: "Posidippo, dicendo che 'non portiamo questa pietra alle auree prove' vuol dire forse che 'non la sottoponiamo alle prove cui sottoponiamo l'oro', cioè 'non la consideriamo come l'oro.'"

specific personages—kings, courtiers, and characters from mythology—that peopled the earlier epigrams. This collective address brings with it a change in the poet's stance. The adjective νήπιοι—the first hint of criticism in this section—suggests that the poet has discarded his role as chronicler of carefully wrought *objets d'art* and elite gift exchange to focus a somewhat disapproving glance on the behavior of humanity, behavior perhaps exemplified by the descriptions and transactions that occupy the first part of the *lithika* section.

The final couplet ties the themes of the epigram together by setting out explicitly the criteria that people use to evaluate gems and exposing the arbitrariness of the procedure (16.5–6). Though the crystal is resplendent (τὸ διαυγές), it lacks the crucial quality of rarity (σπάνιος). In his discussion of how a stone's provenance can affect its value, Theophrastus employs related criteria using similar vocabulary (*Lap.* 33):

> καὶ αὗται μὲν ἅμα τῷ καλῷ καὶ τὸ σπάνιον ἔχουσιν. αἱ δὲ δὴ ἐκ τῆς Ἑλλάδος εὐτελέστεραι.
>
> These stones possess rarity as well as beauty, but those of Greece are of course less valuable.[22]

Both authors focus on beauty and rarity. A principal aspect of a stone's beauty is its ability to refract light. Our epigram connects crystal's splendor (τὸ διαυγές) to the beautiful sun (καλὸς ἠέλιος); in *de Lapidibus*, the adjective διαφανής—an approximate synonym to our epigram's διαυγές[23]—is the standard term for the qualities of transparency and luster.[24] At 30, Theophrastus pairs the rock-crystal (ἡ κρύσταλλος) with the amethyst and says that both are διαφανῆ; our poet thus adopts a procedure very similar to that of Theophrastus when evaluating the crystal in terms of its resplendency.

Theophrastus' second criterion is rarity, τὸ σπάνιον, and the adjective σπάνιος provides an even closer match between his wording and that of our epigram. The adjective, rare in poetry, apparently belongs to a fairly low stylistic register.[25] In our epigram, it may accordingly represent an intrusion of

[22] My translations of Theophrastus are adapted from Eichholz 1965.

[23] Cf. on *HE* 3800; on the popularity of διαυγής in Hellenistic poetry see Bulloch 130.

[24] Theophrastus links brilliancy and transparency in a list of the qualities of stones and earths (2): τὸ λεῖον καὶ τὸ πυκνὸν καὶ τὸ στιλπνὸν καὶ διαφανές, "smoothness, solidity, luster, transparency." Since the latter two terms are not distinguished from each other by separate articles and the adjective στιλπνός does not occur elsewhere in the treatise, we may assume that διαφανής can cover luster and transparency by itself. For διαφανής applied to gemstones see *Lap*. 28, 30 (2x), 31 (2x), 36.

[25] Cf. *LSJ* s.v. The adjective σπάνιος does not occur in the extant work of any of the major Hellenistic poets, though it is common in the prose of, e.g., Theophrastus and

technical, non-poetic vocabulary that further highlights the exclusion of crystal from the elevated level of the preceding pieces.[26]

The response to the *lithika* offered by 16 A-B depends on evoking the conventions of the preceding epigrams, but then confronting them with evaluative criteria that we can recognize from technical literature such as Theophrastus' *de Lapidibus*. There is another aspect of this response, however, that is more closely related to the rock-crystal itself. Several of the *lithika* contain allusions to a stone's specific properties: in 5 A-B, for instance, we encounter a σάπειρος that "contains gold" (5.2 χρυσίτην); Theophrastus notes that this type of stone does indeed show golden flecks (*Lap.* 23 χρυσόπαστος).[27] 14 A-B describes the image of Pegasus in flight, carved on an ἴασπις. Pliny mentions a type of ἴασπις called ἀερίζουσα that was known for its sky-blue color (*Nat.* 37.115), and in the poem the gem is called "cloudy" (14.1 ἠερόεσσαν) and an "ethereal stone" (14.6 αἰθερίῳ ... λίθῳ); both adjectives probably evoke the special characteristics of the ἀερίζουσα, and thereby emphasize how appropriate this type of stone is to the image of Pegasus flying through the sky. Finally, the epigram on the snake-stone (15 A-B = 20 *HE* δρακοντίτης) mentions the keen eyes of the stonecutter who engraved it, a reference to the ancient belief that the snake-stone was able to impart almost superhuman vision.[28] Taken together, the first fifteen poems of the section construct a voice that uses its expertise on gems to praise the objects described. As we shall see, 16 A-B retains this pose of expertise by drawing on technical information about the composition of the κρύσταλλος; in keeping with the thematics of the poem, however, this expertise serves to destabilize the value of rock-crystal rather than buttress it.

Ancient testimony about the value of κρύσταλλος will provide a background against which we can evaluate our epigram's statements. As was noted above, Theophrastus mentions the crystal and amethyst together (30) in the course of his treatment of stones that "possess rarity as well as beauty" (33); there is no indication that κρύσταλλος is any less valuable than the other stones in this section. Pliny the Elder is more explicit about crystal's value and ranks it among the costliest of substances (*Nat.* 37.204):

Polybius. It appears just once in the *Anthology*: an apple that was preserved during the winter is described as a σπάνιον γέρας (*AP* 6.252.5 = Antiphilus 2 Gow/Page 1968 [hereafter *GP*]).

[26] βῶλος from line 3 might also echo technical jargon: Theophrastus describes one stone as βωλώδης (*Lap.* 42), while Pliny records a stone actually called *bôlos* that is similar to a clod of earth (*Nat.* 37.150). The word could be used quite generally, however, for any sort of lump: *LSJ* s.v. 3.

[27] Smith 107–8.

[28] See Gutzwiller 1995: 385–88.

> maximum est pretium in mari nascentium margaritis; extra tellurem crystallis, intra adamanti, smaragdis, gemmis, myrrinis.
>
> The most costly product of the sea is the pearl; of the earth's surface, rock-crystal; of the earth's interior, diamonds, emeralds, engraved gemstones, and vessels of fluorspar.[29]

Pliny offers several anecdotes criticizing the excessive value that people attribute to crystal, e.g., one *materfamilias* purchased a single crystal dipper for 150,000 sesterces (37.29).[30] To turn to a poetic source, an epigram by Leonides of Alexandria (*AP* 6.329 = Leonides 8 Page [henceforth *FGE*]) places κρύσταλλος at the head of a list of expensive birthday presents for Agrippina that he expressly refers to as πλούτου δῶρα, "gifts of wealth."[31] The state of the evidence does not generally allow us to be specific about the relative worth of different stones at different time periods,[32] of course, but taken together Theophrastus, Leonides, and Pliny suggest that rock-crystal was highly prized, a striking contrast to the claims of our epigram.

Why does our poet alone among prose and poetic sources claim that the κρύσταλλος is not prized? The key to this problem may lie in the epithet applied to the crystal at the very start of the poem, πολιός. The collocation πολιὸς κρύσταλλος is not attested elsewhere. Austin highlights the adjective's reference to color with his translation "the grey rock-crystal," similarly Kosmetatou with "this grizzled crystal"[33]; Bastianini offers instead "il limpido cristallo di rocca."[34] Though both "grey" and "clear" could be present in our epigram, Bastianini's rendering brings out slightly better the factor most important for this context, namely the adjective's associations with water. In Homeric epic πολιός is commonly an epithet of the sea (modifying either

[29] My translation is adapted from Eichholz 1962.

[30] Pliny also gives us a sense of the value of rock-crystal vis-à-vis other stones. In discussions of colored gems, the colorless rock-crystal naturally acts as a negative standard because stronger hues are more desirable, e.g., the least valuable amethysts are said to approach the *crystallus* in their coloring (37.123; cf. 37.77, 83, 116); crystals were dyed to mimic other gems (37.197 *ex crystallo smaragdum tinguant aliasque tralucentes*). For colorless stones, however, a comparison to rock-crystal implies a favorable judgment (e.g., *adamas*, 37.56; cf. 37.132).

[31] The other two gifts in the list are silver and topaz. In the epigram's second and final couplet, Leonides rejects such gifts in favor of his own poetry.

[32] See Plantzos 105–8.

[33] Cf. *LSJ Suppl.* s.v. III. "πολιά, ἡ (*sc.* λίθος) a precious stone, Plin. *HN* 37.191."

[34] Cf. *LSJ* s.v. II "bright, clear, serene" and West's comments ad *Op.* 477. Apollonius has πολιοῖο δι' ἠέρος at 3.275; a scholiast glosses the adjective as διαφανοῦς.

ἅλς or θάλασσα),[35] and this link to water is activated by properties of the rock-crystal itself: not only does κρύσταλλος mean "ice" as well as "rock-crystal," but according to many ancient sources rock-crystal really is a kind of ice, produced by intense freezing.[36] Like the epithet πολιός, the opening of our epigram evokes the stone's watery origins, as it recounts how crystal is washed down the river to the sea.

The stress on crystal's connection to liquid helps to explain the devaluation that the stone undergoes later in the piece. Rock-crystal may have been prized by the ancients, but water was proverbially cheap (Pl. *Euthd.* 304b3–4):

> τὸ γὰρ σπάνιον, ὦ Εὐθύδημε, τίμιον, τὸ δὲ ὕδωρ εὐωνότατον, ἄριστον ὄν, ὡς ἔφη Πίνδαρος.
>
> For rarity is prized, Euthydemus, whereas water is the cheapest substance even though, as Pindar said, it is best.

The vocabulary is strikingly similar to that of our epigram (σπάνιον, τίμιον), as is the overall point: despite its excellence, water does not fetch a high price because it is readily available. It was in fact a tenet of popular morality among the Greeks that water should be proffered to anyone who asked for it,[37] and accordingly the question of its worth is a problematic one. Though necessary for life, water is a good common to all, and it would not fulfill the criteria for worth established in the first 15 poems of the *lithika* section: without individual distinctiveness or the capacity to be owned by specific people, water cannot function as a token of identity and value. Rock-crystal's dual identity as beautiful stone and common liquid thus makes it a highly appropriate transition from the precious to the non-precious stones in the *lithika*.

Our epigram's intensive engagement with the issue of value imparts an additional layer of meaning to the apparently formulaic phrase with which the poem closes: if crystal were rare, its splendor would be as precious "as the beautiful sun" (ὥσπερ καὶ καλὸς ἠέλιος). The phrase "beautiful sun" occurs

[35] It modifies ἅλς or θάλασσα 13 times in the *Iliad* (out of 19 occurrences total), 15 in the *Odyssey* (20 occurrences total).

[36] E.g., Plin. *Nat.* 37.23: *glaciemque [crystallum] esse certum est, unde nomen Graeci dedere*. On this belief, commonly held in the ancient world, see Healy 59 and the references at Halleux-Schamp 91 n. 1; Ball 224–26 offers a colorful account of versions of the belief in many different cultures.

[37] See X. *Oec.* 2.15; in Athens, curses were traditionally invoked against, among others, those who did not share water and fire (τοῖς μὴ κοινωνοῦσι κατὰ τὸν βίον ὕδατος ἢ πυρός, *Append. prov.* 1.61 [*Corpus paroemiographorum* 1.388]). For similar testimony from Latin sources see *TLL* s.v. "aqua" 2.348.4–13 (*res omnibus hominibus communis*), 17–26 (*res vilis*).

three times on the Milan papyrus, always in the same *sedes* at the end of an epigram (13.4, 16.6, 52.6).[38] At 13.4, mention of the sun apparently emphasizes the sparkle of an engraved stone, and in our epigram it likewise seems natural at first to understand "the beautiful sun" as a generic standard of beauty. Yet how valuable *is* the sun? Its benefits, like those of water, are shared by all. A character from Plautus' *Asinaria* includes both sun and water in a list of items one need not purchase (*As.* 198):

> diem aquam solem lunam noctem, haec argento non emo.
>
> Day, water, sun, moon, night—these are things I don't pay money for.

Sun and water are desirable, but not valuable according to the constraints imposed by the *lithika*, in which value depends, as we have seen, on rarity and the possibility of ownership. By evoking the "beautiful sun" in its last line, 16 A-B thus reworks once again a formula that occured earlier in the section: if we νήπιοι ἄνδρες were to apply our criteria consistently, the sun would succumb to the same devaluation as did the rock-crystal, an unexpected reversal that highlights the folly of using rarity as a primary measure of worth.

By drawing on the discourse of the *lithika*, and utilizing a specialized knowledge of stones to bring out the ambiguous nature of the κρύσταλλος itself, the poet of 16 A-B questions the ideas about value implicit in the preceding descriptions of precious gems. Behind the connoisseur's apparent interest in the beauty and artistic quality of these jewels lurks a decidedly less refined preoccupation with mere quantity (τὸ σπάνιον), a preoccupation that our poet dramatizes through the rejection of the resplendent rock-crystal.

GEMS AND THE VALUE OF WEALTH

Phoenix of Colophon offers another perspective on the worth of gems, in a 23-line choliambic poem that is preserved on papyrus and seems to be complete. Phoenix was an older contemporary of Posidippus of Pella, the epigrammatist, and the poem in question addresses Ποσείδιππε at the beginning and near the end (6.1, 18 Powell [henceforth *CA*]). The relevant portions of Phoenix's poem are as follows (*CA* 6.1–12, 18–23; I omit some poorly preserved lines from the middle):

> πολλοῖς γε θνητῶν τἀγ[ά]θ', ὦ Ποσείδιππε,
> οὐ̣ [σύ]μφορ' ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ δεῖ τοιαῦτ' αὐτοὺς
> [.]ο̣ν̣ . ειν ὀκο[ῖ]α καὶ φρονε[ῖ]ν ἐπίστανται.
> νῦν δ' οἱ μὲν ἡμῶν[39] κρή̣[γυ]οι καθεστῶτες

[38] Cf. Gutzwiller 2004: 86 n. 10.

[39] These first five words are Crusius' supplement; the papyrus has ..ν̣δ̣ο̣...ρ[..]μων.

πολλὴν ἀφειδέως νη[.]...ν ἐρεύγοντα[ι]· 5
[οἱ] δ᾽ οὔτε σῦκα, φασίν, οὔτ᾽ ἐρίν᾽ εὖντες
πλουτοῦσι· τῷ πλούτῳ δὲ πρὸς τί δεῖ χρῆ[σθ]αι,
τοῦτ᾽ αὐτὸ πάντων πρῶτον οὐκ ἐπίστανται·
ἀλλ᾽ οἰκ[ία]ς μὲν ἐγ λίθου σμαραγδίτου,
εἴ πω[ς] ἀνυστόν ἐστι τοῦτ᾽ αὐτοῖς πρήσσειν, 10
[. .]τ[. .] ἐχούσας καὶ στοὰς τετραστύλους
[πολλῶ]ν ταλάντων ἀξίας κατακτῶνται·
...
[τοῖς οὖν] τοιούτοις ἀνδράσιν, Ποσείδιππε, 18
[οὐ σ]υμβέβηκεν οἰκίας μὲν κεκτῆσθαι
[κ]αλὰς καταξίας τε χρημάτων πολλῶν, 20
[α]ὐτοὺς δ᾽ ὑπάρχειν ἀξίους τ[ρι]ῶν χα[λκῶ]ν;
[κ]αὶ μάλα δικαίως, ἤν τις ἐνθυμῆτ᾽ [ὀρ]θῶς
[.....]ν γὰρ καὶ λίθων φροντίζουσιν.

For many mortals, Posidippus, the goods of life do no good. Those men ought instead [to have only?] such things as they also know how to be sensible about. But now those of us who are good belch out our great [hunger?][40] unstintingly, while those who, as the saying goes, aren't worth a dime, *they* are wealthy. Yet the purpose for which one should use wealth, this, the most important thing of all, they don't know. Instead, houses made of emerald stone (if somehow they manage to accomplish such a thing), that have…and porches with four columns, worth many talents—*these* they acquire … .
Well then, it's the fate of such men (don't you agree, Posidippus?) to own houses that are beautiful and worth a lot of money—but to be worth three pennies themselves! And that's perfectly just, if you think it over properly…for they worry over stones.

As Gow and Page note (*HE* 2.483), the Posidippus of this poem "has been variously taken for the epigrammatist and for another Macedonian, the comic dramatist of Cassandreia, and may of course be neither." If a decision between the two candidates must be made, they slightly prefer the epigrammatist because his life embraced several parts of the Greek world, including perhaps Ionia; later researches into the chronology of Phoenix have little to add to this picture and tend to concur with their assessment.[41] In light of the Milan papyrus, however, we may question Gow and Page's view that the whole issue of identity is "of little moment" because the poem "throws no light on the

[40] I translate Crusius' conjecture νηστείην rather than Gerhard's proposal νηπιέην (which Powell prints). As Gerhard himself notes (108), the supplement ἡμῶν in line 4 seems to demand a word like "hunger" to serve as object of the verb in line 5, so that there will be an antithesis betwen the κρήγυοι and the foolish rich people of lines 6ff.

[41] On the chronology see Cameron 1995: 173, Carluccio.

person to whom it is addressed." In fact, Phoenix's poem, amidst much conventional material,[42] reveals a distinctive emphasis on stones: rich people try to build their houses of emerald, an arresting hyperbole further enhanced by the rare adjectival form σμαραγδίτου (attested elsewhere only in the Septuagint and Pliny the Elder)[43]; the final line recapitulates the perverse interests of the wealthy with another reference to stones (λίθων).

The ending seems flat,[44] but could be rehabilitated if the striking focus on stones had some special relevance for the addressee. Since archaic iambic poetry traditionally directs its attacks at a single individual,[45] Phoenix's use of the choliambic meter in a context of moral critique may in fact require us to hunt for a specific connection between his criticisms and Posidippus. Now, of the *lithika* from the Milan papyrus, one was known earlier from a quotation by Tzetzes, who explicitly attributed it to Posidippus (15 A-B = 20 *HE*, quoted at *Chil.* 7.653–60). Provided Tzetzes is correct,[46] this would be the only epigram about a gem unambiguously assigned to a third-century B.C.E. author,[47] a hitherto unnoted point of contact between Posidippus the epigrammatist and the subject matter of Phoenix's poem. Add to this that the epigram in question is now accompanied in the new papyrus by many pieces with similar subjects (at least some of which may likewise be by Posidippus), and the scale seems to tilt further in favor of seeing our epigrammatist as the likely target for Phoenix's witty censure of those who worry about stones too much. The precious stones in Phoenix's verses are used as building material rather than as elements of jewelry, of course, but this difference in emphasis from the *lithika* may simply reflect the poet's different subject: houses built from emerald produce a more striking image of wealth's misuse than would, say, a description of a costly necklace.

Phoenix's poem—particularly its ending—gains in point if we can connect it to a Posidippus who produced poems like the *lithika*.[48] In that case, Phoenix teases Posidippus for an excessive interest in jewels, playfully treating the subject matter of the epigrams as biographical data about the poet

[42] Exhaustively inventoried by Gerhard 103–40.

[43] See Gerhard 118 for details.

[44] Cf. Gerhard 140: "Gerne möchte man dem Ende des Iambos eine schärfere Pointe wünschen."

[45] Cf. Acosta-Hughes 2002: 42, 91 (with reference to Callimachus).

[46] Tzetzes is not always trustworthy, but there seems to be no reason to doubt his attribution in this case (cf. Fernández-Galiano 22).

[47] But see n. 3.

[48] We cannot of course exclude the possiblity that Phoenix addresses a different, otherwise unattested Posidippus who discussed gemstones in poetry or prose (the name is common); Posidippus of Pella seems nonetheless to be the best identification of Phoenix's addressee on the basis of presently available evidence.

himself. The conversational, almost lighthearted tone of Phoenix's poem is highly appropriate if motivated in part by such a literary joke.[49]

Chronological considerations may hinder the possibility that Phoenix knew specifically the collection preserved on the Milan papyrus. Phoenix is thought to have been active in the earlier part of the third century,[50] but several epigrams from the papyrus refer to chariot victories that may be dated to the 250s or early 240s, depending on the precise identity of the Berenice who is named as victor.[51] These do not seem insurmountable difficulties, however, for Posidippus might have assembled different collections of his epigrams over the course of his life,[52] and some poems could have circulated individually. It is not difficult to suppose that Phoenix was acquainted with the epigrammatist's writing about gems in some form.[53]

Up to this point, we have examined perspectives on the *lithika* that focus on the issue of value. Phoenix seems to infer from the subject matter of Posidippus' poetry an excessive interest in gemstones, to which his poem can be read as a witty rejoinder; 16 A-B, as we saw, subverts the ideology of the *lithika* by playing with our expectations, and encouraging us to view with scepticism the evaluative criteria that operated in the earlier epigrams. As we turn now from the third century to the writers of the Augustan era, however, we will see how treatments of gemstones begin to intertwine questions of worth with a consideration of poetic qualities.[54]

[49] On the tone see Gerhard 103.

[50] Our only explicit chronological datum for Phoenix is that he wrote about the capture of Colophon by Lysimachus, an event that can be dated to ca. 294–89 or 287–81 B.C.E. (see Carluccio 125, with bibliography).

[51] The problem is too intricate to treat here in detail. The editors identify the victor with Berenice II and date the victories between 249 and 247 (B-G 17, cf. Bingen); others connect her with Berenice "the Syrian," daughter of Ptolemy II, and propose the earlier dating (Criscuolo, Thompson).

[52] Argentieri 1998 offers evidence for multiple collections by a single author (4–10), though his conclusions about Posidippus may go too far.

[53] Some scholars have suggested that Phoenix borrows words and phrases from Callimachus' *Iambi* (Pfeiffer *ad* fr.191.1, Cameron 1995: 173), though others reject this notion on chronological grounds (Kerkhecker 29–30, with bibliography; Acosta-Hughes 2002: 149–50 is non-committal). If Phoenix did draw on Callimachus, this would strengthen the possibility that he might similarly respond to Posidippus, Callimachus' approximate contemporary, in *CA* 6.

[54] I leave open the possibility that Greek authors too developed metapoetic interpretations of poems like the *lithika*. 16 A-B, for instance, could lend itself to such an interpretation: the image of the swift stream bearing along large quantities of a stone that is commonplace, but nonetheless worthy of admiration, might be read as a riposte to

JEWELED STYLES

In a recent article, Hutchinson has examined passages of Latin poetry that seem to be connected with the epigrams of the Milan papyrus, devoting special attention to the *lithika*. He attractively proposes a metaphorical interpretation for this section as a whole: the sequence of poems suggests "a metapoetic link between the small-scale artistry and craft of the gems and that of Posidippus' epigrams" (2). In support of his thesis, he cites examples from Greek and Latin authors of the use of physical artefacts as metaphors for poetry, but his conclusion is nonetheless tentative: "[a]t all events, it seems not unnatural that a Latin poet should read Posidippus in this way" (3). In the present section, I analyze two fragments from Maecenas and Augustus—the beginning of a poem and the closing of a letter, respectively—that are not discussed by Hutchinson, but that focus on gemstones and treat themes bearing a strong resemblance to those of the *lithika*. These passages demonstrate that Augustan writers did indeed imbue sequences of gemstones with metapoetic significance, and suggest furthermore the range of contexts in which features of this discourse on stones could be evoked, not just in poetry but even in the apparently more casual medium of a personal letter.

I have adapted the heading for this section, "Jeweled Styles," from Michael Roberts's similarly titled book *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity*. Roberts employs the phrase "jeweled style" to denote the dense, richly textured effects cultivated by late antique poets, who arrange short, often antithetical clauses in groups with intricately varied word order. Ancient authors themselves used the imagery of "jewels" and "jeweled" to describe stylistically brilliant passages of poetry, and Roberts follows this imagery's beginning and development through Latin sources, noting that it is rare in the first century C.E. but becomes common by the fourth and fifth (51–54). The evidence now offered by the *lithika* sheds further light on the history of this influential metaphor. The earliest passages linking jewels with poetry show strong connections both to each other and to the Milan papyrus; it may accordingly be possible to view the metaphor, at least in part, as a Roman reworking of a Hellenistic discourse on gemstones.

Let us begin with a fragment from the opening of a hendecasyllabic poem by Maecenas, addressed to one Flaccus who should be identified with the poet Horace (fr. 2 Courtney, cited by Isidore *Et.* 19.32.6[55]):

Callimachus' programmatic rejection of the great Euphrates and its detritus in favor of the pure, meager trickle frequented by Demeter's bees (*Hymn* 2.108–12).

[55] The manuscripts of Isidore introduce the verses with the word *Flaccus*, but the emendation to <*Maecenas ad*> *Flaccum* is universally accepted (for discussions of the

> lucente<s>, mea vita, nec smaragdos
> beryllos neque, Flacce mi, nitentes
> nec percandida margarita quaero
> nec quos Thynica lima perpolivit
> anellos nec iaspios lapillos.
>
> Neither shining emeralds, my life, nor, my Flaccus, gleaming beryls, nor resplendent pearls do I seek, nor the little rings polished by Thynian file, nor jaspery stonelets.

Here Maecenas attempts to convey the alluring sparkle of gemstones through a series of arresting literary effects. The number of graecisms is immediately striking (*smaragdos*, *beryllos*, *Thynica*, etc.). Each of the first three lines contains a gem modified by an epithet describing its brilliance, and the semantic similarities among these three word groups throw into relief Maecenas' careful variation of the word order. In the final two lines, the recherché geographical periphrasis of the relative clause finds its counterpart in the peculiar and otherwise unattested adjective *iaspios*.

As commentators have noted, this fragment's focus on jewels is in accord with the amply attested luxuriousness of Maecenas' own lifestyle, and indeed a special interest in gems is well documented for the Augustan period as a whole.[56] The *lithika* poems flesh out the literary background more fully, however, and reveal that Maecenas is most interested in precisely those aspects of gemstones that the papyrus highlights. The fragment emphasizes the resplendency of its stones, a commonplace in Latin literature,[57] but surprisingly enough the Greek epigrams that we possessed before the discovery of the papyrus seldom mention a stone's sparkle.[58] In the new epigrams, by contrast, descriptions of the gems' luminosity are so frequent as to become a kind of leitmotiv,[59] and these help to account for Maecenas' fixation on this particular trait. Similar observations apply to the reference to the "Thynian" gem in the fourth line of the fragment. The *lithika* exhibit a pronounced interest in the provenances of the stones they describe, and their geographical references constitute a veritable gazetteer of the Hellenistic world, ranging from the Indian river Hydaspes in the east (1.1 A-B) to the island of Euboea (19.10 A-B)[60];

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authorship see Lunderstedt 56–58; Avallone 314–15). Treatments of the fragment include Lunderstedt 54–59; Kappelmacher 227–28; Avallone 309–16; Makowski 33; Lieberg 10–11; Mattiacci 77–79.

[56] See Griffin 4–14 (12–13 for gems).

[57] Cf. *TLL* s.v. lumen 7.2.1817.5–18.

[58] See Beckby's index s.v. Edelsteine for the relevant poems.

[59] See Bing 2002: 1 for the relevant passages.

other Greek epigrams about jewels, by contrast, are largely unconcerned with the origins of their stones.[61] By laying stress on the exotic origin of a gem, Maecenas is following a poetic precedent now attested in the *lithika*.[62]

Several earlier commentators, unaware of the discourse on gems now exemplified by the *lithika*, connect our fragment with various poems by Horace that begin, like Maecenas' piece, with a priamel[63]; as early as 1928, however, Kappelmacher presciently rejected this approach, and insisted that behind the piece "liegt eher hellenistische Poesie" (228). He was unable of course to be more specific, but with the discovery of the Milan papyrus we may say that a possible Hellenistic precedent for Maecenas' effort has at last come to light.[64]

We have yet to broach the possibility of a metapoetic interpretation for Maecenas' gemstones, but this will be easiest to see in connection with a closely related fragment. Augustus closes a letter to Maecenas with a lengthy string of vocatives that includes many gem names. The text is preserved in Macrobius, whose introduction to the fragment we will consider in a moment (*Sat.* 2.4.12 = *Ep.* 32 Malcovati[65]):

> Vale meli gentium, †meculle†, ebur ex Etruria, lasar Arretinum, adamas supernas, Tiberinum margaritum, Cilneorum zmaragde, iaspi figulorum, berulle Porsenae, carbunculum habeas, ἵνα συντέμω πάντα, μάλαγμα moecharum.
>
> Farewell sweetheart of the world, sweetie(?),[66] ivory from Etruria, silphium of Arezzo, diamond from up north, Tiberine pearl, the Cilnians' emerald, jasper

[60] See Bing 2002: 3–4 for geography in the *lithika*.

[61] The two relevant exceptions, *AP* 9.544 (=Adaeus 9 *GP*) and *AP* 5.270 (Paulus Silentiarius), mention that the stones they describe come from India, a beryl and a jacinth, respectively (cf. 1.1 A-B, Ἰνδὸς Ὑδάσπης, also 2.4, 8.5).

[62] Hutchinson 2 provides a list of passages in which Augustan authors draw attention to the foreign origins of gems, often with disapproval. As Hutchinson acknowledges, the contemporary cultural background contributed to the popularity of this theme, but the Milan papyrus is nonetheless an important literary source.

[63] *Carm.* 1.31 is often adduced as Maecenas' model because it starts by rejecting various forms of wealth (cf., e.g., Avallone 312–14; André 1967: 106–7; Lieberg 10–11).

[64] All of the stones named by Maecenas are attested on the Milan papyrus: emerald: 12.3; jasper: 14.1; pearl: 11.3 (μαργαρῖτις; the reference is probably to mother-of-pearl); beryl (6.3; only the initial beta is preserved: τοῦτο τὸ μαρμαῖρον β[ηρύλλιον). Cf. n. 70.

[65] Gelsomino is fundamental for any discussion of this fragment. See also Cugusi 1972:154–60; ibid. 1979: 2.2.404–6; Roberts 51–53.

[66] Translating Cugusi's proposal *melcule* (1972: 156–59), an otherwise unattested masculine modeled on the neuter *melculum* (literally "little honey"), which appears in Plautus as a lover's blandishment (*Cas.* 837, *Cur.* 10–11).

> of the potters, beryl of Porsenna, carbuncle ... hope you get one!—to sum it all up, you emollient of adulteresses.[67]

The similarities between this valediction and Maecenas' poem seem too close to ignore or attribute to coincidence.[68] All of the gem names from the poem appear in the letter, and both authors employ the unusual neuter form *margaritum* instead of the more common feminine *margarita*. Like Maecenas, Augustus presents a succession of short word groups with similar semantic components (most consist of a noun and modifier), but he enlivens them through variations in word order (note the chiasmus of *Cilneorum zmaragde, iaspi figulorum*) and through sound play (*ebur ex Etruria, lasar Arretinum*). The first and last gems in the list do not come from Maecenas' verses, and Augustus singles both out for special treatment. *adamas supernas* plays with sound and morphology in its juxtaposition of homophonic Greek and Latin nominative endings. Like the English word "carbuncle," *carbunculus* can refer both to a type of red gem and to a pustule (often venereal[69]); the form *carbunculum* from the letter thus seems at first to be an unusual neuter on the model of *margaritum* that continues the sequence of vocatives ("o you ruby ..."), but with *habeas* we quickly revise our understanding and take the whole phrase as a witty, and unexpected, insult: "hope you get a sore!" perhaps an initial jab at the amorous pursuits with which Augustus twits Maecenas explicitly in his final phrase.[70]

For our purposes the most important part of Augustus' letter is of course the list of precious substances that occupies its middle. Each element in the list receives a geographical modifier that is strictly speaking inappropriate, but that recalls Maecenas' Etruscan origins: e.g., ivory does not come from Etruria (*ebur ex Etruria*), nor pearls from the Tiber (*Tiberinum margaritum*), nor is the Etruscan family of the Cilnii known for its emeralds (*Cilneorum zmaragde*). Presumably the joke here is directed at both Maecenas' taste for

[67] I have adapted the translation offered at Roberts 52, though I owe the rendering of the final phrase to Graver 629.

[68] Most commentators support the idea that the letter pokes fun at Maecenas' verses (see Mattiacci 68 n. 3 for a convenient conspectus of opinion); Courtney dissents (1993: 277).

[69] When Roman authors specify the parts of the body on which the lesions known as *carbunculi* appear, they typically locate them either on the eyes and eyelids, or on the genitalia (*TLL* s.v. "carbunculus" 3.433.29–32).

[70] For genital lesions in Roman humor cf. Martial's puns on *ficus*, "fig" or "hemorrhoid"; see Leary 146. The *carbunculus* is mentioned on the Milan papyrus in its Greek form ἄνθραξ (8.5 A-B ἄνθρ[α]κας Ἰνδούς). Cf. n. 64.

foreign luxury and his pride in his ancestry, two qualities that seem, as the emperor implies, somewhat incongruous when taken together.

On the face of it Augustus' conceit appears arbitrary and bizarre,[71] and it becomes fully comprehensible only when we set it against the backdrop now offered by the *lithika*. As we noted above, the new epigrams stress the exotic provenance of their gems, a technique that Maecenas adopts once in his own poem (*quos Thynica lima perpolivit anellos*). In a show of learning typical for his day, Augustus not only demonstrates his awareness of this convention by employing it in his response to Maecenas, but also wittily reverses the convention: the exotic, foreign stones receive modifiers that refer to the *local* origins of the addressee. Augustus' facility with the poetics of precious stones here mirrors the skill with which he and other members of his family utilized jewels in other, more public contexts: as Pliny tells us, the emperor's wife Livia dedicated the fabled ring of Polycrates of Samos in the Temple of Concord (*Nat.* 37.4), and a large piece of crystal on the Capitol (37.27)—clear attempts to draw on the cultural capital of precious and otherwise noteworthy stones in order to heighten the prestige of the imperial house.[72]

Through its consistent focus on its addressee's idiosyncracies, Augustus' letter encourages us to treat its striking, even overwrought style as a parody of the poetic qualities exhibited by the fragment from Maecenas. Macrobius suggests such an interpretation in his introduction to the letter (*Sat.* 2.4.12):

> Idem Augustus quia Maecenatem suum noverat stilo esse remisso, molli et dissoluto, talem se in epistulis quas ad eum scribebat saepius exhibebat, et contra castigationem loquendi, quam alias ille scribendo servabat, in epistula ad Maecenatem familiari plura in iocos effusa subtexuit.
>
> Likewise, because Augustus knew that his Maecenas had a lax, effeminate, and disjointed style, in letters that he wrote to him he quite often behaved in the same way, and contrary to the strictly controlled manner of discourse that he otherwise kept to when writing, in a personal letter to Maecenas he closed with a fair number of unrestrained jokes.

Suetonius, too, records a jibe by Augustus against Maecenas that employs a strategy recognizably similar to that of the letter (*Aug.* 86.2):

> cacozelos et antiquarios ut diverso genere vitiosos pari fastidio sprevit exagitabatque nonnumquam; in primis Maecenatem suum, cuius myrobrechis, ut ait, cincinnos usque quaque persequitur et imitando per iocum irridet.

[71] Avallone 56 n. 28: "La lettera a noi sembra un bizzarro, ma felice intarsio di parole di Mecenate e di Augusto."

[72] For other dedications of stones by the imperial family see, e.g., *Nat.* 9.116, 37.11.

> Those with affected or archaizing styles, though afflicted by opposed vices, he rejected with equal disdain, and often chided them—in particular his own Maecenas, whose "unguent-soaked locks" (to quote his own words) he constantly goes after and wittily mocks by parodying them.[73]

The phrase *myrobrechis cincinnos*, a Greek compound adjective modifying a Latin noun, is a linguistic hybrid that mimics (*imitando ... irridet*) both Maecenas himself, the Etruscan noble in foreign finery, and his literary work, replete with Greek vocabulary and baroque stylistic effects.[74] The valediction to Augustus' letter depends on an identical blurring of personal and poetic qualities, and achieves the same imitative effect by the same means in the way it pairs exotic gems with local toponyms. The emperor's list of jewels is thus a response as much to Maecenas' poetic style as to the subject matter of his poem—or to any fondness Maecenas might actually have had for such luxury items.

The passages from Maecenas and Augustus illustrate the early development of a metaphor linking gemstones with the description and evaluation of style. In Maecenas the link between gems and stylistic qualities is potential, a connection that seems suggested by the poem's florid style and sensuous subject, but that is not explicitly drawn by the fragment itself; Maecenas may even create an ironic tension between style and content by claiming not to seek (*nec ... quaero*) the jewels whose qualities his own writing appears to cultivate. Augustus makes the metapoetic undertones of his friend's poem overt by thematizing the issue of style (and its parody). Both authors produce *lists* of stones that involve intricate variations over a set of short, similar word groups: this is the technique that Roberts designates in late antique poets as the "jeweled style," and it could owe something to the impression communicated by sequences of epigrams about stones like the one from the Milan papyrus. Be that as it may, the two passages adapt motifs and conventions that are now elucidated by the new epigrams; Augustus' valediction in particular becomes easier to understand when we realize that it parodies a tendency in third-century epigram to trumpet the exotic origins of a gem. The Hellenistic discourse exemplified by the *lithika* thus appears to be an important input to the Roman metapoetic interpretation of jewels.

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

I will follow this interpretation through two later examples in order to demonstrate the development of the metaphor. The first is a remarkable poem

[73] For the link between lifestyle and writing style, with special reference to Maecenas, see Graver and Petersmann.

[74] See André 1983: 1766 for a similar appreciation of the phrase.

from Petronius' *Satyricon* that seems to be in explicit dialogue with the fragments from Maecenas and Augustus. In a discussion of poetry, Trimalchio proposes an absurd comparison between Cicero and Publilius Syrus, the writer of mimes (55.4–5). Cicero is more eloquent (*disertior*) but Publilius more moral (*honestior*), claims Trimalchio, and he follows up his point with sixteen moralizing lines supposedly quoted from Publilius, the last eight of which run as follows (55.6.9–16):

> quo margaritam caram tibi, bacam Indicam?
> an ut matrona ornata phaleris pelagiis
> tollat pedes indomita in strato extraneo?
> zmaragdum ad quam rem viridem, pretiosum vitrum?
> quo Carchedonios optas ignes lapideos?
> nisi ut scintillet probitas e carbunculis.
> aequum est induere nuptam ventum textilem,
> palam prostare nudam in nebula linea?
>
> What use to you your dear pearl, fruit of India? So that the lady wife, decked out in maritime medals, out of control, may spread her legs on a stranger's couch? To what end the green emerald, precious bit of glass? What's the point in your wishing for rubies, stony fires?—unless you suppose integrity might gleam forth from carbuncles. Is it right for a married woman to don a textile thin as the breeze, to prostitute herself in the open, as good as nude in a linen mist?

Most scholars agree that these lines could not come from Publilius and are more likely a composition by Petronius himself. But what is the point of the *jeu d'esprit*? Several have considered it a parody: Smith suggests that it apes the style of Varro's Menippean satires, while Courtney proposes that the ultimate target is Seneca, who frequently uses quotations from Publilius to illustrate his teachings.[75]

Baldwin observes, however, that the closest match to this poem's language and content is the fragment from Maecenas considered above.[76] Both passages offer elaborate lists that include the emerald and pearl; the phrase *ignes lapideos*, with its reversal of the expected relationship between noun and modifier ("stony fires" for "fiery stones"), resembles Maecenas' *iaspios lapillos*. Petronius' poem also contains a hitherto unnoticed reference to Augustus' letter. In both authors, *carbunculus* denotes a type of stone—not a common

[75] Smith 1975: 148; Courtney 1991: 20–21 (again at 2001: 106–7); cf. Connors 56–62 on connections between the poem and Petronius' narrative.

[76] Trimalchio asserts a connection between himself and Maecenas in the language of his own epitaph (71.12): *C. Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus hic requiescit*. Cf. Petersmann 277.

usage outside of technical literature[77]—and occurs furthermore in a context dealing with sexual indiscretion; a given gem name might occur by chance in two different lists of gems, of course, but the similar contexts, together with the probable reference to Augustus' correspondant Maecenas, makes an allusion to the emperor's letter likely. Just as Augustus' *carbunculum habeas* ("carbuncle ... hope you get one!") mocked Maecenas' amatory pursuits in its equivocation between the meanings "red stone" and "(venereal) pustule," so in Petronius the phrase *ut scintillet probitas e carbunculis* acquires a witty double meaning if the *carbunculi* are both the jewels that entice to wanton behavior, and the physical consequences of the same. This seems the sort of jest that would please a Trimalchio.

These coincidences in diction and specific content guide us to themes shared between Petronius' lines and the passages from Maecenas and Augustus. Petronius embeds his collection of gems in a discussion of poetry, and the mannered style of the piece, coupled with the incongruous attribution to Publilius, encourages the reader to reflect on its literary qualities and the possibility of parody. Petronius' response to two elaborate and closely related treatments of gems from the Augustan period thus demonstrates a remarkable degree of continuity in its consistent association of groups of stones with striking stylistic effects.

In his fifth book, Martial presents a trio of epigrams that explore and develop the link between gems and style (5.11–13). The first (5.11[78]) seems to show the metaphor on its way to becoming a commonplace:

> sardonychas, zmaragdos, adamantas, iaspidas uno
> versat in articulo Stella, Severe, meus.
> multas in digitis, plures in carmine gemmas
> invenies: inde est haec, puto, culta manus.
>
> Sardonyxes, emeralds, diamonds, jaspers—my Stella twists them all on one digit, Severus. On his fingers you will find many gems, in his poetry even more: this is the real source, I think, of his hand's elegance.[79]

The opening line's impressive string of Greek nouns and inflections (accusatives in short *-as*) conveys the typical connection between jewels and

[77] In non-technical works *carbunculus* is exceedingly rare and, with the exception of the passages from Augustus and Petronius, tends to be used simply as a diminutive of *carbo* (cf. Pl. *Mos.* 986, *Rhet. Her.* 4.9, Apul. *Met.* 7.19); in specialist literature the word seems never to refer to coal, cf. *OLD* s.v. 2–5.

[78] This poem is noted briefly at Hutchinson 3.

[79] My translation is adapted from Howell 27.

a graecizing style. The second couplet could be one of the earliest passages in Latin that overtly associates *gemmae* with poetic ornament.[80] We should note in Martial's poem the close relationship between Stella's personal adornment and his writing style, forged by the gems that appear both on his hands and in his poems; the resemblance to themes from Maecenas' and Augustus' pieces is again clear.

The next epigram in Martial's book (5.12) apparently offers an additional description of Stella's ring. The performers Masclion and Ninus may show off their strength by balancing weights or lifting seven, even eight boys (1–4), but the poet is unimpressed (5–7):

> res non difficilis mihi videtur,
> uno cum digito vel hoc vel illo
> portet Stella meus decem puellas.
>
> This does not seem to me to be a difficult feat, when my friend Stella carries on one finger—either this one or that—ten girls.[81]

5.12 points back to 5.11 through clear verbal echoes: *uno in articulo*, *in digitis* (5.11) and *uno digito* (5.12); both pieces mention *Stella meus*. As Howell notes more generally, "[i]t is unusual for Martial to place two poems on the same theme side by side, but this epigram [5.12] would be extremely obscure without the previous one"; not only are the themes identical, but the ring described in the first couplet of 5.11 is "no doubt the same one referred to in the next epigram, from which it appears that there are ten gems, each bearing the representation of a girl."[82]

Regardless of the precise configuration of Stella's ring,[83] Howell's analysis of the reading process engendered by the two poems is surely correct: their unusually close relationship is striking enough that we feel authorized to supplement one epigram with information derived from the other. The process of supplementation creates additional links between gems and poetry,

[80] Cf. Roberts 52. Shackleton Bailey believes that a metaphorical interpretation of *gemmae* here would be farfetched, and suggests instead that Martial is referring to gemstones actually described by Stella in a poem (see the comments in his Teubner edition *ad* 5.11.4, also the note in his Loeb translation ad loc.). This skepticism seems somewhat overstated given the evident popularity of the metaphor in later periods; in the *Dialogus*, furthermore, Tacitus indisputably uses *gemmae* as a metaphor for the orator's arsenal of stylistic ornaments (22.4, noted by Howell 89).

[81] The translation is Howell's.

[82] The quotations are from Howell 89 and 88, respectively.

[83] Verdière 106–7 surveys several different interpretations of the end of 5.12; Shackleton Bailey doubts that these lines refer to a ring (cf. the comments in his Loeb edition ad loc.).

for the "ten girls" on Stella's finger could easily evoke the nine Muses along with, perhaps, Violentilla, the wife whom Stella celebrated in his own elegies.[84] The next poem in Martial's book (5.13) returns explicitly to the theme of poetry, and would act as foil to a metapoetic interpretation of the preceding pair: in 5.13, the epigrammatist contrasts the riches of one Callistratus with his own slender means, but boasts that his poetry has conferred on him a fame inaccessible to the wealthy but otherwise undistinguished.[85] With the trio of 5.11–13, then, Martial juxtaposes divergent, almost mutually exclusive conceptions of the relationship between wealth and poetry, a confrontation paralleled by the dual status of jewels as poetic metaphors and problematic emblems of value.

CONCLUSIONS

As was noted at the outset of this study, uncertainties surrounding the authorship and availability of the Milan papyrus make it difficult to investigate links between the new epigrams and other ancient texts, but I hope to have demonstrated above that such links can be found, and are worth pursuing. The *lithika* articulate the tastes and values of the society for which they were written, and they offer evidence for themes and modes of expression whose development we can now observe in contemporary and later literature. 16 A-B is a good example of how the conventions of the *lithika* may enrich our reading of a text: while not alluding to the specific content of the descriptions that precede it, this poem exploits *topoi* such as the river-motif along with the pretense of offering specialized knowledge about stones; the anomalous case of the rock-crystal thereby toys with our expectations, and ultimately deconstructs the apparently "natural" connection between beauty, individuality, and value that operated in the earlier pieces. By linking the name "Posidippus" with a critique of those who worry about stones too much, Phoenix too may treat *lithika* epigrams by this author as instantiations of an ideology that he exposes, and (playfully) subjects to criticism.

The Augustan and later texts that we examined are at a much further remove from the period of the papyrus; they naturally reflect trends in contemporary Roman culture, and may also draw on treatments of gemstones, in poetry or in prose, that are now lost to us.[86] Direct reference to the papyrus is consequently hard to prove, but the *lithika* nevertheless give us our clearest

[84] See Verdière 107–8, Klug 77.

[85] See, e.g., the final couplet (5.13.9–10): *hoc ego tuque sumus: sed quod sum non potes esse: / tu quod es e populo quilibet esse potest.*

[86] Such treatments had evidently multiplied since the third century B.C.E.: Pliny's extensive list of sources for book 37 of the *Natural History* (on gemstones) suggests how much material was once available (cf. Plantzos 7–11).

view to date of the Hellenistic background from which the Roman metapoetic interpretation of jewels must in part have evolved. We have seen how Roman authors build on each other as they create brilliant sequences of gems that characterize, and simultaneously criticize, both a lifestyle and a style of writing. The close connections of these passages both to each other and to motifs that appear in the *lithika* suggest that Hellenistic discourse on gems may have played a greater role in how the metaphor of the "jeweled style" developed than has so far been appreciated.

Apart from their intrinsic interest, these ancient responses to the discourse of the *lithika* encourage us to reflect on our own interpretive practices. Hunter has already noted in connection with the papyrus that "[a] new text such as this naturally tests our interpretive resolve (and our methodology) in finding patterns and meaning in juxtaposition" (2004: 97). 16 A-B presents, from within the collection itself, one attempt to impose meaning on the preceding sequence of *lithika*, offering an interpretation that is both unexpected and subversive; viewed as a model for the reader's own interpretive activity, this epigram seems to sanction creative, varied, even dissonant responses to the collection's different sections. More broadly, all of the passages considered above suggest the wide range of interpretations that the *lithika* could have evoked from ancient readers at different periods. The collection as a whole offers broad scope, of course, for study of how its themes are redeployed in different contexts, both Greek and Roman. These studies will not only offer insight into additional areas of Hellenistic culture and their connections with later periods, but may also illuminate the ways in which ancient readers harnessed the semantic possibilities offered by sequences of epigrams.

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