

PREFACE

The following pages are intended to serve a double purpose. On the one hand I hope to have thrown light on certain problems in Hellenistic poetry which until now had outwitted commentators. On the other, since many colleagues, both in Great Britain and abroad, as well as many postgraduates, had invited me to write a conveniently sized work which might exemplify, through the concrete analysis of specific literary or textual problems, the method of research developed and applied in our Classics Research Centre at Birkbeck College, I hope that my book will prove useful as a methodological guide for those who are interested in understanding Greek poetry, especially Hellenistic. Our method is historical – that is to say, ultimately obvious, indeed orthodox, and it needs re-stating only in view of the anti-historical approach which has recently led so many interpreters to disastrous results: we try to interpret ancient poetry on the basis of contemporary language, contemporary *ρόποι* and contemporary literary practice.

The material printed in this book is the result of my seminar lectures aimed at training in research the international group of postgraduates who are working at our Birkbeck Classics Research Centre: they have found it an instructive guide to the perplexing and difficult field of Hellenistic poetry, and I venture to hope that so will the readers.

I am particularly indebted to Professor G. Giangrande, Professor B. Gentili, Professor E. Degani, Dr. F.J. Williams and Dr. G.R. McLennan for their helpful criticism, and to Mr. J.C. Gieben for publishing my book with his deservedly admired efficiency.

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