

Paul McKechnie  
Macquarie University

# Racing ahead to a globalized world: the Ptolemaic commonwealth and Posidippus' Hippika

## Abstract

When A.E. Zimmern wrote of the Greek commonwealth, he meant the fifth century Athenian empire; but the expansion of the Greek-speaking world under Alexander the Great makes it better to associate the idea of a Greek commonwealth with the global Greek civilization of the post-Alexander world. The impulse, in the Hellenistic kingdoms to look for validation and legitimacy to long-established Greek institutions and values, is illustrated in this article with reference to Posidippus' Hippika. In the text examined here, a horse-racing victory at Delphi by one of Ptolemy II's most trusted friends is celebrated.

## Introduction

Alfred Eckhard Zimmern's *The Greek Commonwealth*, first published in 1911, is about Athens in the fifth century BC, and its program, which culminates with the Peloponnesian War (Zimmern 1931: xi):<sup>1</sup>

*... a conflict which brought inward unhappiness and outward disaster upon the foremost Greek community at the very height of her greatness and left its mark upon the mind and writings of the men who laid the foundations of European political thought.*

Zimmern engaged with the Greek environment, economics and political thought in the course of his exposition. An internationalist, and a proponent of the idea that war ought to be illegal, Zimmern wrote a Foreign Office



Figure 1: Map from Zimmern's *The Greek Commonwealth* (1931)

memorandum which became the basis of the 'Cecil draft', the document on the organization of the League of Nations which the British took to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 (Markwell 2004).

Zimmern's conception of the importance of the Greek commonwealth was in important respects broad. Yet by centring on fifth century Athens it remained unengaged with how the ancient Greeks themselves globalized Hellenism. They expanded their world beyond the confines of the lands Zimmern chose to include in the map published at the front of *The Greek Commonwealth*, as shown in Figure 1.

It would be wrong to imply after more than a hundred years that the subject of Zimmern's *The Greek Commonwealth* ought to have been other than it is. In this article, however, it is proposed that in antiquity Hellenism did not only face, but actually created, a globalized world; and that by looking to that world, the world of Greek-ruled and Greek-speaking empires after Alexander the Great, it will be possible to gauge what Hellenism can mean in a globalized context.

As emblematic of that globalized world, consider Ptolemaic Egypt – not merely one of the *disjecta membra* of Alexander's empire, but the realm of the Ptolemaic kings, who as J.G. Manning put it (Manning 2010: 205):

*are directly responsible for some of the greatest achievements of the ancient world, not least of which is the building of Alexandria – the first 'urban giant' ...*

*of the ancient world, home to the greatest center of learning in Mediterranean antiquity and to the famed lighthouse, among many other significant monuments.*

These kings drew on intellectual and artistic achievements to build their thrones: science, philosophy, jewellery, and other attainments for which this article will not have space; but the focus here will be on poetry and horse racing.

### Posidippus and the *Hippika*

About twenty poems by Posidippus of Pella, depending on where lines are drawn over ambiguous attributions, are preserved in the Palatine Anthology, more in the Planudean Appendix, and some are quoted in Athenaeus. A generation ago, there were a total of twenty-four to include in *Hellenistic Epigrams* (Gow and Page 1965: 166–74). But in 2001, study of mummy cartonnage stored in Milan revealed a manuscript containing 112 poems and fragments of other poems. Two of these 112 were already known (Posidippus 15 and 65),<sup>2</sup> and attributed to Posidippus. On the strength of this it has been inferred by most scholars that all the poems in the Milan papyrus are by Posidippus. Doubters remain, including Franco Ferrari (Ferrari 2007: 331–9), the late Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Lloyd-Jones 2003: 613–16), and Stephan Schröder (Schröder 2004); but the purpose of this article is not to re-examine their concerns: the arguments in favour of Posidippus' authorship are strong enough to justify proceeding on the assumption that the scholarly majority has got it right.

Among the new poems are eighteen under the heading of *Hippika*. They celebrate victories in panhellenic athletic contests – at Nemea, Isthmia, Delphi and above all the Olympic Games. Only one reference is made to a contest outside the big four: Etearchus' horse had won at the Ptolemaieia as well as the Nemean and Isthmian Games, before it triumphed at Delphi (Posidippus 76). The eighteen poems celebrate the equestrian victories of Posidippus' patrons, and as M.W. Dickie cautiously observed, some of them were written for 'a person or persons who commissioned epigrams on behalf of the family of Ptolemy Philadelphus' (Dickie 2008: 35). Most of the rest were written for Thessalian racehorse owners, although one Spartan (Posidippus 75: [D]ios non of Lysi[m]a[chos]) and one Messenian (Posidippus 86: Eubotas of Messene) were also celebrated.

Dickie argued persuasively that Posidippus' poems were inscribed on actual monuments: statue-groups featuring horses, their riders or drivers, and their owners – who won the prizes and funded the memorials of victory. Rightly, he has no time for Marco Fantuzzi's idea that 'more probably, Posidippus may have been celebrating the autonomous power of poetry by celebrating a purely fictitious monumental tradition' (Dickie 2008: 14–16 and 21–22; Fantuzzi 2005: 268). Dickie's discussion of the *Hippika* is exemplary also in that it proposes a straightforward principle of ordering on which the eighteen epigrams can be understood as having been arranged in the Milan papyrus (Dickie 2008: 48–52). In brief, the guiding principle (Dickie observed) is that 'poems for Ptolemaic victories should be highlighted' (Dickie 2008: 50). This is a more persuasive suggestion than Fantuzzi's intricate idea of the anthologist having 'broadly adopted as template a structure ... found in Callimachus' *Aetia*' (Fantuzzi 2004: 221), in such a way that the first seven poems, celebrating non-royal winners (Posidippus 71–7) would correspond to *Aetia* Books One and Two, and the 'cluster of coherent epigrams commemorating victories by Ptolemaic queens and kings' (Posidippus 78–82) would correspond to Callimachus' *Victoria Berenices*. The four further epigrams for non-royal winners (Posidippus 83–86) would then 'correspond' to *Aetia* Books Three and some of Four, while the final two poems (Posidippus 87, –88) would 'find [their] parallel' in the apotheosis of Berenice's Lock, at the end of *Aetia* Four.

It must be conceded that if anyone could be unapologetically allusive in a literary way, it would be a Hellenistic poet; but even so, Fantuzzi seems to have drawn a long bow with that explanation. And yet it is clear that there is a metanarrative of Ptolemaic greatness in the *Hippika* – greatness instantiated in winning prizes in the big four athletic festivals in Greece. It was an embarrassment, as the River Nile himself pointed out in Callimachus' *Victoria Sosibii* (fr. 384 in Pfeiffer 1949), lines 29–34, when the Nile had never won such a prize:

... no one had brought a trophy back to the city from these sepulchral festivals  
(*ταφίων τῶνδε πανηγυρίων*) [the panhellenic games] and, great though I am,  
in this one thing alone I was more insignificant than those streams which the  
white ankles of women cross without difficulty, and children pass over on foot  
without wetting their knees ...

The centuries in which the River Nile suffered this embarrassment, however, came to an end soon after the city of Alexandria was founded – since Ptolemy son of Lagus made a fairly prompt start, winning with his *synoris* (pair) of foals at the sixty-ninth Pythian Games in 310 (Pausanias 10.7.8),<sup>3</sup> when he had not yet even become King of Egypt (cf. Fantuzzi 2005: 251).

Another thing a Hellenistic poet could do was to deliver the same message both on the large scale and in microcosm, and therefore the rest of this article will focus on one particular epigram, Posidippus 74.<sup>4</sup>

### The poem

ἐν Δελφοῖς ἡ πῶλος δὲ ἀντιθέουσα τεθροίπποις  
 ἄξονι Θεσσαλικῶι κοῦφα συνεξέπεσε  
 νεύματι νικήσασα, πολὺς τότε θροῦς ἐλατήρων  
 ἦν ἀμφικτύοσιν, Φοῖβ', ἐν ἀγωνοθέταις.  
 ῥάβδους δὲ βραχέες χαμάδις βάλλον, ὡς διὰ κλήρου  
 νίκης ἠνιόχων οἰσομένων στέφανον.  
 ἦδε δὲ δεξιόσειρα χαμαὶ νεύσα[σ' ἀ]κεραίων  
 ἐ[κ σ]τηθῶν αὐτῆ ῥάβδον ἐφειλικύσα[το,]  
 ἡ δεξιὴ τήλεια μετ' ἄρσεσιν· αἱ δ' ἐβόησ[αν]  
 φθέγματ[ι] παρδήμωι σύμμιγα μυριάδ[εσ]  
 κελ[ί]νη κηρῦξαι στέφανον μέγαν· ἐν θροῦβωι δὲ  
 Κάλ[ικ]ράτης δάφνην ἤρατ' ἀνήρ Σάμιος[ς]  
 Θεοῖσι δ' Ἀδ[ε]λφείοις εἰκῶ ἐναργέα τῶν τότε [ἀγώνω]ν  
 ἄρ[μα] καὶ ἠνί[ο]χον χάλκεον ᾧδ' ἔθετο.

*Competing at Delphi in the four-horse chariot race  
 the filly nimbly made it neck and neck with a Thessalian carriage*

*And won by a hair: there was then great uproar from the drivers,  
 O Phoebus, in front of the Amphictyonic umpires.*

*[In no time they] A minority of them threw their rods to the ground,  
 to make the drivers draw lots for the victory crown.*

*Our right-hand tracer, nodding her head downwards,  
 in pure innocence herself picked up a rod,*

*A daring girl among the males. The myriads all together  
 shouted with unanimous voice*

*To assign her the great crown. Amid the applause  
Callicrates of Samos obtained the laurel*

*And to the Sibling Gods as a visible sign of that [contest]  
he dedicated here a bronze [chariot and] driver.*

*Στο τέθριππο το δελφικό η σβέλτη φοραδίτσα  
μ' άρμα μαζί θεσσαλικό στο τέρμα ίσια πέφτει  
και μ' ένα νεύμα μοναχά της κεφαλής νικάει·  
υψώθη θόρυβος πολύς απ' τους αρματοηλάτες  
ω Φοίβε, στους κριτές μπροστά της Αμφικτιονίας·  
τα σκήπτρα τους τα ρίξανε οι ηνίοχοι στο χώμα  
με κλήρο λέγαν στους κριτές το νικητή να βγάλουν·  
κι εκείνη από δεξιά, με το κεφάλι κάτω  
ντόμπρα ένα σκήπτρο τράβηξε, σιμά της και το πήρε,  
μέσα σε τόσα σερνικά ατρόμητο κορίτσι·  
Μυριόστομη τότε φωνή από το πλήθος βγαίνει  
πως η φοράδα τον τρανό το στέφανο αξίζει.  
Κι ο Καλλικράτης κέρδισε τη δάφνη ο Σαμιώτης  
και στους Φιλάδελφους Θεούς του αγώνα την εικόνα  
αρματολάτη χάλκινο μετ' άρμα αφιερώνει.*

In this poem, the story is told of a win in the Pythian Games by a four-horse chariot owned by Callicrates of Samos. Callicrates is a well-attested individual. He was an admiral in Ptolemy II's service. Long before the discovery of the Milan papyrus, Callicrates' monumental and literary trail was traced by Hauben 1970. Inscriptions are extant from Crete (Olous) and Cyprus (Old Paphos) as well as Callicrates' home island of Samos; but the most important monument for which he was responsible in Greece was at Olympia, where he set up statues of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II on top of two tall columns. Peter Bing summarizes (Bing 2002/3: 253):<sup>5</sup>

*The dedication consists of a monumental pedestal 20 m. long by 4 m. wide by 1.12 m. high, in the middle of which was an exedra 2.35 m. long by 1.68 m. wide, articulated with a bench. Bracketing the pedestal on either end a large stylobate block supported an 8.93 m. tall Ionic column, each crowned by a bronze statue resting on a statue base*

*atop the capital. As the texts symmetrically inscribed in four lines at the base of each column reveal, one was of king Ptolemy Philadelphus, the other of his queen Arsinoe.*

## A Greek commonwealth

This development at Olympia put the king and queen in a setting which corresponded to and echoed the placement of the temples of Zeus and Hera themselves. Callicrates, who in 272/1 had become the first eponymous priest in the dynastic cult of the Sibling Gods Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II, took a proactive role in publicizing the royal couple's claim to divinity – both in Greece and at Cape Zephyrium, near Canopus on the Egyptian coast, where he built a shrine to Arsinoe as goddess of sailors (Posidippus 39, and cf. Bing 2002/3: 255–62).

In Posidippus 74, Callicrates' chariot wins at Delphi, the centre of the world, in a photo finish – in the days before such a thing was possible. Some of the umpires throw their rods of office on the ground, the action an umpire takes to show that he is ruling the race too close to call, and that the winner has to be selected by lot. Most translators and commentators, including Colin Austin who contributed to the *editio princeps* in 2001 (Bastianini and Gallazzi 2001: 201), have wished to emend βραχέες to βραχέ<ω>ς, effectively meaning 'quickly': the umpires were quick to throw down their rods. Austin, then would read βραχέ<ω>ς as having the force of ἐν βραχεῖ, 'in a short time'. Others have taken a similar view: Bastianini's Italian translation in Austin and Bastianini 2002 gave '*subito questi gettarono a terra le loro verghe*', which is consistent with Austin's English translation. Yannick Durbec in his French translation in Acosta-Hughes et al. 2002 gave '*rapidement ils jetèrent leur baguette au sol*', also agreeing with Austin. Elizabeth Kosmetatou in her translation in Acosta-Hughes et al. 2002 gave 'They cast their short staffs to the ground', relating βραχέες to (accusative) ῥάβδους – which may seem to be a counsel of desperation. Nikos Sarantakos in his modern Greek paraphrase quoted above seems to elide the issue.

But Jean Bingen (Bingen 2002: 188) made a case for reading βραχέες as analogous to βραχεῖς in Polybius 4.19.10:<sup>6</sup>

*Λακεδαιμόνιοι ... βραχεῖς ... τινὰς παντελῶς ἰππεῖς καὶ πεζοὺς ... ἐξέπεμψαν*

*The Spartans sent out ... some altogether inadequate number of cavalry and infantry*

Bingen's point would be that a *minority* of umpires ruled the race too close to call, but Callicrates' filly bent down and picked up one of the umpires' rods. While acknowledging that his example from Polybius is of a later date, Bingen also cited Thucydides 1.51.1,<sup>7</sup> where the Athenians had sent out more ships,

*δείσαντες, οπερ εγένετο, μη νικηθώσιν οι Κερκυραιοι και αι σφέτεροι  
δέκα νόες ολίγαι αμόνεινωσιν*

*fearing that the Corcyreans might be defeated [as actually happened], and that their [the Athenians'] ten ships might be too few to defend them*

and Herodotus 6.109,<sup>8</sup> where

*ὀλίγους γὰρ εἶναι στρατιῇ τῇ Μήδων συμβαλεῖν means*

*[supposing] that they were too few to attack the army of the Persians.*

Bing, however, argued against Bingen's interpretation of the scene: although finding Bingen's grammatical case 'syntactically and lexically possible' (Bing 2002/3: 250 n.17), he objected to the implication that 'the ordinary human decision-making process' would have come down in favour of Callicrates' team even if the filly had not picked the rod up: 'this,' he wrote, 'is to make the sign ... quite pointless.'

Nonetheless, this seems to be a case where grammar ought to be followed in preference to that other source of insight, whose proponents might call, 'common sense'. The story is about an incident at a horse race, in front of a large and noisy crowd. The poet is clear from the outset that Callicrates' team has won: in this epigram's little narrative world, the filly picked up the rod because she was a winner (she did not win because she picked the rod up). Not all the umpires were certain at first – but only overthinking the story can lead to the conclusion that the unusual incident is 'pointless'.

Both in Callicrates' monument at Olympia and in the crowd's delighted reaction to the miracle at Delphi, there is evidence of an official at the pinnacle of the government of Ptolemaic Egypt publicizing his royal master's new and globalized Greek commonwealth. In the Athenian case, Zimmern wrote that the fifth century empire 'was the child of necessity, and its creators did not know what they were doing' (Zimmern 1911: 186); but the empire of the Ptolemies was planned by kings who were ambitious to keep what they held while making their royal power acceptable across the Greek world. Callicrates called himself a 'man of Samos', just as the king is called a 'Macedonian'



at the panhellenic games, and not ‘the King of Egypt’ – the latter a fact striking enough to prompt Pausanias, in the second century AD, to remark on it (Pausanias 6.3.1). The nativity of Greek Egypt had been marked with gymnastic and musical games held at Memphis by Alexander the Great, who in 332/1 brought top performers from Greece to take part (Arrian *Anabasis* 3.2.1). The dialectic evident in the retention of Greek ethnics by king and courtier, and in the simultaneous creation of extravagant monuments to the divine stature of Ptolemy and Arsinoe, points to how there remained, at the heart of the expanded Greek commonwealth after Alexander, a powerful impulse to bring the glory of empire back to the centre of the world.

## References

- Acosta-Hughes, Benjamin, Kosmetatou, Elizabeth, Cuypers, Martine and Angiò, Francesca (eds.) (2002 and updates), *Issue One: Posidippus*, Classics@: an online journal, accessed 13 March 2011, <<http://chs.harvard.edu/wa/pageR?tn=ArticleWrapper&bdc=12&mn=1341>>.
- Austin, Colin and Bastianini, Guido (eds.) (2002), *Posidippi Pellaei quae supersunt omnia*, Milan: LED Edizione Universitarie Milano.
- Bastianini, Guido and Gallazzi, Claudio (eds.) (2001), *Posidippo di Pella Epigrammi* (P.Mil.Vogl VIII 309), Milan, LED [= Papiri dell’Università degli Studi di Milano, VIII].
- Bing, Peter (2002/3), ‘Posidippus and the Admiral: Kallikrates of Samos in the Milan Epigrams’, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 43, pp. 243–66.
- Bingen, Jean (2002), ‘La victoire pythique de Callicratès de Samos (Posidippe, P. Mil. Vogl. VIII 309, XI.33–XII.7)’ *Chronique d’Egypte* 77, pp. 185–90.
- Büttner-Wobst, T. (1889–1905), *Polybii historiae*, vols. 1–4, Leipzig: Teubner.
- Dickie, M.W. (2008), ‘The Hippika of Posidippus’ in Cairns, Francis (ed.), *Papers of the Langford Latin Seminar* 13, Cambridge: Francis Cairns Publications, pp. 13–54.
- Fantuzzi, Marco (2004), ‘The structure of the Hippika in P.Mil.Vogl. VIII 309’ in Acosta-Hughes, Benjamin, Kosmetatou, Elizabeth and Baumbach, Manuel (eds.), *Labored in Papyrus Leaves: Perspectives on an epigram collection attributed to Posidippus* (P.Mil.Vogl. VIII 309), Washington, DC, pp. 212–24.
- Fantuzzi, Marco (2005), ‘Posidippus at court : the contribution of the ἱππικά of P.Mil. Vogl. VIII 309 to the ideology of Ptolemaic kingship’ in Gutzwiller, Kathryn J. (ed.), *The new Posidippus : a Hellenistic poetry book*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 249–68.
- Ferrari, Franco (2007), ‘Posidippo, il papiro di milano e l’enigma del soros’ in Frösén, Jaakko, Purola, Tiina and Salmenkivi, Erja (eds.), *Proceedings of the 24th International Congress of Papyrology, Helsinki, 1–7 August, 2004* vol. 1, Helsinki, Societas Scientiarum Fennica [= *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum* 122.1], pp. 331–9.
- Gow, A.S.F. and Page, D.L. (1965) *The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams*, Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

Hardie, Philip (2006), 'Virgil's Ptolemaic Relations' *Journal of Roman Studies*, 96, pp. 25–41.

Hauben, Hans (1970), Callicrates of Samos: a contribution to the study of the Ptolemaic admiralty, Leuven, Leuvense Universitaire Uitgaven [= *Studia Hellenistica* 18].

Hoepfner, W. (1971) *Zwei Ptolemaierbauten. Das Ptolemaierweihegeschenk in Olympia und ein Bauvorhaben in Alexandria*, Berlin [= *Ath. Mitt. Beiheft* 1].

Jones, H.S. and Powell, J.E. (eds.) (1942), *Thucydides historiae*, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Legrand, Ph.-E. (ed.) (1948), *Hérodote. Histoires*, vol. 6, Paris, Les Belles Lettres.

Lloyd-Jones, Hugh (2003), review of Bastianini, Guido and Gallazzi, Claudio (eds.), *Posidippo di Pella Epigrammi* (P.Mil.Vogl VIII 309), Milan, 2001 [= *Papiri dell'Università degli Studi di Milano, VIII*]: *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 9.3, pp. 612–16.

Manning, J.G. (2010), *The Last Pharaohs: Egypt under the Ptolemies, 305–30 BC*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Markwell, D.J. (2004), 'Zimmern, Sir Alfred Eckhard (1879–1957)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn., Oxford University Press, Sept 2004, accessed 29 June 2010, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37088>>.

Pfeiffer, Rudolf (ed.) (1949), *Callimachus*, vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Romero, Luis Arturo Guichard (2004) 'Notes on Posidippus 74 AB (P. Mil. Vogl. VIII 309, XI 33–XII 7)' *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 148, pp. 77–80.

Roos, A.G. and Wirth, G. (1967), *Flavii Arriani quae exstant omnia*, Leipzig: Teubner.

Schröder, Stephan (2004), 'Skeptische Überlegungen zum Mailänder Epigrammpapyrus (P. Mil. Vogl. VIII 309)' *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 148, pp. 29–73.

Spiro, F. (ed.) (1903), *Pausaniae Graeciae descriptio*, 3 vols, Leipzig: Teubner.

Zimmern, Alfred Eckhard (1931), *The Greek Commonwealth: politics and economics in fifth-century Athens*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Quotations in this article are from the fifth edition of Zimmern's *Greek Commonwealth*.

<sup>2</sup> Posidippus' poems are numbered in this article as in Austin and Bastianini (2002).

<sup>3</sup> References to Pausanias in this article use numbering as in Spiro (1903).

<sup>4</sup> English translation by Colin Austin (in Austin and Bastianini 2002), amended in line 5 (*italic*) to follow Jean Bingen's reasoning (Bingen 2002); modern Greek paraphrase by Nikos Sarantakos (in Acosta-Hughes et al. 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Here Bing draws on Hoepfner (1971).

<sup>6</sup> References to Polybius in this article use numbering as in Büttner-Wobst (1889–1905).

<sup>7</sup> References to Thucydides in this article use numbering as in Jones and Powell (1942).

<sup>8</sup> References to Herodotus in this article use numbering as in Legrand (1948).

<sup>9</sup> This reference to Arrian uses numbering as in Roos and Wirth (1967).