SIMIAS’ PATTERN POEMS:
THE MARGINS OF THE CANON

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1. Problems of Name, Definition, and History of the Text

The Greek Pattern Poems are six texts transmitted by the Greek Anthology and the Corpus Bucolicorum, ascribed to Simias of Rhodes (Wings, Axe and Egg), Theocritus (Syria), Dosidas (‘Doric’ Altar), and Ben-santinus (‘Ionian’ Altar), the most important feature of which is that they visually reproduce the object with which they deal. We have no true ancient name for this type of poem – if it ever had any –, therefore it has received many different names in Classical and Modern Philology. The first denomination, taken from a well-known work of Ausonius, was used first by Fortunio Liceti, who wrote a commentary on five

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1. The manuscript of the Anthology preserves all six poems (AP XV 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27); the manuscripts of the bucolic poets preserve them divided into different groups according to the families. See Haebelin (1887: 5-8); Wendel (1907; 1910); Ernst (1991: 54-57); Gallavotti (1993: 372-380); Strodel (2002: 10-41).

2. The vagueness of the testimonies actually leads to the conclusion that they never had a special name. Hephaist. Intr. meir. p. 62.5-6 Consbruch calls them simply παίγνια; Schol. ad Hephaest. Ench. 9.51 calls the Axe a συγγραμμα and informs that there are others of the same kind with the form of a sphere and a throne. In some manuscripts of the bucolic poets in which the poem is ascribed to Theocritus, the Wings is called εἰδοῖλλαον or ποιήμα; see Wilamowitz (1899: 51) and the critical apparatus of the principal editions.

3. See Ernst (1991: 1-11); the most usual terms in European languages are ‘pattern poetry’, ‘figured poetry’, ‘figurative poetry’, ‘concrete poetry’ (Engl.); ‘Figurengedicht’, ‘Bildgedicht’, ‘Imago-Gedicht’, ‘Umrissgedicht’, ‘optische Poesie’, ‘Bilderreime’, ‘Schriftzeichen’, ‘Buchstabendichtung’ (Germ.); ‘poesia visual’, ‘poesia concreta’, ‘poesia figurada’ (Sp.); ‘poesia visiva’ (It.); ‘calligramme’ (Fr.). Some of them are related to specific periods (i.e. Bilderreime to German Baroque, calligrammes to XX-th-century avant-garde, etc.), but anachronism in the name is very common. More difficult is to associate them to specific productions of the text: concrete poetry normally refers to typographical texts, calligramme to hand-written texts, etc. A certain familiarity with these forms and denominations is useful in any case to appreciate the type in different periods.
of the poems in the XVIIth century; the latter is the standard name used in mediaeval Latin literature to refer to the work of Optatianus Porfiris, Venantius Fortunatus, Rabanus Maurus and other authors who composed poems that belong to the same tradition but in a different form, that of the labyrinth.

The six poems date from different periods. If Wings, Axe and Egg are the work of Simias of Rhodes as most testimonies indicate, they belong to the IIIrd century BCE. Dosidas’ Altar bears close relationship to Lycophron’s Alexandra, and so could be Hellenistic or slightly later. As Gow has demonstrated, the Syrinx is not by Theocritus and certainly comes from a later period, probably imperial, as does Besantinus’ Altar, which seems to be the latest of the six. In this paper I will deal with Simias’ poems, since they mark the foundation of this poetic type in the Hellenistic period.

Simias’ poems belong to the extensive tradition of visual poetry, that is to say, texts that in a broad sense try to represent the shape of objects. Although this sort of poetry has been commonly considered in terms of literary oddity, erudite experiment and avant-garde, recent studies have demonstrated its continuity from Antiquity to modern times, the Greek poems being the first examples preserved. In this tradition nevertheless very different types of poems appear, which can be classified according to two basic features:

i) The use of verbal and nonverbal devices, so that we have
   a) poems that use only words (verbal devices)
   b) poems that use words combined with other elements, ranging from
      lines to complicated designs, colour, numbers, etc. (nonverbal
      devices).

4. See Liceti (1630; 1635; 1637; 1640; 1655); these commentaries have been denigrated – perhaps rightly from a purely philological point of view – by modern scholars, but they are quite interesting for the understanding of the critical reception of the poems and their vogue in Baroque.

5. As most critics note, the testimonies of Hephaestion and Tzetzes on the authorship of the poems is more reliable than the alternative ascriptions (to Theocritus or Dosidas) given by some manuscripts; see Cameron (1995: 33). The fragments of Simias have been edited by Fraenkel (1915), Powell (1925: 109-120), and Strodel (2002). SH 906 has been also attributed to Simias by Merkelbach.

6. See Gow (1914); most scholars seem not to know this paper, which closes the discussion on the authorship of the Syrinx.

7. On the tradition of visual poetry see D’Ors (1977); Rypson (1989); Higgins (1987); Adler – Ernst (1990); Ernst (1991); Cézar (1992); Pozzi (2002); Molas – Bou (2003). On the continuity of the tradition see specially Ernst (1990) and (1997). The reader should be advised that the sections devoted to Greek poems in these general works are of very uneven value.

8. For theoretical approaches and classification see especially Cook (1979); Ernst (1986); Higgins (1987: 3-17 and 236-233); Pozzi (2002: 101-111); Molas – Bou (2003: 45-59).
2) The way in which the image is produced, so that we have
   a) poems in which the word block shapes an image, so that is ‘out of
      the text’.
   b) poems in which the image results from combinations inside the word
      block, so that is ‘in the text’.

Mediaeval Latin poems and modern poems in a variety of languages are
easy to classify according to these features, but the Greek examples are
not, as the original layout is probably lost and the appearance of each
poem in manuscripts, early editions and modern editions can be differ
widely. According to my own examination of the manuscripts, which
confirms in general terms those of Gallavotti and Strodel, it is possible
to identify at least three different traditions with different layouts of the
poems:

1) A tradition represented by the manuscript of the Greek Anthology
   (Palat. gr. 23 + Par. suppl. gr. 385), in which the six poems appear in
   layout 1a-2a, copied in a ‘typographical manner’ 9.
2) A tradition represented by the Ambrosian family of the bucolic poets, in
   which the poems appear in layout 1a-2a, but copied in a ‘calligrammatic
   manner’. The only surviving codex of this family is Ambrosianus gr. C
   222 inf. (K), whose importance for the text of Theocritus is well-
   known 10.
3) A tradition represented by many manuscripts of the bucolic poets in
   which the poems appear in layout 1a-2b and 1b-2b.

Although the manuscript tradition of the poems is a complicated matter
for which we have no definitive answers even after Strodel’s valuable
description 11, I consider it of interest to discuss some of its conse-
quences. We should ask ourselves first whether the different layouts pre-
vented by the manuscripts can or cannot be the result of personal contri-
butions by the copyists. The example of group 3 seems to indicate that
personal variation is scarce, i. e., the matter that a copyist may be able to
‘draw’ better or worse than the model he copies, but in every case tries
to imitate it as accurately as possible. One of the most important manu-
scripts of group 3, the magnificent Parisinus gr. 2832, probably copied
by Demetrius Triclinius himself and illuminated by a professional artist,
presents the same model of Syrinx as for example the poorly copied
Ambrosianus B 75 sup or the Vaticanus gr. 1948, in which the copyists
just did what they could 12. The same happens in early editions, based on

9. Pattern Poems are in the Parisian section, Par. suppl. gr. 385 fols. 28r-30v (642r-
644v of the manuscript before it was divided). Bibliography on this important manuscript
cannot be reported here; see Cameron (1993: 97-120); Guichard (2004: 85-102); spe-
cially useful is the photographic facsimile of Preisendanz (1911).
12. I refer to published examples. The Parisinus is reproduced by Wead (1907),
manuscripts of different traditions and layout (see below on the Axe). Modern editions more often use the layout 1a-2a as transmitted in the Anthology and edited first by Saumaise. Modern critical editions do not explain why they prefer this layout, but it is obvious that most editors thought that this was the original, the other being a late revision. It is difficult to state with certainty in any case which is the original layout. From a strictly chronological point of view, there seems to be some kind of progression in the manuscript tradition from copies of the type 1a-2a to copies of the type 1a-2b and 1b-2b, but this is very uncertain as group 1 seems to be completely independent from groups 2 and 3 from the point of view of the text. Group 1 -- if indeed the manuscript of the Anthology represents a group -- comes from about the IXth century, as the material included in book XV certainly comes from a source different than from Cephalas’ Anthology; that source could have been a bucolic manuscript or a special edition of carmina figurata or an anthology of difficult epigrams such as those collected in the last books of the Palatine manuscript, but of course every option is a matter of conjecture. The text of group 2, as noted by Gallavotti, comes from the IX-XIth centuries. Manuscripts of group 3 come from the XIIIth century onwards. Drawings in this group are consistent and lead to a whole family of the types 1a-2b and 1b-2b; there is no doubt that this tradition was that used by Holobolos and Pediasimos for their commentaries in the XIIIth Century. The testimonies of Eustathius, although extremely rhetorical, and Tzetzes, seem to refer also to a drawn version of the poems. It is also important to consider that this kind of drawing fits in with the testimonies we have of illuminated papyri, but this no doubt implies that

Wojacek (1993) and Ernst (1991: 751); the Ambrosianus and Vaticanus by Ernst (1991: 75). If the example of other Paterm Poems is relevant, we can also consider the different copies of the In honorem Sanctae Crucis of Rahnus Maturus, whose copyists respected even the colour of their models, although there is a great difference between the magnificent Vatican ‘purple codex’ and the poor copies. See Perria (1989) and Ernst (1991: 309-323).

13. The most important editions of the poems are those by Saumaise (1619); Bruack (1776), all six; Jacobs (1798): Dübner (1864), all six; Bergk (1868), (not including the Syrinx; Haeberlin 188), all six; Frankel 1915, only Siamas’ poems; Powell 1925; Diehl 1940, not including Syrinx; Beckley (1968 and 1975), both including all six; Gow (1950) for the Syrinx and (1952) for all six; Gallavotti (1993), all six; Strödel (2002), only Siamas’ poems.


16. The testimonies have been recently collected and studied by Snell (2003: 118-154).
Simias’ poems were originally conceived in layout 1a-2b or 1b-2b. Although Cameron has tried to demonstrate that Simias’ Pattern Poems “are not really figure poems at all”, the evidence collected by Gallavotti, Ernst and most recently Strodel clearly shows that the poems did have a pattern. As an example of the problems posed by the transmission of the text, we can consider the different shapes of the Axe, which are much less problematic than those of the Syrinx or the Egg. The text in most modern editions is presented as in the Palatine manuscript:

1. Ἀνδρόθεα δόρον ὁ θωκέης κρατερᾶς μηδοῦνας ἤρα τίνον Ἀθάνα
   τάμιος ἐπεὶ τὰν ιερὰν κηρὶ πυρίνῳ πόλιν ἠθάλωσεν
   οὐκ ἐνάρπισος γεγαδὸς ἐν κρομάχοις Ἀχαιῶν,
   νόν δ’ ἔς Ὄμηρειον ἔβα κέλευθον
   τριάς μάκαρ, δὲν τοῦ θυμῷ
   ὅδ’ ὀλβος
   δὲι πνεῖ.
   Ἄπος ἀμφιδέρπης
   σὰν χάριν, ἄχνα πολύβουλε Παλλάς.
   ἄλλ’ ἀπὸ κρανῶν ἑώραν νάμα κόμμες δικλῆς
   Δαρδανίδαν χρυσοβαρεῖς τ’ ἐστυφέλεις’ ἐκ θεμέλιοιοι ἄνακτας,
   ὅπως Ἐπείδου πέλεκυν, τῷ ποικ πύργον θεοτυκτῶν κατέρειψεν ἀπὸς.

Phocian Epeius, in gratitude for his strong device, to the virile goddess Athena
then when burnt to ashes with fire-breathing doom the holy city
a man who was not reckoned among the Achaeans chieftains,
but now he has entered on the path of Homer,
three times blessed he whom with a gracious
This blessedness
ever breathes.

mind you watchest over.
thanks to you, holy Pallas of many counsels.

but an unknown one who carried water from the pure fountains,
of the Dardanidae and dashed down from their seats the gilded kings,
gave the axe with which of old he laid in ruin the high, god-built towers.

The Palatine manuscript (group 1) presents a double-sided axe, in which
the verses have to be arranged as above. Hephæstion attests this arrangement for the Egg “and other poems” and the bucolic scholia

18. Text as edited by Gallavotti (1993), but layout as in the Palatine manuscript. Gallavotti’s text of reference for the bucolic poets and the recent edition of Strodel (2002) do not give any visual appearance to the Pattern Poems; although Gallavotti’s and Strodel’s prudence is laudable, their edited text does not represent any manuscript at all: every manuscript gives its own pattern.
19. Prose translation by Paton (1918), adapted to my own interpretation of the poem and the layout of the Palatine manuscript.
20. See plate nr. 1; a facsimile was published by Preisendanz (1911: 2,670).
relate it to the *Axe*21. The bucolic manuscripts present it as follows. The *Ambrosianus gr. C 222 inf.* fol. 362v (group 2) has an *Axe* in a layout very similar to that of the *Anthology* but with a ‘calligrammatic’ aspect, i.e. the text is not copied in horizontal (‘typographical’) lines but it is adapted to a semicircle22. *Vaticanus gr. 434*, a very important manuscript for the text of the Pattern Poems that preserves the work of Holobolos23, presents the *Axe* as *Ambrosianus*, but with a drawing which shapes the text24. Several manuscripts of the bucolic tradition, most of them late, present the text as the *Ambrosianus A 155 sup.*, i.e. like in *Ambrosianus C 222 inf* but with the figure rotated 9025. A manuscript of this type was used by Musurus for the *editio Iuntina* (1515), while the edition of Callierges (1516), whose importance for the text is well known, used a manuscript of the ‘calligrammatic’ type with a drawing, much less striking than that of the *Salamandrina* (1531) – from which also the influential Latin translation of Andreas Divus (1939) was made – or that of Wechel (1543), both of which were based on the *Callergiana*26. An obvious consequence of the arrangement as double-sided axes presented by most manuscripts of the bucolic tradition is the ‘handle’, which presents different metrical or prose texts, most of them not making any sense27. Basing himself or the Palatine manuscript, which he had recently ‘discovered’, Saumaise considered that the handle was not original since its text was very close to Egg v. 20. Manuscripts descending from Holobolos’ edition – e.g. *Vaticanus gr. 434* cited above – also present a handle, this time with a sort of (unmetrical) title.

The text of the *Axe* therefore can be found in at least four different layouts. Although the manuscript transmission gives no clues about

21. Ἡφασέατ, *Intr. metr.* p. 62.5-6 Consbruch: ταύτης τῆς ἱδέας ἔστι τὸ Ὄμον τὸ Σιμίου καὶ ἄλλα παίγνια. ‘Of this kind are also Simias’ *Egg* and other poems’. *Sch. ad Theoc.* p. 343.7-10 Wendel: δεί τὸν ἐναγινώσκοντα καὶ ἐξηγούμενον μετά τὸ πρῶτον κόλλον τὸ τελευταῖον λέγειν, ἐπί τὸ δεύτερον ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς καὶ μετ’ αὐτὸ τὸ δεύτερον ἀπὸ τέλους, καὶ ὅτως καθεξῆς ἕως τοῦ μέσου, ὧστε τὸ μέσον τέλος ἠλιθινὸς, ‘the reader should place the last kolon after the first, then the second from the beginning, and after this the second from the end, and continue in this way until the coming to the middle’.

22. See plate nr. 2. I have no notice of a published facsimile.


24. See plate nr. 3; reproduced by Ernst (1991: 70).


26. The transition of *carmina figurata* from manuscript to printed text needs a more extensive explanation, which I hope to give in the edition and commentary I am preparing; in the meantime, see Osbourne (1933).

which of them could have been the one copied in the papyri contemporary with Simias, the only layout without a handle is that of on the Palatine manuscript, so we can conclude that layout 1a-2a is closer to the original than layout 1a-2b. It is clear, in any case, that these texts are later additions to fit better the shape of an axe: the original text was conceived made to fit (or imitate) the shape of the blades only.

2. Origin

There have been three main interpretations regarding the origin of the Pattern Poems: 1) as texts derived from magical practice, 2) as a literary elaboration of real ‘pattern inscriptions’, destined themselves to be inscribed or not, and 3) as an extreme development of grigri and other puzzling devices used in Hellenistic Poetry. Let us begin with the less plausible. Dieterich and other authors after him tried to link the Pattern Poems to magical diagrams preserved in magical manuscripts and papyri. The spells in the form of a triangle that have been preserved in crude form in some papyri do not have any metrical or poetic features. Wojaczeck proposed that the Pattern Poems could have some relationship to magical practice and that the three poems by Simias are actually inspired by Orphic cult, an opinion adopted by some scholars but in general terms very difficult to support. According to Wojaczeck, Simias’ poems are a sort of tryptichon in which the Orphic Eros (Wings) uses the Axe to crack the cosmogonic Egg from which the world is created. Two (not really relevant) problems in the text of Wings are added by the author as a ‘proof’ of the Orphic character of the Eros described:

Λευσσε με τὸν Γάς τε βαθυστέρνου ἄνακτ’ Ἀρμονίαν τ’ ἀλλιώς ἐδράσινα: μὴδε τρέσις, εἰ τόσοι ὁν δάσκαλον δέσια λάβῃ γένεια. τάμος ἐγὼ γὰρ γενόμαι, ἀνίκε ἑκραίν’ Ἀνάγκα, πάντα δὲ Γάς εἴκε φραδαίσι λυγαίς ἑρπεταὶ, πάνθη, ὅς ἑρπεῖ ὅ’ αἰθρὰς. Χάουσε δ’, οὗτι γε Κύπριδος παῖς ὀκυπέτας οὐδ’ “Ἄρσεος καλεύμα: οὗτι γὰρ ἑκραίνα βία, πραύνον δὲ πειθοῖ.”

30. Layout as in the Palatine manuscript, adopted by every modern edition. Text as edited by Gallavotti. Prose translation by Paton (1918), adapted to my own interpretation of the poem and the layout of the Palatine manuscript.
εἶκε δὲ ὡς αἰεὶ ἡμέρας τε μνημόνευσαν οὐρανοῦ τοῖς δὲ ἐξώ ἐκκοιμηθάμεν ὕμνημι σκάπτρουν, ἐκρινον δὲ θεοὶς θεμισταῖς.

Look on me, the lord of broad-bosomed Earth, who established the Heaven elsewhere, and tremble not if, little though I be, my cheeks are heavy with bushy hair. For I was born when Necessity was ruler, and all yielded to her dire decrees, both creeping things of earth and those that move through the sky.

Of Chaos
The swift-flying son
I am called, not of Cypris or of Ares,
for in no way did I rule by force, but by gentle-voiced persuasion, and earth and the depths of the sea and the brazen heaven yielded to me. I robbed them of their ancient sceptre and gave laws to the gods.

In v. 1, Hephaestion and one of the two versions in the Palatine manuscript read Γὰς τε βαθυστέρνου, but manuscripts of the bucolic tradition read Γὰς τε βαθύστερνου. Most editors consider that the accusative is wrong and accept the first reading; Wojaczek proposed the opposite and corrected the text to Γὰν τε βαθύστερνου, so that Eros is the king who separates earth from heaven as in Orphic cosmogonies. Wojaczek proposes also to see an Orphic hint in vv. 4-7, arguing that Χῶνες δὲ should be read with the precedent and not with the following lines: “als ihren verderblichen Ratschüssen gehorchte alles, war kriecht und alles, was fliegt durch Helle (Äithra) und Aufklaffen (Chaos)”. The ‘Orphic’ interpretation of these passages as well as those of other passages of the Pattern Poems becomes very difficult to accept in view of the enormous amount of imagination shown by the author on the sole basis of common terms that do not have in the context of the poems the special meaning they have in religious works.

More plausible is the hypothesis formulated by Wilamowitz, Fraenkel and others, who relate the poems to epigraphical practice. Evidence collected by them includes IG IV 537, 566; V 1, 225, 226, 1497, 1518, 1519, 1520; V 2, 102; IPr. 434, and IG XIV 643. Most of these inscrip-

31. On the Orphic Eros, see frs. 30, 69, 75-80, 82, 83 and 86 Bernabé (=28, 54 and 57 Kern); it is open to discussion if the parody by Ar. Av. 673-702 should be credited or not. Cfr. Martínez Fernández (1987: 201-202) and specially Bernabé (1995).
32. Wojaczek finds further initiatory elements in ἄγνος (Axe v. 8), μάκαρ (v. 9), δαίμος (11), in the pure fountain from which Epesos takes water, in ἄγνος (Egg v. 5) and in an alleged cryptic reference to the myth of Prokne and Philomela in vv. 1-5 of the same poem. Other interpretations of the author, such as the ‘discovery’ of an initiatory gryphos in v. 2 of the Axe (Epesos is actually Epiekapaios, the Orphic Eros) are plainly absurd; see Martínez Fernández (1987: 293-304 and 211), and Cameron (1995: 36).
tions are very simple, often just a name of a dedicatory. They certainly adapt the text to the surface of the object dedicated, but none of them really resembles a Pattern Poem, except perhaps the most frequently quoted example, an inscribed axehead from Calabria (IG XIV 643)34:

Τὰς Ἡρας ἤτορὸς ἵππον τὰς ἣμι πεδίλοι. Ὀὐριστὸς μὲ ἀνέθεε ὀργάμος ἤφαιδον ἰδἐκάτον.

I am consecrated to Hera of the plain. Kynicus the butcher dedicated me as a tithe of his work.

"Quid amplius? Ecce tenemus securim, in cuius aere, versuum longitudine in versus diminuente dedicatio inscripta est", exclaimed Fraenkel (1915:58). If the origin of Simias’ poems is to be found in objects like this, Pattern Poems are the result of the same process as gave origin to the literary epigrams of the Hellenistic age: a process of imitation of a popular form to which new contents coming from high poetry were added in a striking combination35. More precisely, they would be dedicatory epigrams avant la lettre, in which not only the style of popular dedications was imitated but even the form of the dedicated object. This interpretation justifies the inclusion of the poems in the Greek Anthology, although it is well known that there are many poems in the collection that have nothing to do with epigrams. Although it is plausible that epigraphical practice had some influence or the work of Simias, it is more difficult to accept, as do other authors who advance this interpretation, that the poems themselves were conceived to be inscribed on real objects such as a statue of Eros, a facsimile of Epeios’ axe or an egg36. In his edition of the poems, Haeberlin postulated that they were purely literary pieces, written without real objects in mind; the different layouts preserved in the manuscript tradition reinforce this.

The Pattern Poems of Simias represent in any case an extreme development of literary tendencies that are commonly described as typically Hellenistic: formal (especially metrical) experiment and word-play. We can find parallels for metrical experiment in Hellenistic epigrams (both

34. On this inscription see Dittenberger (1878); Roberts (1887: 1 nr. 306); SCDI 1653; Schweyzer (1923: nr. 437); Jeffery (1961: 260); Mauiri (1962: 68-70); Guarducci (1974: 43-45). Photographs: Roehl (1907: 120); Landi (1979: 277 pl. 119); Guarducci (1974: 44).
36. See e. g. Cameron (1995: 34-35), Wojaczek (1993: 162-164) even tried to reconstruct the ‘real’ syrinx on which the text attributed to Theocritus could have been inscribed; as Gow (1914) demonstrated, this kind of syrinx with decreasing pipes is not documented for the Hellenistic period, in which only the square syrinx is attested.
inscribed and literary) and in the work of other minor poets such as Philikos, Boiskos, Kastorion of Soloi, Cercidas and Chaeremon.27 Wordplay is well attested also in epigrams and in enigmatic texts such as Lycophron’s Alexandra. Even Callimachus and Theocritus used metrical experiment and griphoi at a much more moderate level. Theoretical approaches to the griphoi are attested by an interesting text by Klearchos, Περὶ γρίφων, in which seven types are distinguished. Three of them are very clearly explained by Athenaeus; they refer to manipulation of formal elements such as letters, syllables and words.28 A fourth type refers to metrics, as we also know from Athenaeus; as can be inferred from the same passage, the other three refer to manipulation of sense: improvisation, parodies, replies and centoines, although their classification is not clear.29 In any case, the first four methods are the most important in relation with carmina figurata and give a context for the Pattern Poems as elaborated forms of poetry.

29. Clearch. fr. 86 Wehrli (ap. Athen. X 448c): ἐν δὲ τὸ περὶ γρίφων ὁ αὐτός Κλέαρχος φησιν ἐπὶ ἑαυτὸν ἐφη γρίφοιν. ἐν γραμματι μὲν, οἷον ἐρούμεν ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀλφα, ὡς ὁ νομισματικὸς ἤ φωνικός, δύος δὲ καὶ. Εἶχειν τὴν κελεύει τῶν γραμμάτων ἢ μὴ ἔχειν, καθάπερ οἱ ὑστημοί καλομένων δὲ γρίφων ὅθεν καὶ Πίναρος πρὸς τὸ σὲ ἐκποίησαν φθείριν, οἷον γρίφου τινὸς ἐν μελοποιίᾳ προβληθέντος. ἐν συλλαβῇ δὲ λέγονται γρίφοιν, οἷον ἐρούμεν ἐξετρισμὸν ὑπὶς ἤγεσε τα βία, οἷον ἄπειρα, ὡς ἐχει τελευτην τὸ ναξ, ὡς Καλλίανας, ὡς τὸν λέοντα καθηγεῖσθαι, οἷον Λεονίδας, ὡς ἐμπαλιν τελειῶν εἶναι, οἷον Θρασύλας. ὥστε μικρά, οἷον ἐρούμεν ἐν ἐνόματα ἀπλά καὶ ὑπόθεταις δυσλαβίας, οἱ μορφή τις ἐμφανισ- τατε τραγικής ἤ πάλιν ταπεινής, ἢ ἐσθαν ἐνόματα, οἷον Κλεάνωμος, ἢ διεφόρα, ὥστε διονύσιος, καὶ τοῦτο ἤτοι οὐκ ἐνόμα τοῦτο ἢ πλεόνυμον, οἷον Ἐρμαράδος ἢ ἀπὸ Διῶς ἀρχεσθεῖν. Θικλῆς, ἢ Ἐρμοῖ, ἢ Ἐρμόδρομος ἢ λήγειν εἰ τόχοι εἰς νικός. Translation by Gulic 1930:IV,531-533: ‘And again in the treatise On Riddles, Clearch. says there are seven kinds of riddles. Depending on a letter, as when we are to tell, for example, the name of a fish or a plant beginning with α; similarly, when the proposer requires a word which contains or does not contain a certain letter, like the riddles called the s-less; whence even Pindar composed an ode against the letter s, putting forth, as it were, a kind of riddle in lyric poetry. Then there are riddles depending on a syllable, where, for example, we are to name something measured that begins with ba, like basileus (king), or that ends in –nav, like Callianax, or that has the lion for its leader, like Leonides, or contrariwise at the end, like Thrasyllos. Or riddles involving a whole noun, where, for example, we must give either simple or compound nouns of two syllables, wherein the form has a pompous or, conversely, a low implication; or names which are godless, like Cleonymus, or have a god in them, like Dionysius; in this case the noun may be made up from the name of either one or several gods, like Hermaphroditus; or a noun beginning with Zeus, like Diocles, or with Hermes, like Hermodorus; or one ending, perhaps, in –nicus.’
30. Cf. Clearch. fr. 63 (= 84) Wehrli (ap. Athen. X 457 c); the passage refers to symptomatic entertainment, but the fact that Clearch. quotes Kastorion of Soloi’s permutable hymn makes clear that he is also thinking of literary texts.
3. Vocabulary and metrics

Vocabulary and dialect present the Hellenistic koine with a blending of Doric (lyric) and Ionic (epic) as is usual in other Hellenistic poets. The proportion (and fluctuation) of both is very close to that of the ‘mixed’ Idylls of Theocritus (13, 16, 17, 24) and authors of epigrams like Asclepiades and Posidippus. Apart from usual ἂν, Doric is limited to gen. pl. (Axe v. 4 Δαρδανιδᾶν, v. 6 κρανᾶν ἰθαρᾶν, Egg v. 16 Νομίφιν, v. 17 θαλαμῖν); a pronominal τά in Egg v. 14 and ποικι in Axe v. 2. Ionic and epic flavour are better attested, as for example the geminated dative in Egg v. 13 (τέκεσσι) along with the simple form in 15 and 20 (ποσι, ποσίν); uncontracted forms such as Wings v. 10 (πραυνών), 11 (χάλκεος), Egg vv. 16 and 19 (ὄρεων), 14 (τερέντα) and 20 (θοοίς, δονέων). Epic dat. pl. in –αίτι and –αιτι along with –οίς and –ως. Epic gen. Ἀρεός in Wings v. 9, radical aorist ἔβλαν in Egg v. 16 and epic imperative δέξο in Egg v. 5. The vocabulary shows the usual links to the poetic tradition with some hapax like ἀνδροθέα (Axe v. 1), ἀμφιδερκοματ (v. 10), μονόδουτος (Egg v. 12), ἀμφίπαλτος (Egg v. 17), and πετρόκοτος (Egg v. 18), which are nowhere as numerous as those of the Syrinx or the Altars. Simias’ Pattern Poems are thus, from the point of view of language and dialect, not very different from other Hellenistic poems.

As stressed by Wilamowitz, the metrics of Simias’ Pattern Poems are of lyrical origin. Both Axe and Wings present a decreasing combination of choriambic metra from ‘hexameter’ – used later κατὰ στίχον by Philokos – to a syncopated monometer. Such a radical experiment is not so strange in the Hellenistic vogue of epodic metrics, in which Simias seems to have played an important role. But the Egg, considered by

42. For examples and bibliography, see Gow (1950: I,xxvi-lxxvii); Molinos Tejada (1990); Sens (2004); Guichard (2004: 103-108; forthcoming 2005).
43. The sigmatic aorist ἔκτεισε in Egg v. 7 reported by Powell (and Martínez Fernández) as the reading of the Palatine manuscript is wrong: it reads ἕκτεσεν. Haeberlin conjectured Doric acc. viv in Egg v. 6 against the consensus codicum μνη.
44. As noted by Hephaest. Ench. p. 30.21-31.14 Conschbruch, Philokos boasted as being the first to use this metre (see Lloyd-Jones and Parsons on SH 677); Sch. ad Theoc. p. 341. 13-15 Wendel: τὸ δὲ μέτρον τοῦ Περφυτίου καὶ τοῦ Πελέκεως χορωμβικόν, ‘the meter of Wings and Axe is choriambic’.
46. Among the few fragments preserved we can find a catalectic anapastic trimeter (fr. 9 Powell), a Simmiacum (fr. 15) – considered a rare verse by Hephaestion –, and a catalectic dactylic pentameter or Simmiacum (fr. 17); cfr. Koster (1962: 60,167,262).
West “the most complex product (metrickly) of all Hellenistic book-
poetry”, presents a much more striking creation:  

Κοτίλας 1

τὴν τοῦ ἄληριον νέον 3
πρόφρον δὲ θυμὸ δέξῃ  δὴ γὰρ ἀγνάς 5
τὸ μὲν θεῖον ἐρμίδας ἔρμιδας ἐκείνες κάρυς 7
ἀνοιγε δ’ ἐκ μέτρου μονοβάμιον μέγιν πάροιβ’ ἀδέξιν 9
θεοῖς δ’ ὑπερθέν ἀκυκλέχριον ἑρέον νεῖμα ποδῶν σποράδων πιφαυσκέν 11
θοαῖς ἵστ’ αἰόλαις νεβροίς κόλ’ ἀλλάσσαν, ὀρνισθότων ἐλάφων τέκεσσι’ 13
πάσι κρασίνιοις ὑπὲρ ἄκρων ἱέμεναι ποσὶ λόφων κατ’ ἀρθήμας ἤγνοις τιβήνας’ 15
καὶ τὰς ἀμόθυμος ἀμφίπαλτον ἀψι’ αὐθὰν ὧγρ εν κόλπω δεξάμενος θαλαμὰν μυκοτάτω 17
καὶ δ’ ἄκα βοϊς ἀκοίν μεθέπον δ’ ἄφαρ λάτων νυφοβόλων ἀν’ ὀρέαν ἔσταται ἄγκος’ 19
ταῖς δ’ ὑδαίμον κλυτὸς ἦσα θοοίσα ποσίν δονέαν ἀμα πολύπλοκα μεθεὶς μέτρα μολῆς. 20
ῥήμα πετρόκοστοιν ἐκλιπόν ὀροῦσ’ εὐνίας, ματρὸς πλακύκτων μαύλομενος βαλίς ἔλειν τέκος, 22
βλαχή δ’ οἴον πολυβότόν ἀν’ ὀρέαν νομὸν ἔβαν ταυναφύρων τ’ ἐς ἄντρα Νυμφάν’ 24
ταί τ’ ἀμφρότω πόθῳ φίλας ματρὸς ῥώσαν’ ἡγοῦμαι μεθ’ ἵμεροντα μαζόν, 14
ἐγινει θενών τε κρότον πανύιολον Πειρίδων μονοδόουσαν αὐθὰν, 12
ἀριθμὸν εἰς ἄκραν δεκτὰ’ ἤγνιον, κόσμον νέμονα μυθῶν, 10
φῦλ’ ἐς βροτών ὑπὸ φίλας ἠλων πετροίσα ματρός, 8
λὲγειά μν κάρ’ ἰτ’ ματρὸς αὖδίς’ 6
Δωρίας ἄρδονος. 4
ματέρος 2

Lo here a new weft of a twittering mother, a Dorian nightingale; receive it with
a right good will, for pure was the mother whose shrilly throes did labour for it.
The loud-voiced herald of the Gods took it up from beneath its dear mother’s
wings, and cast it among the tribes of men and bade it increase its number
onward more and more – that number keeping the while due order of rhythms –
from a one-footed measure even unto a full ten measures: and quickly he made
fat from above the swiftly-slaniting slope of its vagrant feet, striking, as he went
on, a motley strain indeed but a right concordant cry of the Pierians, and mak-
ing exchange of limbs with the nimble fawns, the swift children of the foot-stir-
ing stag. Now these fawns through immortal desire of their dear dam do rash
pace after the beloved teat, all passing with farhasting feet over the hilltops
in the track of that friendly nurse, and with a bleat they go by the mountains, pas-
tures of the thousand feeding sheep and the caves of the slender-ankled
Nymphs, till all at once some cruel-hearted beast, receiving their echoing cry in
the dense fold of his den, leaps speedily forth of the bed of his rooky lair with
intend to catch one of the wandering progeny of that dappled mother, and then
swiftly following the sound of their cry straightway darteth through the shaggy
dell of the snowclad hills. Of feet as swift as theirs urged that renowned God the
labour, as he sped the manifold measures of the song.

47. Layout as in the Palatine manuscript, adopted by Haerlin and Beckby; text as
edited by Gallavotti. It is not known if Powell’s (and Gow’s) layout Represents to their
own interpretation of how the poem could have looked or is just due to typographical rea-
sons. Prose translation by Paton (1918).
Simias describes his poem as an ἄρην νέον, ‘a new weft’, in which known meters and rhythms are combined in a new way. The metrical expertise pursued by the poet consists thus in taking to its extreme the combination of meters already practised by himself and other poets: it is more a matter of elaborating new patterns than of radical invention. From this point of view, Simias is a Hellenistic poet of the ‘elaborated’ tendency, who works upon a material already known with a new focus.

4. The (necessary) Margins of the Canon

The literary context of Simias’ Pattern Poetry has to be found in other ‘hyper-elaborated’ forms of poetry developed in the Hellenistic period: isopsephic poems, lipograms, anagrams, acrostics, permutative texts, rhopalic verses, lexical puns, riddles, etc. These kind of literary games, conceived for the ‘happy few’ (or those who wanted to be considered so), produced interesting literary and inscribed texts. The most recent survey of Hellenistic Poetry groups them all among “aberrazioni marginali”. I agree with the authors that experimentalism, intellectualism, artificiality and other similar are not the best terms to define Hellenistic Poetry as a whole generation of philologists did. The relative progress of the discipline requires no doubt the legacy of that generation to be revised, but it is important to avoid the critical ‘anxiety of influence’ that leads to contradict systematically past orthodoxy.

48. The clearest and most convincing metrical explanation remains Wilamowitz 1906:248-249, adopted by most editors: τρ. ΙΙ (vv. 1-2), 2τρ. ΙΙ (vv. 3-4); 3τρ. ΙΙ (vv. 5-6); 4τρ. ΙΙ (vv. 7-8); ια 1 11 2ια ΙΙ (vv. 9-10); 3ια 1 2ια 1 ιρ ΙΙ (vv. 11-12); 2ια 1 2ια 1 ιρ ΙΙ (vv. 13-14); σπ 1 3ια 1 2ια ΙΙ (15-16); 3τρ. 1 2ια 1 2ε χ ΙΙ (vv. 17-18); 3αι 1 2ια 1 2δα (vv. 19-20); as usual when dealing with lyric metrics, κολο can be identified in different ways.

49. Hellenistic hyper-elaborated texts have not been collected and studied as a whole; the best treatment is Fantuzzi – Hunter (see next notes). For further bibliography, see Bing (1985); Cameron (1995b); Vogt (1965); Courtney (1990); Merkelbach-Stauber on SGO 06/02/27.


51. Fantuzzi & Hunter (2002: 40-41) explain this better than I can: “Affermare la coscienza ambizione di questi autori a costruire un (nuovo) sistema letterario, che in sostanza ha esser poco di ludico-arbitrario e presuppone invece un senso storico maturo e consapevole, non significa dimenticare che il III secolo a.C. alimentò senz’altro più che ogni altra epoche precedente anche la figura del letterato compiaciuto di sperimentalismi e di contaminazioni pretendenti sperimentali. Ma questa componente investì quasi esclusivamente un certo numero di figure minori, e non è il caso di continuare a consentire con quegli studiosi che per amore di schematismi e contrapposizione polari rispetto alle epoche arcaiche e classica hanno sopravvalutato la portata di tale componente anche nella poesia callimacheo-teororea.”

52. Cameron (1995) is undoubtedly an excellent example of the virtues and risks of challenging orthodoxy.
Pattern Poems have been considered ‘aberrazioni’ both by past and present orthodoxy in great part because they present themselves as such; a type of poem existing in almost all literatures and periods can hardly be marginal, except if one of its basic features is that they want to appear as marginal. From Simias to most recent poets publishing extreme forms of poetry on the Internet, the appeal to originality, erudition and marginality is more than a topic: it is a calling card of the genre, a rhetorical sign of identity. Pattern Poems and the extensive widespread archipelago of related poetic types have thus a very important role in the canon: the forms that present themselves as the outsiders are in fact a part of a strong tradition and, paradoxically, are very conservative inside their own type. Kastorion of Soloi’s permutable Hymn to Pan plays the same role as Raymond Queneau’s Cent mille milliards de poèmes; Simias’ Pattern Poems appear in their moment as innovative as Apollinaire’s Calligrammes appear at their turn. Literature needs a territory that seems to be free, fresh and new; a territory at the limit of poetic discourse, that is in itself the limit of literary discourse.

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Plate 3: *Vaticanus gr. 434, f. 3r (s. XIII-XIV)*

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BEYOND THE CANON

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