Lanna (S.), Mesomede. Inno a Iside. Edizione con introduzione, traduzione, commento, e altri testi del culto isiaco. Pp. xii + 260. Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2021. Paperback, €31. ISBN: 978-88-5491-151-2.

The last decade has seen an uptick of interest in the extraordinarily varied poetic production of Mesomedes, a freedman of Hadrian and author of ‘citharodic songs’ (Suda μ 668). His surviving corpus includes hymns to the Muse, the Sun, Nemesis, Nature, and Isis, songs on animals (a swan and a gnat), an ode to the Adriatic sea, descriptions of a sun-dial and a sponge, a riddle on the Sphinx, and a cameo on glassblowing. Mesomedes’ work circulated widely in the Imperial period; his metrical arrangements influenced Lucian and Synesius, he is cited by John Lydus, and enjoyed significant popularity in Egypt in the second and third century AD. He was also honoured with a cenotaph by no less than the emperor Caracalla.

Scholars in the Anglosaxon world will probably know Mesomedes either through Pöhlmann-West’s *Documents of Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford 2001), which contains four poems accompanied by musical notations (a *unicum* in the entire medieval manuscript tradition), or Hopkinson’s anthology of *Greek Poetry of the Imperial Period* (Cambridge 1994), which features an edition of the *sponge.* Apart from these, and a characteristically instructive overview (with English translation of some of his poems) by E.L. Bowie in D.A. Russell’s *Antonine Literature* (Oxford 1990), there has been virtual silence on Mesomedes’ non-musical poems for the entire second half of the past century.

Sara Lanna, who already authored a commentary to Mesomedes’ *Hymn to Physis* (Rome 2013), and Janna Regenauer, the author of an edition with German translation and commentary to all poems (Frankfurt 2016, of which Lanna makes sparing use), championed this resurgence in interest. Their work is complemented by some important recent studies, which were probably appeared too late for Lanna’s consideration, namely Psaroudakes’ chapter on the music and performance of the *Hymn to the Sun* (in D’Angour and Phillips’ *Music, Text, and Culture in Ancient Greece,* Oxford 2018); and a new article by Pöhlmann (*Greek and Roman Musical Studies* 7.1, 2019) arguing that a second century AD inscription from the sanctuary of Apollo Hylatas in Courion preserves the text of Mesomedes’ lost *Hymn to Antinous*, Hadrian’s lover. (an attribution to M. was indeed considered by Lanna in the introduction to her *Physis* book)

This new commentary is divided into two parts, a detailed study of the reception of the cult of Isis in literary, epigraphic, and papyrological sources (pp. 3-94), and a section devoted to Mesomedes’ hymn (pp. 97-177), comprising an introduction to the poem (though not the poet), a critical text with apparatus, Italian translation, and commentary. Let me start by pointing out what the book does *not* offer, before moving on to the numerous praiseworthy aspects of Lanna’s work.

Recent bibliography on Mesomedes’ poems other than *Isis* (by Fernández Nuin, *REC* 40 (2013), 141-54, and Keith, *CQ* 64.1 (2014), 428-31) is not taken into account. Particularly striking is the exclusion of Whitmarsh’s study of Hadrian’s patronage of the poet (*Beyond the Second Sophistic*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 2013, 154-73), which could have been engaged with in the introduction; and of M. Brumbaugh’s chapter ‘Making the Hymn’ (in A. Faulkner, O. Hodkinson (eds.), *Hymnic Narrative and the Narratology of Greek Hymns*, Leiden 2015, 165-82), which explores the limited narrative scope of Mesomedes’ hymns and reads the *Hymn to Helios* and *to the Adriatic* as praise poetry.

The book presupposes the reader’s knowledge of Lanna’s previous book, which contained an extended introduction to Mesomedes, an analysis of the historical and cultural context in which he operated, and his relationship with previous hymnographers. The lack of all that here, incl. the poet’s biographical details and his involvement with the Hadrianic court, is a reason for disappointment to the reader, who encounters occasional references to Hadrian (p. 44, 48) before being told about the patronage of the emperor (who could have commissioned his work, p. 101). In a dense, but succinct general introduction to the text, Lanna advances the interesting hypothesis that the *sollers poëta* mentioned in Apuleius, *Met.* 11.9 is in fact Mesomedes himself (p. 100 n. 556).

The first half of the book is devoted to the cult of Isis in the Graeco-Roman world and is divided into four sub-chapters. The first is underwhelming; it contains a selection of literary passages on Isis, devoid of any contextualization, which is merely functional to the interpretation of the hymn in the commentary. I personally did not find the classification of documents as historical, logographic, ‘literary/against the Nile cult’, ‘literary/erudite’, ‘literary/religious’ particularly productive, and I disagree -for what matters- on the exclusion from the list of *PSI* 844, which I do consider a *Hymn to Isis* (see my *Adespota Papyracea Hexametra Graeca*, Berlin-Boston 2020, no. 19).

Chapter 2 tackles in detail the spread of the cult of Isis in the Graeco-Roman world through an analysis of the epithets of the goddess, helpfully classified as *myrionyma* ‘many-named’, *kyria* ‘mistress’, Isis-Sothis, Isis-Hathor, Isis *Regina*, and Isis *Fortuna*. It also includes a study of epithets associated with the Imperial power of Rome and *epicleseis* suggesting an assimilation of the goddess to Demeter and Aphrodite. This is a strong chapter; Lanna investigates the dynamics of *interpretatio graeca* in the Ptolemaic times, the gradual spread of the cult of Isis and the reasons for her popularity at Rome, and the local VS cosmopolitan aspects of her cult.

Chapter 3 is equally good. It focuses on the mysteric character of the Isis cult in the Mediterranean, analysing the terminology of her mysteric rites and concluding on the basis of epigraphical and literary evidence that initiation rites probably developed no earlier than the Imperial times and involved a ritual of death and re-birth. (L. aptly uses the word ‘Osirization’) Chapter 4 investigates the henotheistic character of the cult of Isis, laying the foundations for the excellent analysis of the hymn’s *incipit* εἷς ὕμνος later in the commentary.

An excellent metrical analysis of the hymn follows. Lanna brilliantly reconciles the information provided by a metrical scholion to the text, which explains the hymn as a combination of pyrrhics and iambics, with modern scholarly interpretations, i.e. Cretic dimeters with occasional ‘intrusions’ of paeons and palimbacchiacs (p. 103). I wonder, in fact, whether the reference in v. 15 to the Curetes, the inventors of the Cretan war-dance *pyrriche*, is not meant to reflect the pyrrhic start of some of the verses in the hymn. Given the complexity of the text at stake, the reader would have welcomed a full metrical articulation of the hymn rather than a simple list of units and more eloquent explanation of technicisms found in the scholion (e.g. ‘decasemic rhythm’ and ‘hypolydian tropos’). I note that Husmann’s ‘Zu Metrik und Rhythmik des Mesomedes’ (*Hermes* 83.2 (1955), 231-36), which engaged with the problematic v. 14, is absent from the discussion.

The critical text is carefully established, and is based on the inspection of the photographic reproduction of the *codex unicus*. Lanna does a brilliant job at fixing the metrical inconsistencies of the manuscript text; in particular, her emendation of vv. 9-10 (previously proposed in D. Gigli Piccardi, E. Magnelli (eds.), *Studi di poesia greca tardoantica*, Florence 2013, 65-78) is entirely convincing.

The commentary (pp. 115-177) is certainly the strongest asset to the book; incredibly detailed, well-researched, and paying equal attention to issues of language, style, metre, textual transmission as well as cultural and religious phenomena. A quick look at Lanna’s excellent discussion of v. 2 ἁλιπόρος (p. 119) and v. 114 ἄρρητος (p. 161) will give the reader a sense of the painstaking philological work behind these entries.

The book offers a table of *loci isiaci comparandi* and a generous selection of Isis-related texts with critical apparatus and Italian translation, including Isidorus’ *Hymns to Isis*, three inscriptional hymns to the goddess, nine aretalogies, relevant extracts from Apuleius, and the Isis litany from *P.Oxy.* 1380 (pp. 181-233).

Philologists will certainly welcome a wonderfully detailed 260-page study on just 19 verses and will excuse the frequent repetition of *loci similes* throughout the various sections of the book and the occasional presence of typos (I counted 31, mostly in the Greek). Overall, whilst there is little attempt to link the poet’s corpus to the contemporary historical context and the book does not discuss the possible performative setting of the hymn, Lanna has certainly succeded in providing a good introduction to the cult of Isis in the Graeco-Roman world and an excellent philological commentary to Mesomedes’ *Hymn to Isis.*

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