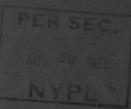
VOL. 82 · 1984 · FASC. 2

# ERANOS

ACTA PHILOLOGICA SUECANA

A VILELMO LUNDSTRÖM CONDITA

Edenda curaverunt
Birger Bergh, Åke Fridh
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The Almqvist & Wiksell Periodical Company Stockholm, Sweden

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Eranos, Acta philologica Suecana was founded in 1896 by Vilhelm Lundström, then lecturer at the University of Uppsala, from 1907 professor of Latin at the University of Gothenburg. Prof. Lundström had sole charge of Eranos until his death in 1940 (vols. 1–37). Vol. 38 (1940) was edited by Dr Harry Armini, Gothenburg. In 1941 the editorship of Eranos was taken over by Dr Tönnes Kleberg, Gothenburg, Librarian of the University of Uppsala in the years 1946–66, who, with the assistance of various collaborators, remained at the helm until the end of 1975.

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#### Books

intended for consideration in the bibliography should be sent to: Eranos, c/o Universitetsbiblioteket, Box 510, S-75120 Uppsala 1, Sweden.

#### Publication dates

Fasc. 1, autumn of the current year; fasc. 2, spring of the subsequent year.

Subscription and Circulation
The Almqvist & Wiksell
Periodical Company,
P.O. Box 45150
S-10430 Stockholm, Sweden.
Prices: Volume 80, 1982, Sw. kr. 150, postage included. Volume 81, 1983, Sw. kr. 185, postage included.

#### Back volumes

Price per volume Sw. kr. 135, postage included. To be ordered from the Almqvist & Wiksell Periodical Company.

#### Advertisements

(full or half page) to: Eranos, c/o Universitetsbiblioteket, Box 510, S-75120 Uppsala 1, Sweden.

#### Printer

Almqvist & Wiksell Tryckeri AB, S-75181 Uppsala, Sweden

### Korinna's "Glorious Songs of Heroes"

By Jane M. Snyder Ohio State University

Since the publication in 1930 of E. Lobel's theory that Korinna of Tanagra was a Hellenistic writer—despite ancient evidence connecting her with the 5th century B.C.—nearly all the scholarship about her poetry has centered on the controversy surrounding her date. The dispute continues, with the pendulum now perhaps swinging back in the direction of the 5th century, but it seems unlikely that the question will be finally resolved on the basis of the evidence presently at hand. 1 As a result of the focus on the issue of Korinna's date, as well as the initial difficulties inherent in establishing the text of the three major fragments, little has been written on the subject matter or style of her poetry, except insofar as these topics have a bearing on the central controversy. The resulting judgement of the poet tends in the direction of labelling her a somewhat simple-minded Archaic folk-singer, or a clever Hellenistic imitation thereof.2 The existing fragments, however,

<sup>1</sup> E. Lobel, "Corinna", Hermes 65 (1930) 356-65. Others who argue for (or at least tend to favor) the Hellenistic dating include M. L. West, "Corinna", Classical Quarterly 20 (1970) 277-87; Pierre Guillon, "Corinne et les Oracles Béotiens: La Consultation d'Asopos", Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique 82 (1958) 47-60; D. L. Page, Corinna (London: Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, 1953) 65-84; and Charles P. Segal, "Pebbles in Golden Urns: The Date and Style of Corinna", Eranos 73 (1975) 1-8. Scholars who favor the 5th-century date include Zoltan Franyó and Bruno Snell, Frühgriechische Lyriker (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1976) vol. 3, p. 13; A. Allen and J. Frel, "A Date for Corinna", Classical Journal 68 (1972) 26-30; Kurt Latte, "Die Lebenzeit der Korinna", Eranos 54 (1956) 57-67; Douglas Gerber, Euterpe (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1970) 394-95; Umbertina Lisi, Poetesse Greche (Catania: Studio Editoriale Moderno, 1933) 110; and C. M. Bowra, "The Date of Corinna", Classical Review 45 (1931) 4-5.

The text of Korinna used here is that of D. L. Page, Poetae Melici Graeci (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), with correction of the typographical error in 654.i.22 (χρουοσφαίς corrected to χοουσοφαῖς). This article is part of a larger study of Greek and Roman women writers, for which thanks are owed to the College of Humanities, Ohio State University for a sabbatical leave and to the Horace H. Rackham Visiting Scholar program at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

See (e.g.) John G. Griffith, "Early Greek Lyric Poetry", in Fifty Years (and Twelve) of Classical Scholarship (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968) 66: "Stylistically ..., the narrowly provincial interest of her subject matter and unexciting yet clear form of expression might suggest folk-Poetry." Gerber (above, n. 1) 395 in referring to the "charm and appeal" of Korinna's work, is one of few modern commentators who express any appreciation of her style.

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indicate that the probable scope of Korinna's themes involves primarily heroic song and that her style is informed by a marked degree of literary sophistication. Far from being a quaint writer of obscure old wives' tales narrated in a pedestrian style, as the handbooks generally imply, Korinna seems to have treated the chief figures of Boeotian legend in such a manner as to win the admiration of various Roman-period writers, including Antipater of Thessaloniki, Propertius, and Statius.

One source of confusion over the subject matter of Korinna's poetry is the claim by a late mythographer that the title of one of her books was  $\gamma\epsilon\varrhoo\bar{\iota}\alpha$ , a term which has been variously interpreted as "tales of old time" or in a more pejorative sense as "Altweibergeschichten", "old wives tales", the latter translation inevitably bearing connotations of triviality and ignorance—qualities which need not be inherent in the Greek word itself. Moreover, the detection of apparently the same word as used by Korinna herself to describe what she sings to the chorus of Tanagraean girls (655.i.2 *PMG*, see below) has complicated the matter further, since in the papyrus the term is spelled with initial digamma, not gamma.  $F\epsilon\varrhoo\bar{\iota}\alpha$ , if the reading is correct, would seem to have nothing at all to do with  $\gamma\epsilon\varrhoov$ ; according to the most recent judgements, the term is of doubtful meaning and therefore of little independent help in defining Korinna's themes.

If we are to determine Korinna's subject matter and treatment, then, we must rely largely on the poems themselves, particularly the three major papyrus fragments, which for convenience we may refer to as the singing contest, the daughters of Asopos, and the Terpsichore fragment. Mutilated and scanty though these passages may be, they do at least hold some clues to the nature of Korinna's work. Since these fragments are generally unfamiliar, Page's text, together with my own translation, precedes the discussion of each below.

The Singing Contest (654.i.12-34 PMG)

Ιευ. [....] Κώφειτες ἔκρου]ψαν δάθιο[ν θι]ας βρέφο]ς ἄντροι, λαθρά[δα]ν ἀγ15 κο]υλομείταο Κρόνω, τα-νίκά νιν κλέψε μάκηρα ' Ρεία μεγ]άλαν τ' [ά]θανάτων ἔσ-ς] ἔλε τιμάν τάδ' ἔμελψεμ΄ μάκαρας δ' αὐτίκα Μώση
20 φ]ερέμεν ψᾶφον ἔ[τ]αττον κρ]ουφίαν κάλπιδας ἐν χρουσοφαῖς τừ δ' ἄμα πάντε[ς] ὧρθεν΄

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See fr. 655.2 PMG. Cf. LSJ Supplement, s.v. [F]εροῖα, and Pierre Chantraine, Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1968) vol. 1, p. 217, For the older interpretations, see LSJ, s.v. γεροῖα ("tales of old time") and Wilhelm Schmid and Otto Stählin, Geschichte der Griechischen Literatur (Munich: Beck, 1929) part 1, vol. 1, p. 446 ("Altweibergeschichten"). See also below, n. 9.

πλίονας δ' εἶλε Κιθηφών'
τάχα δ' Έρμᾶς ἀνέφαν[έν
25 νι]ν ἀούσας ἐρατὰν ὡς
ἕ]λε νίκαν στεφ[ά]νυσιν
...]. ()ατώ, ανεκόσμιον
μάκα]ρες' τῶ δὲ νόος γεγάθι'
ὁ δὲ λο]ύπησι κά[θ]εκτος
30 χαλεπ]ῆσιν Εελι[κ]ὼν ἐ....] λιττάδα [π]έτραν
....]κεν δ' ὄ[ρο]ς' ὐκτρῶς
....]ων οὑψ[ό]θεν εἴρισέ νιν ἐ]μ μου[ρι]άδεσσι λάυς'

"... the Kouretes
hid the very holy infant of the goddess
in a cave, in secret from
crooked-counseled Kronos, at that time when
blessed Rhea stole him

And seized great honor
from the immortal gods." Such things he sang.
Immediately the Muses instructed the Blessed Ones
to cast their pebbles—secret ballots—
into golden-gleaming voting urns.
They all stood up together.

Kithairon seized the larger share of votes.

Swiftly Hermes brought [all] to light,
crying out that he had seized
lovely victory. The Blessed Ones
placed a crown [upon his head]
and adorned him; his heart was filled with joy.

But the other one, Helicon,
gripped by dreadful pain,
[tore out] a bare boulder;
the mountain [yielded]; piteously
[he groaned] and from on high hurled
it [downward], [breaking it] into
a thousand tiny stones...

From various late sources we know that Helicon and Kithairon were thought to be brothers who were rival kings in early Boeotia before they were transformed into mountains. Korinna capitalizes on both the human and natural aspects of the two figures; the victor is crowned, just as an ordinary human contestant would be, but the loser is portrayed both as a superhuman giant and as an actual mountain who angrily rips a boulder out

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See W. H. Roscher, Ausführliches Lexicon der Griechischen und Römischen Mythologie (Leipzig: Teubner, 1886–90) vol. 1, part 2, col. 1986. For an interpretation of Korinna's poem as representing the brothers before the metamorphosis (based on a new reconstruction of the text of lines 31–34), see Joachim Ebert, "Zu Korinnas Gedicht vom Wettstreit zwischen Helikon und Kithairon", ZPE 30 (1978) 5–12.

of his own body. The resulting tiny stones are reminiscent of the very instrument of his defeat, the voting pebbles cast under the direction of the Muses, who, ironically, often frequented Mt. Helicon.

Other repeated motifs lend unity to the narrative, and ideas are connected through association rather than through grammatical subordination. The secrecy surrounding Zeus' whereabouts at the end of the second contestant's song is echoed in the ensuing description of the secret ballots used by the Muses. Similarly, in the song Rhea seizes (ἕλε, line 18) honor from the other gods, just as in the description Kithairon "seizes" (είλε, line 23) the larger share of votes, with the same verb repeated yet a third time in Hermes' report of the victory (ἕλε, line 26). The verbal repetition of ἕλε (lines 18 and 26) may suggest that Hermes is deliberately echoing the language used by the victorious contestant; thus it would seem that the opening lines of the fragment should be assigned to Kithairon. If these lines do indeed give us the conclusion of Mt. Kithairon's part in the competition (as Wilamowitz was the first to suggest), the choice of the story of Zeus' birth as the subject matter of his song is highly appropriate, since Mt. Kithairon was a site on which an important cult of Zeus was located.5 Finally, the recurrence of an adverb of speed (αὐτίκα, line 19, followed by τάχα, line 24), emphasizing the swiftness of the Muses' administering of the voting process and of Hermes' announcement of the result, creates a sense of swift-paced, decisive action that is echoed in the sudden, violent reaction of Helicon upon learning that he has lost the contest.

Aside from the use of adjectives modelled on Homeric epithets such as ἀγκυλομήτης, there is nothing particularly arresting in any of the description; no metaphors, no images except those directly related to the narrative. Our response is not so much to any special beauty of language as to the vividness of the story itself and to the details chosen by the poet to characterize the two prominent features of the Boeotian landscape, Mt. Kithairon and Mt. Helicon. There may be a touch of humor, for example, in the fact that Helicon, despite close association with the civilizing forces of the Muses, loses not only the contest but also his temper. His destructive loss of control contrasts sharply with the Muses' legalistic administration of the balloting procedure, described by Korinna with "precise dicaeastic particularity." Despite the surface appearance of a simple folk-song about two mountains, then, the singing-contest fragment appears on closer examination to be a relatively sophisticated treatment of the rivalry between two legendary figures of Boeotian myth.

The same papyrus also contains a slightly longer fragment from a similar narrative poem, of which only the middle portion survives. The intact section is narrated by the prophet Akraiphen, who is answering the ques-

<sup>6</sup> Segal (above, n. 1) 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Paus. 9.3.1-2. On Wilamowitz' view, see Page, Corinna (above, n. 1) 20, n. 3.

tions of the god of the river Asopos (on whose banks Tanagra is located) as to what became of his nine maiden daughters:

The Daughters of Asopos (654.iii.12-51 PMG)

ταν δὲ πήδω[ν τρῖς μ]ὲν ἔχι Δεύς πατεὶ[ό πάντω]ν βασιλεύς, τοῖς δὲ πόντ[ω γᾶμε] μέδων 15 Π[οτιδάων, τ]ᾶν δὲ δουῖν Φῦβος λέκτ[ρα] κρατούνι. τὰν δ' ἴαν Μή[ας] ἀγαθὸς πῆς Έρμᾶς οὕ[τ]ω γὰρ Ερως κή Κούποις πιθέταν, τιώς έν δόμως βάντας κρουφάδαν χώρας ἐννί' ἑλέσθη τή ποκ' είρώων γενέθλαν ἐσγεννάσονθ' είμ[ιθί]ων κάσσονθη π[ο]λου[σπ]ερίες 25 τ' ἀγείρω τ' ἐς [μ]α[ντοσ]ούνω τρίποδος ὥιτ[.....] τόδε γέρας κ[.....]ν ές πεντείκο[ντα] κρατερών διήμων πέριογοίς προφά-30 τας σεμνῶν [ἀδο]ύτων λαχὼν άψεύδιαν 'Ακ[οη]φείν' πράτοι [μέν] γὰ[ο Λατ]οίδας δῶκ' Εὐωνούμοι τριπόδων έσς ίῶν ]χρε]ισμώς ἐνέπειν, 35 τὸν δ' ἐς γᾶς βαλὼν Ούριεὺς τιμά[ν] δεύτερος ἴσχεν, πῆς [Ποτ]ιδάωνος ἔπιτ' 'Ωα[ρί]ων άμὸς γενέτως γῆα[ν F]ὰν ἀππασάμενος χώ μεν ώραν[ό]ν άμφέπι τιμάν δ[.....]ν οὕταν. τώνεκ[.....]ν ἐνέπω τ' ἀτ[ο]έχ[ιαν χρει]σμολόγον τού δέ[νου Είκέ τ' ά]θανάτυς 45 κὴ λού[.....] φρένας δημόν[... (Ε) έκου] οεύων ῶς ἔφα [μάντις] π[ε]οάγείς τὸν δ' ᾿Α[σωπὸς ἀσ]πασίως

δεξιᾶς ἐ[φαψάμ]ενος δάκοού τ' [ὀκτάλ]λων ποοβαλ[ὼν ὧδ' ἀμίψ[ατο φ]ωνῆ΄

"Of [your] daughters
Zeus the father, king of all, has [three];
Poseidon, who rules the sea, married
three, while Phoibos rules the beds
of two,

"And the fine boy Hermes, son of Maia, [has] one. For thus Eros

and Cypris persuaded [the gods]
to go into your house and
seize the nine maidens.

"One day they will bring forth a race of demigod heroes, and they will be exceedingly fruitful and never-aging; [such are the things I learned] from the oracle's tripod.

"This honor, I alone, Akraiphen the prophet, superior among my fifty brothers, obtained—the truth from the holy inner sanctum.

"For first Leto's son granted to Euonymos to utter oracles from his tripod; but Hyrieus, having cast him out of the land, was the next to hold the honor—

"Poseidon's son. Then Orion, my father [held the office], having regained his own land; he now frequents the heavens, and this office fell to my lot.

"... I utter
the truth as spoken through my oracles.
But you now, yield to the immortals
and [set your] heart [free from sorrow],
since you are father-in-law to the gods."

Thus spoke the bent, old prophet. Asopos, gladly touching him by the right hand and shedding a tear from his eyes, answered aloud as follows....

Asopos' reply is missing, but the description of his emotional display of feelings in response to the prophet's account suggests that Akraiphen was successful in persuading him to accept what has befallen his daughters. Korinna seems to be following a local version of the story which is substantially different from other, later accounts (e.g. Apollodorus 3.12.6), and which sanctions the abduction of the nine girls as an act of fate that will bring future glory to their family through their offspring. The prevailing tone of the passage is one of submission: even the gods must submit to the will of Eros and Cypris; the daughters of Asopos must submit to their husbands; and Asopos is advised to yield to fate and submit to the will of the gods.

Besides giving us a further example of Korinna's use of the received tradition, the "Daughters of Asopos" fragment suggests that Korinna's

style varied according to the nature of the subject matter. Here the extreme simplicity of the narrative, lacking the Homeric epithets of the singing contest, focuses our attention on the complexity of time as it is presented in these lines. The prophet contrasts the past event (the rape of the girls) with future glory (the heroes they will bear), at the same time pointing out that for the daughters of Asopos themselves there will be, in effect, neither past nor future, for they will be never-aging creatures in a world in which time does not exist. The prophet's own account of his predecessors, who include his father the great Orion and his grandfather Hyrieus, is not merely (as Lisi throught) an otherwise pointless exercise in genealogy. Rather, in addition to certifying the credibility of Akraiphen's prophecy, it changes the direction of the telescopic view of times to come toward times past instead. The names of the progenitors of Asopos' descendants, given emphasis by their initial positions in the line (Δεὺς πατείρ, line 12; Ποτιδάων, line 15; Φῦβος, line 16; and πῆς Έρμᾶς, line 18), are balanced by the names—placed either in initial or final positions in the line-of the prophet and his ancestors: 'Αχρηφείν himself (line 31), Ούριεύς (line 35), and 'Ωαρίων (line 38). In addition, the two families are linked together through Poseidon, who is at the same time son-in-law to Asopos and great-grandfather to Akraiphen. Thus Korinna draws together into the same continuum the heroes of old and the heroes of the future.

Another papyrus contains the only other fragment from Korinna's work that is of any length, a badly mutilated section of some twenty lines that may be the beginning of the opening poem in the book possibly titled  $F \in Q \circ I \cap I$ . The fragment seems to address the poet's role in preserving the traditions of the community through celebrations in song and dance of its heroes of old. Speaking in the first person, Korinna proclaims that Terpsichore herself called upon her to sing:

The Terpsichore Fragment (655.i.1-16 PMG)

ἐπί με Τεοψιχόρα [
καλὰ Γεροῖ' ἀισομ[έναν
Ταναγρίδεσσι λε[υκοπέπλυς
μέγα δ' ἐμῆς γέγ[αθε πόλις

λιγουροκω[τί]λυ[ς ἐνοπῆς.
ὅττι γὰρ μεγαλ. [
ψευδ[.]σ. [.]αδομε[
..]...ω γῆαν εὐρού[χορον
λόγια δ' ἐπ πατέρω[ν

κοσμείσασα Γιδιο[
παρθ[έ]νυσι κατα[
πο]λλὰ μὲν Καφ[ισὸν ἱώνγ' ἀρχ]αγὸν κόσμ[εισα λόγυ]ς,
πολλὰ δ' ՝Ωρί[ωνα] μέγαν

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Lisi (above, n. 1) 122.

15 κὴ πεντεί[κοντ'] οὑψιβίας πῆδα[ς οῦς νού]μφησι μιγ[ί]ς

Terpsichore [summoned me] to sing glorious Fεροῖα to the Tanagraean girls in their white robes.

And the city rejoiced greatly in my clear, plaintive voice.

For great things ...

... the broad-plained earth ...

I, having done honor to the oracles in the time of our fathers ...

... to the maidens ...

I myself often honored with words the leader Kephissos but often also great Orion and the fifty mighty youths whom [he begat] by mating with nymphs. ...

Although we cannot be certain, the white-robed Tanagraean girls mentioned in line 3 are probably the members of the chorus to whom Korinna is to teach her parthenion for public performance. 8 Nor can we be sure of the subject matter of such a brief fragment; but the references to "the time of our fathers", to the Boeotian river-god Kephissos, and to the legendary hunter Orion and his offspring suggest that once again Korinna's song celebrates major heroic figures in Boeotian myth. As in the singing-contest fragment, the style here seems to include frequent use of adjectives, particularly Homeric ones such as εὐούχορος. The poet claims for herself a public role in addressing the polis as well as success in winning the community's approval through the clarity of her words. Whatever the 'καλά Γεροί' were, it is unlikely that they consisted of "old wives' tales"; a better guess, based on the fragments themselves and on Korinna's claim in 664b PMG that she sings of the "excellent deeds of male and female heroes" (εἰρώων ἀρετὰς χεἰρωάδων), would be something like "glorious songs of heroes." Her dialect may be parochial, but her function as a public poet is of broader concern—to draw upon the common tradition in an attempt to establish a moral framework.

The several fragments and titles of Korinna's poetry which have been preserved through brief quotations by the grammarians further support the notion that her work went beyond the modest ambitions of folk-song or entertaining tales. The self-rebuke in 657 *PMG* ("Indeed, do you sleep perpetually? Hitherto you were not [asleep], Korinna"); the criticism of a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> West (above, n. 1) 280.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Cf. Franyó and Snell (above, n. 1) 133: "Hohe Lieder von Helden". This interpretation is consistent with the suggestion of Dee Lesser Clayman, "The Meaning of Corinna's Fεροῖα", CQ 28 (1978) 396-97, who connects Fεροῖα with εἴρω/ἐρέω and translates the term as "The Narratives".

fellow poet, Myrtis (664 a PMG); the poems about Boeotos (658 PMG). Orion (662 PMG), and the Seven Against Thebes (659 PMG); the more pan-Hellenic themes apparent in titles or paraphrases involving Athena, Apollo, and Iolaus (667, 668, 661 PMG)—all these suggest a scope that has more in common with the aims (if not the treatment) of Pindar or Bacchylides than with those of the folk material in, for example, the Attic skolia.

The paucity of fragments and the question of Korinna's date prevent her from being assigned her appropriate niche in the history of Greek literature. To judge from the fragments themselves, she excelled at heroic narrative which relied largely on simple, direct language but was also characterized both by selective use of Homeric epithets and by significant repetition. With perhaps an intentional humorous twist, she draws parallels between the mythological world and everyday human behavior, as in the Muses' use of the democratic voting procedure or Mt. Helicon's temper tantrum. Her verse may lack the brilliant imagery or philosophical profundity of other Greek lyric poets, but to label her style as "naive" does injustice to the refreshing simplicity with which she treats the relationships among the mythological, natural, and human worlds. 10

Despite the limitations of her dialect, Korinna was a well-known poet outside her homeland, at least by the 1st century B.C. Antipater of Thessaloniki includes her in his list of nine mortal Muses (along with Praxilla, Moero, Anyte, Sappho, Erinna, Telesilla, Nossis, and Myrtis) in an apparent allusion to a poem about Athena:

> καὶ σέ, Κόριννα, θοῦριν 'Αθηναίης ἀσπίδα μελψαμέναν

And you, Korinna, singing of the impetuous shield of Athena.11

During the same century, Propertius indirectly sings her praises by claiming that his lover surpasses Ariadne in dance and Aganippe (the spring on Mt. Helicon) in lyre-playing, and that when she compares her own verses to those of antiquae ... Corinnae, they are of equal merit. 12 Evidence in Statius' Silvae suggests that Korinna's poetry was also the subject of Roman academic studies, at least during the 1st century A.D. Addressing his schoolmaster-father, Statius praises his skill in "opening up the secrets of refined Corinna" (pandere ... tenuisque arcana Corinnae), who is included in a list of authors taught at his father's school in Naples, along with Homer, Hesiod, Sappho, Pindar, Alkman, Callimachus, and others. 13 Although tenuis ("thin", "fine") can carry pejorative connota-

13 Stat. Silv. 5.3. 156-158.

See, e.g., Schmid-Stählin (above, n. 3) 447, who refer to her "naive Berichterstattung".

Prop. 2.3.22. For a discussion of the difficulties in the Latin text here, see L. Richardson, Jr., Propertius: Elegies I-IV (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1977) 220-21.

tions ("slight", "trifling"), both the context here and the frequent use of the word in discussions of literary style elsewhere as a synonym for *elegans* or *subtilis* suggest that Statius intends the epithet as a complimentary assessment of Korinna's poetry, while at the same time his reference to *arcana* acknowledges the difficulties presented by her Boeotian dialect. Yet one translator, perhaps unduly influenced by the negative modern view of the Boeotian poet as naive and simplistic, renders Statius' description of her as "meagre" Korinna. 14

Korinna, whose fame merited a statue and a portrait which Pausanias reports having seen at Tanagra, may not have had the emotional power of Sappho or the philosophical depth of Pindar; however, the fragments themselves, as well as the Roman-period assessments of her work, suggest that she is best described not as a meagre writer of old wives' tales but as a respected composer of "glorious songs of heroes" based on the legends of her native Boeotian land. 15

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> J. M. Edmonds, ed., Lyra Graeca (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967) vol. 3, p. 11. See, contra, H. Frère and H. J. Izaac, ed., Stace: Silves (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres", 1944) vol. 2, p. 199, n. 9: "Dans Stace l'épithète tenuis semble technique: tenue dicendi genus = τὸ γένος ἰσχνόν; et le mot arcana concerner les difficultés du dialecte béotien. . . ."

<sup>15</sup> Paus. 9.22.2.