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ΟΥ ΜΟΝΟΝ Η ΚΥΝΗΓΙΑ – ON THE COMPLEXITY OF THE CONTENT OF OPPIAN'S KYNEGETIKA

Kynegetika (On hunting) by Oppian, a didactic poem in four books, was dedicated to the emperor Caracalla and depicts one of the most fashionable and luxurious entertainments in the Hellenistic and Imperial Period, namely hunting. However, the aforesaid work can not be treated simply as a "hunter's handbook". I intend to present the complexity and variety of its content and to demonstrate that Oppian based his work on the Hellenistic literature on hunting. In spite of the fact that Kynegetika was written during Caracalla's reign, in terms of its character and subject matter, it belongs to the Hellenistic tradition. This work abounds with historical facts and political allusions, expressed in a poetic and metaphorical way. The extensive descriptions of exotic animal species prove not only Oppian's erudition and sophistication, but also his references to the Hellenistic tradition of hunting for African animals that was initiated in the times of the Ptolemaic dynasty. These accounts illustrate contemporary knowledge in the area of zoology and natural history. Apart from hunting as an activity, this work also has many other dimensions. The aim of this presentation is to show the multifaceted character of Oppian's work.

Keywords: *animals, beast, court poetry, didactic poetry, game, Hellenistic literature, hunting, Kynegetika, Oppian of Apamea, Pseudo-Oppian*

J. K. Anderson, the author of a book called *Hunting in the Ancient World*, used a particular kind of metaphor in order to describe the character of Oppian's *Kynegetika* – namely, he compared it to a mosaic. The author claimed that, in its overall effect, the poem resembles beautiful mosaic pavements of the poet's native northern Syria.¹ It seems that it is impossible to imagine a more accurate comparison, that could reflect the complexity of Oppian's work. As it is hardly possible to point to the main and the most

¹ ANDERSON (1985: 135).

important element in the mosaic, in the same vein, the character and theme of the aforesaid poem cannot be pinpointed with just one term. The author of the aforementioned publication intentionally drew attention to its title. The neuter plural *Kynegetika* (Things of the Hunt) has been used here not without a reason: it suggests the variety of the content.²

The *Kynegetika* of Oppian of Apamea is a didactic poem written in hexameter verse, which consists of four books. The poem was included in the same manuscript as another didactic poem entitled *Halieutika* (*On fishing*), whose author was, however, another poet called Oppian (of Cilicia). Undoubtedly, the author of *Kynegetika* was not from Cilicia in Asia Minor, but from Apamea in Syria, as the poet himself declares in his work (2.127; 2.156–157). Thus, to avoid confusion, the author of *Kynegetika* is frequently called Pseudo-Oppian. Since the issue of the authorship is not the primary subject matter of my paper, for convenience the author will be referred to simply as Oppian.³ The work describes horses, dogs, the animals that are hunted, their respective characteristics and habits, as well as methods and weapons of hunting. These descriptions of are enriched with numerous mythological digressions and similes⁴ that not only enliven the content, but also demonstrate the author's knowledge of ancient literary classics.

The poem under discussion was dedicated to Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus Augustus (better known as Caracalla); hence, one may assume that it was written between AD 212 and 217. The overt dedication opens the prologue (1.1–3). What follows is a commendation to the emperor and his mother, Julia Domna (1.4–15). The emperor, who is also mentioned in the further part of the work (4.20), was apparently a patron of Oppian.⁵ The prologue abounds with more and less direct allusions and evocations of Roman imperial policy, historical events and to the emperor himself. However, these are expressed obliquely: the author uses various means of artistic expression, such as apostrophes, epithets, metonymies and others. Accordingly, the work cannot be considered to be simply a handbook for hunting enthusiasts, but a piece of imperial court poetry as well. Thus, the

² ANDERSON (1985: 129).

³ On the issue of the 'two Oppians', see: MARTÍNEZ – SÁNCHEZ (2003).

⁴ The digressions and similes in *Kynegetika* are the primary focus of BARTLEY (2003). See also JAMES (1969).

⁵ It is worth mentioning that Julia Domna was renowned as a literary patroness who commissioned Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, BOWERSOCK (1969: 103). Her interest in Apollonius was linked to the tour to the East she made with Caracalla in AD 215, JONES – BOWERSOCK (1970: 12). The tour included a visit to Apamea, so it might be claimed on these grounds that Oppian benefited not only from Caracalla's patronage, but also from the patronage of the empress.

aim of my paper is not only to present the complexity of the *Kynegetika*'s content and its multifaceted nature, but also to prove that – due to its character and the subject matter – the poem actually belongs to the Hellenistic tradition; however, Greek literature is a continuum, and one should keep in mind that the modern classification into Hellenistic and Imperial literature is rather artificial and this theoretical division is made solely for the purpose of convenience.

Kynegetika represents a genre of court poetry that flourished in the Hellenistic period under the patronage of kings of the great monarchies.⁶ The factor that highlights the court character of the work is the poet's request for imperial patronage. The request is an intrinsic part of the *invocatio imperatoris*, which is located customarily at the end of a proem, hence one may assume that the poet's appeal for help is a clear reference to hymnic poetry (cf. e.g. *h.Cer.*490; *h.Merc.*8; *Orph. H.* 6. 10; *H.* 10. 29). From a compositional point of view, the structure of the *invocatio imperatoris* (1.43–46) may be divided into three parts. The first line describes the scope of the imperial reign of Caracalla.⁷ The next line is a veiled simile and flattery of the emperor. Finally, the last two lines consist of well-wishing: the poet wishes that the emperor will have a successful and prosperous reign and so that the poet himself will create beautiful hunting songs.⁸ It is worth noticing here that the short reference to the limits of Caracalla's lands goes from the East to the West, a reversal of the usual order.⁹ Interestingly, he follows the same order when describing the landscape surrounding the plain by the foot of Emblonus (2.123–124).¹⁰ According to Bartley, the form ἀντολίηθεν is a poetic innovation by Oppian who has been inspired by the epigram *AP* (16.65) of Crinagorus.¹¹ In this epigram, a divine figure has arisen like the Sun and this description strongly evokes the encomiastic tone adopted here. The parenthetical line 44 continues the flattery: Oppian used the Homeric motif and vocabulary to liken Caracalla to Zeus. The august, ambrosial

⁶ Cf. Nicander of Colophon's didactic poems *Theriaca* and *Alexipharmaca*. Nicander flourished under Attalus III of Pergamum and dedicated to him the Hymn to Attalus, which did not survive.

⁷ A parallel between the description of the scope of the imperial reign and the description of the influence of Demeter and Persephone noticed by SCHMITT (1970: 58) (*h.Cer.*490–491) seems to be a clear allusion to the divine cult of the emperor.

⁸ Perhaps Caracalla was one, who inspired the poet, OPELT (1960: 56).

⁹ SCHMITT (1970: 58). Cf. *Nemes.* 65–66, where *fines* denote the limits set by the Ocean on the East and the West, DUFF (1934: 491, n. e).

¹⁰ However, Oppian elsewhere presents lands of the Severan rulers from the West to the East (1.12–15).

¹¹ BARTLEY (2003: 178).

brows of Caracalla are an obvious reference to and conflation of the parallel description of Zeus by Homer, dark brows and ambrosial locks merged (*Il.* 1.528). Accordingly, the poet lowers himself and exalts the emperor as worthy of the imperial divine cult, a literary technique already noted by Schmitt.¹² In fact, the whole proem, fulsome in mood, is considered one of the most reliable testimonies to the influence of the imperial cult upon the literature of that period.¹³ The apostrophe that opens the proem upholds the tradition of hymnic poetry: the adjective μάκαρ is a recognizable Homeric epithet, a metonymic term for gods and fortunate men. In *Kynegetika*, it is a form of address to the emperor, which not only reflects the imitation of Homeric poetry, but also demonstrates one of the forms of imperial worship.¹⁴ The apostrophe is followed by the list of metaphorically expressed metonymies of Caracalla (1.1–3).¹⁵ For instance, the phrase φέγγος ἐνναλίων πολυήρατον Αἰνεαδάων fulfils two functions: it reminds us that Romans were derived from Aeneas' lineage¹⁶ and it contains veiled praise of the warlike exploits of the Severan dynasty, exploits that are hinted at through the use of the word ἐνναλίων. Subsequently, the poet proceeds to discuss the divine parentage of Caracalla (1.3–11). As it was rightly noted by scholars, neither the mention of the recipient's parents nor the idolatrous praise are essential components of the dedication.¹⁷ However, if one takes into consideration the fact that *Kynegetika* was written at the time when emperors were venerated, these elements appear perfectly justified and understandable in that context. To prove Caracalla's divine origin, Oppian calls his father, Lucius Septimius Severus, Ἀυσόνιος Ζεύς. The adjective Ἀυσόνιος derives from the noun Ἀυσόνια, which began to denote Italy from the Hellenistic period onwards.¹⁸ However, not only Caracalla's father was represented as divine; a relatively long fragment was dedicated to the mother of the emperor, Julia Domna.¹⁹ She was born into the royal dynasty of Emesa, where her father, Gaius Julius Bassianus fulfilled the function of high priest of the Sun god.²⁰ The empress was thought

12 SCHMITT (1970: 57–58).

13 OPELT (1960: 53).

14 SCHMITT (1970: 42).

15 Cf. *Pi. O.* 2.7; *Pi. I.* 2.17; *Pi. N.* 3.64.

16 αἱ Αἰνεαδάαι is a metonymy for Romans: *Lucret.* 1.1, *Verg. Aen.* 8.648, MAIR (1928: 2, n. b).

17 HERZOG-HAUSER (1924: 65).

18 SCHMITT (1970: 44).

19 Cf. *Theoc.* 17.56–57 (BARTLEY 2003: 171).

20 SCHMITT (1970: 44).

to be of divine origin; she is called Ἀσσυρίη Κυθέρεια and οὐ λείπουσα Σελήνη. The first epithet not only identified her with Aphrodite, but also contains an allusion to her Syrian origin. The second one is somewhat obscure. It may refer to the Syrian goddess Astarte, who was frequently depicted with the crescent moon or, a symbol that is in some cases interpreted as cow's horns.²¹ However, according to an *interpretatio graeca* the Syrian goddess was identified with Aphrodite and Selene as well.²² Nonetheless, whichever goddess the empress was intended to connote, Oppian's goal was to demonstrate the divine descent of Caracalla.

As was mentioned earlier, the request for patronage is traditionally situated at the end of the proem. Accordingly, Oppian verbalised his request in the last two verses of the *invocatio imperatoris* (45–46). In his appeal to Caracalla, Oppian alludes to the hymnic tradition by referencing a similar work. The phrase πολίεσσι καὶ εὐθήροισιν ἀοιδαῖς might be an emulation or even a paraphrase of the dedication and hymn to Poseidon in *Halieutica*: λαοῖς σύμπασι καὶ ἡμετέρησιν ἀοιδαῖς (H.2.42).²³

According to Schmitt's modern commentary on the first book of the *Ky-
negetika*, Oppian in his proem did not use either Hellenistic or Imperial *Formelschateses*, since he apparently prefers Homeric and Pindaric phrases and vocabulary.²⁴ However, it is not impossible that Oppian attempted to emulate the leading poet of the Hellenistic court, Callimachus.²⁵ His *Hymn to Zeus* abounds in more and less overt allusions to the patronage of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, as well as to the patron himself. However, Callimachus as a putative Hellenistic model for Oppian was slightly more explicit about his expectations. In the final verses of his *Hymn*, Callimachus salutes the god and asks him for ἡ ἀρετή as well as for τό ἄφενος. Afterwards – possibly to make his request more reasonable – Callimachus argues that lack of excellence results in lack of riches, and, conversely, that wealth helps people gain excellence. This argumentation precedes the actual request, conveniently expressed with an often used Homeric epic formula: δίδου δ' ἀρετὴν τε καὶ ὄλβον.²⁶

Oppian in his fulsome invocation to Caracalla apparently strives to achieve a similar effect. The encomiastic praise and the imagery used by the

21 SCHMITT (1970: 45).

22 MAIR (1928: 3).

23 BARTLEY (2003: 178).

24 SCHMITT (1970: 59)

25 BARTLEY (2003: 21, 170–178). To read more on the Callimachean motifs in the *Ky-
negetika*, see: COSTANZA (1991).

26 Call. *Jov.* 94–96

poet demonstrates the current of Alexandrianism in his work²⁷ and shows that – in spite of the nearly five centuries between Callimachus and Oppian – the relation between the poet and the lord remained the same and that the poets quoted and paraphrased the same corpus of literary sources and used the same means of artistic expression to reach their goals. The pattern of emulation of Homeric, Pindaric and Callimachean phrases proves the continuity of Greek literature; the division into periods—although convenient for modern scholars—is actually only a certain approximation for the sake of literary theory.

Hunting was a popular subject for didactic writers.²⁸ Among authors who wrote handbooks for hunters one can list Xenophon, Arrian, Grattius and Nemesianus. The handbooks were customarily entitled *Kynegetika*, since hunters frequently used packs of dogs in pursuing game.²⁹ These treatises gave advice to hunting enthusiasts and had a purely instructive and descriptive character. However, the *Kynegetika* by Oppian strongly differs from the works of the authors listed above. What distinguishes the poet's work the most is his approach to the subject matter. Oppian revealed new aspects of hunting: he considered this sport a luxurious pastime and an occasion for friendly rivalry between aristocrats. Such aspects of hunting, although innovatively demonstrated by Oppian, are neither new nor original: hunting as a sport—collecting trophies and boasting of one's own proficiency and success – is a pastime that probably developed soon after humankind began to live in urban conditions.³⁰ In most ancient Mediterranean civilisations, hunting was considered to be a royal activity, since it evoked associations with mythological heroes, such as Gilgamesh or Heracles. Frequently, it served as a tool of royal propaganda and demonstration of king's vigour and power. It is worth mentioning that big game, such as elephants, boars and, in particular, lions, were deemed to be exclusively royal prey. Boars and lions as game enjoyed special status, and not without reason. These animals were often associated with the best mythological hunters, for instance, with Heracles, who killed the Erymanthian Boar, the Calydonian Boar and Nemean Lion. Furthermore, they were status symbols for aristocrats. Literary sources confirm the "royal" status of boars and lions; for example, according to Athenaeus, a young Macedonian could not participate in a feast or-

²⁷ WHITBY (2007: 126). However, that current is somewhat superficial. For instance, Hellenistic poems are known for strict adherence to poetic metre; in turn, Oppian's metre is less than perfect.

²⁸ HOPKINSON (1994: 197).

²⁹ HUGHES (2007: 56).

³⁰ HUGHES (2007: 55).

ganised by aristocrats until he hunted a boar on his own (*Ath.* 1.31). In turn, Cassius Dio reports that no one except a king could hunt a lion during the royal hunt; if somebody dared to do so, the king would be right to put him to death (D.C. 69.10.3.).³¹

In the Hellenistic Period, hunting acquired special significance. In Alexander the Great's days, success in hunting constituted the most salient mark of the excellence and fascination with the pursuit of game that was a distinctive feature of the Macedonian élite.³² As Elizabeth Carney writes, *in the agonistic Hellenistic world, where excellence was not simply a matter of being good, but of being better than anyone else, one man's success always meant that someone else had failed.*³³ Thus, succeeding in the sport was crucial, as it reflected a man's *arete*. Oppian's approach to this sport shows clear associations with the Hellenistic tradition of royal hunting. Although *Kynegetika* contains some didactic parts, the poem highlights passages concerning hunting for wild, exotic animals, such as lions, elephants and other ones. In addition, animals Oppian chose to describe call up associations with a Persian tradition of luxurious royal hunting in *paradeisoi*,³⁴ game reserves.³⁵ The author refers to these royal hunts which were in the Hellenistic period considered a venue for competition between the king and those who hunted with him.³⁶ It represented an immensely fashionable and luxurious kind of entertainment that was an intrinsic part of an elegant, élite lifestyle. This phenomenon reflected social practice initiated during the reign of the Ptolemaic dynasty. This social practice was expressed through the Greek noun *tryphé*, the meaning of which denotes *softness, luxury, extravagance*. This term connotes fashionable lifestyle and luxurious pastimes that were highly desirable in the elite milieu of the Roman antiquity. Oppian's poem fits thematically into this lifestyle, since it contains descriptions of hunts for wild, exotic animals, which was a kind of embellishment of life and refined entertainment affordable only for the nobles.

Although some scholars who have researched this poem jointly claim that Oppian's work contains more absurd witticisms about hunting than

³¹ On the connection between the idea of the manhood and hunting, see: COHEN (2010).

³² CARNEY (2002: 59).

³³ CARNEY (2002: 68).

³⁴ Commentators on Xenophon's *Anabasis* define *paradeisos* as *a park, an inclosed pleasure ground, usually stocked with game* (MATHER – HEWITT 1910: 482). For further reading on *paradeisoi*, see: LUTKHUIZEN (1999).

³⁵ See: Xen. *Cyr.* 1.3. 14; 1.4.5.; 1.4.11.; 8.6.12; *An.* 1.2.7; *HG* 4.1.15–16.

³⁶ CARNEY (2002: 62).

factual information,³⁷ one must admit that some descriptions – for instance, of the rhinoceros – surprise us with a wealth of detail. The author meticulously describes this animal: its size, colour and temperament. These types of descriptions prove Oppian's relatively deep knowledge of the wildlife, possibly derived from stories of natural historians and zoologists.

Additionally, Oppian's work contains passages of a purely didactic character as well. In fact, nearly the entire first book consists of instructions concerning hunting. For example, Oppian discussed in detail the preferable physical appearance of a hunter (1.81–90).³⁸ As far as hunter's equipment (1.91–109) and weapons (1.147–157), Oppian gives an extended account as well. Explicit instructions on how to hunt particular animals are given in the fourth book. The author comprehensively discusses different techniques used for hunting wild beasts: he advises using bait, deception or traps.

However, some descriptions self-evidently have a paradoxographical character and cannot be treated as a serious source of information on animals. A passage concerning the ichneumon's cunning nature (3.407–448) can be invoked here as a model example of this kind of story. The same type of fanciful description may be found in passages on the origin of hybrids, such as a giraffe (a crossbreed of a camel and a leopard) and an ostrich (a crossbreed of a camel and a sparrow).

Similarly, several passages concerning horses definitely represent this type of story. For instance, as the author advises, the colour of the horse's eye affects the type of quarry it is most suitable for (1.350–310). Hence, if the hunter wanted to hunt a bear, he should mount a blue-eyed horse, if a deer, a dark-eyed one, and if a leopard, a tawny-eyed one. Analogically, probably to provide an entertaining interlude between the lists of horse and dog breeds, Oppian decided to embellish his work with a digression on the eugenics in horses, doves and men (1.326–367).³⁹ The first compositional part of the digression (1.326–348) describes the marking of horses and it includes a comparison with a bridegroom dressed for marriage. The diction of this digression does not shine in terms of rhetorical figures used (as opposed to, for example, an elaborate description of horses in battle, 1.213–220). The relative simplicity of this digression, as Bartley argues, is an intentional move by the poet. Oppian refrained from stylistic embellishments, as the topic was unusual enough on its own.⁴⁰

37 ANDERSON (1985: 129).

38 Cf. Poll. 5.18.

39 BARTLEY (2003: 115–116).

40 BARTLEY (2003: 117).

Digressions and paradoxographical stories add colour to the content and enliven the poem. Even if in some cases one finds them fanciful or spurious, one must admit that through such interludes the content gains variety and the poem, attractiveness. Accordingly, Oppian's work cannot be classified as a typical hunting treatise, simultaneously due to the poet's unique approach to the subject matter and the content. By contrast, *Kynegetika* by Grattius shows most of characteristic features of a didactic product: the metre, the length, technical details and the use of narrative panels.⁴¹ The material of Grattian's work is rather dry and repetitive.⁴² The content is not leavened by sensationalism, or by generic, textual and tonal variety or by the use of metaphors, similes or digressions. Hence, one may presume that Grattius' treatise may not have enjoyed great popularity among his contemporary audience. In turn, *Kynegetika* by Oppian surprises modern readers – and it probably surprised Oppian's contemporaries as well – with sophistication and erudition. The author draws from literary sources and anecdotes. He frequently cites local and rather uncommon variants of myths (for example, he considers a myth about moles that sprang from king Phineus, 1.614–628), apparently trying to emulate the practice of his Hellenistic predecessors. The variety of sources used suggests that Oppian's intended audience must have been well educated and familiar with Greek and Roman literature and mythology. This fact proves that, in spite of the artificial divide between Hellenistic and Imperial literatures, the intended type of audience did not change as far as poetry is concerned. If one assumes that Oppian's target audience was select and associated with the imperial court, one may consequently realise that for such an audience the poetry was a droll embellishment of life and a sophisticated kind of entertainment. The readers, cultured and often worldly, were at the same time conservative in taste and manner. They seemingly preferred erudite, novel and sensational works in refined style, works that would also preserve an archaizing style and language.⁴³ In turn, their expectations shaped Oppian's choice of the subject and style. It may be claimed, that the poem met all the audience's expectations: it was a work in sophisticated dactylic hexameter, written in the extravagant diction of Alexandrian Homerism⁴⁴ and embellished with numerous literary evocations.

⁴¹ TOOHEY (1996: 197–198).

⁴² However, as Toohy points out, the poem attracts attention due to its strong ideological bias and the fact that the structure of instructions on hunting is tailored to the current Roman policy.

⁴³ EASTERLING (1985: 551–552).

⁴⁴ EASTERLING (1985: 653).

Yet another aspect of the poem ought to be discussed here, that is, whether the prologue had been inspired by certain historical events or not. The complexity of this issue not only highlights the multifaceted nature of *Kynegetika* as a hunting treatise, but also proves its court character. Among scholars who have researched the prologue to the *Kynegetika*⁴⁵ there is a vocal group that claims there were some specific historical events which were alluded to in this laudatory passage. For example, a passage $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\sigma\alpha\nu$ $\tau\rho\alpha\phi\epsilon\rho\eta\nu$, $\pi\tilde{\alpha}\sigma\alpha\nu$ $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\upsilon\gamma\rho\eta\nu$ (1.11) – actually, a Homeric formula – probably denotes the imperial control over both parts of the world. Hence, one may assume that the phrase was a part of imperial propaganda of Severan imperial power, since Oppian as a courtly poet was surely obliged to praise the Severi in his poems.⁴⁶ The lines 12–15 adopt a purely flattering style: the flourishing condition of the Roman Empire is presented here as a natural result of the imperial policy of the Severan dynasty, whose power spanned the land and the sea, from the West to the East (1.12–15). According to Schmitt,⁴⁷ these lines are a thinly veiled allusion to Septimius Severus' victories in the wars against the Roman usurpers, Pescennius Niger in AD 193–196 and Clodius Albinus in AD 196–197. In turn, Alexander Hollis calls scholarly attention to the way in which Caracalla is described: he is hailed as the sole emperor and heir of Septimius Severus, the master of lands and oceans.⁴⁸ Thus, these details may indicate that the poem was written after AD 211, when Caracalla's brother and co-emperor, Geta, was murdered.⁴⁹

A passage that apparently generates the liveliest scholarly discussion (due to its controversial interpretations) is the passage containing the dialogue between Artemis and the poet, in which Oppian receives instructions concerning topics to be avoided or discussed in his poem. What attracts scholarly attention is Oppian's response to the instruction that he should not sing about wars (1.30–31). Oppian in all probability alludes here to the campaign against Parthians conducted by Septimius Severus and to the conquest of Ctesifon, the capital of Parthian Empire.⁵⁰ In turn, Costanza⁵¹

45 E.g. MAIR; SCHMITT; COSTANZA.

46 Contra SCHMITT's theory (1970: 46), according to which this phrase was simply a copy of common literary phrase, which does not convey anything new into the poem (cf. *Il.* 14.308; *Od.* 20.98; *h.Cer.* 43).

47 SCHMITT (1970: 46).

48 HOLLIS (1994: 156.).

49 MAIR (1928: XVIII).

50 SCHMITT (1970: 53).

51 COSTANZA (1991: 486).

presumes that the part of the dialogue concerning wars was appended later on the request of Caracalla himself, who wanted Oppian to emphasize Septimius Severus' successes in foreign policy.

Interestingly, to the list of themes traditionally rejected in *recusatio* by didactic poets⁵² Oppian adds events from contemporary history; still, these issues are apparently discussed or nominally mentioned. What is striking is the Oppian's inclusion of allusions to the warlike exploits of Severan dynasty, despite Artemis' orders. If one excludes the interpolation theory, Oppian's declaration made in the *recusatio* spectacularly clashes with the praise of Severans' warlike deeds and their imperial policy.

Costanza⁵³ proposes two possible explanations of Oppian's feigned refusal to sing of wars. The poet might have found this theme too lofty and bombastic in mood for didactic poetry, or, what seems to be even more probable, he was obliged to propagate the idea of peace and not to remind citizens about the horror of wars. In my opinion, one should take into consideration yet another possibility: hunting was considered as an ersatz war, a type of blood sport, which served as a form of pre-war preparatory training.⁵⁴

In the end, the *Kynegetika* remains a complex, multifaceted work. Similarly to other surviving Greek and Roman hunting treatises, Oppian's work discusses in detail hunting techniques and methods, the chase and the game itself. Its didactic character is an undeniable fact. However, the poem distinguishes itself among other works of this type. Passages which seem to be purely didactic suddenly offer us tantalizing glimpses at the world of the powerful and affluent. Oppian's descriptions of hunts for exotic species, such as elephants and lions, evoke the Hellenistic tradition of aristocratic hunts, a luxurious and refined form of entertainment. Hence, one may conclude that Oppian's poem unveils the social practice which was undoubtedly an integral part of an elegant and affluent lifestyle enjoyed by the élite of Greek and Roman societies. Moreover, I have demonstrated that the poem is firmly embedded in the contemporary political, social, military and cultural milieu. The indirect influence of these factors on the poem itself can only be elucidated by means of an analysis of the text. Furthermore, the fulsome and incredibly flattering invocation to the emperor, the use of sophisticated forms of dactylic hexameter, numerous literary motifs drawn from works of Oppian's predecessors and the artistry with which Oppian

⁵² COSTANZA (1991: 486–487).

⁵³ COSTANZA (1991: 488–489).

⁵⁴ See: Xen. *Cyn.* 12.7–8; *Cyr.* 8.1.34–38; cf. Pl. *Lg.* 763b. On this angle of hunting, see: BARRINGER (2001: 10–70).

combines all these features demonstrate that the poem is an exquisite example of court poetry, the genre that flourished in the Hellenistic period under the patronage of kings of the great contemporary monarchies.

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