



Aristotle as Poet: The Song for Hermias and Its Contexts (Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics)

Andrew L. Ford

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Aristotle is known as a philosopher and as a theorist of poetry, but he was also a composer of songs and verse. This is the first comprehensive study of Aristotle's poetic activity, interpreting his remaining fragments in relation to the earlier poetic tradition and to the literary culture of his time. Its centerpiece is a study of the single complete ode to survive, a song commemorating Hermias of Atarneus, Aristotle's father-in-law and patron in the 340's BCE. This remarkable text is said to have embroiled the philosopher in charges of impiety and so is studied both from a literary perspective and in its political and religious contexts.

Aristotle's literary antecedents are studied with an unprecedented fullness that considers the entire range of Greek poetic forms, including poems by Sappho, Pindar, and Sophocles, and prose texts as well. Apart from its interest as a complex and subtle poem, the Song for Hermias is noteworthy as one of the first Greek lyrics for which we have substantial and early evidence for how and where it was composed, performed, and received. It thus affords an opportunity to reconstruct how Greek lyric texts functioned as performance pieces and how they circulated and were preserved. The book argues that Greek lyric poems profit from being read as scripts for performances that both shaped and were shaped by the social occasions in which they were performed. The result is a thorough and wide-ranging study of a complex and fascinating literary document that gives a fuller view of literature in the late classical age.

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