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OVID, METAMORPHOSES 1,445FF.: APOLLO, DAPHNE, AND THE PYTHIAN
CROWN

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neve operis famam posset delere vetustas, 445
 instituit sacros celebri certamine ludos
 Pythia de domitae serpentis nomine dictos.
 hic iuvenum quicumque manu pedibusve rotave
 vicerat, aesculeae capiebat frondis honorem;
 nondum laurus erat, longoque decentia crine 450
 tempora cingebat de qualibet arbore Phoebus.
 primus amor Phoebi Daphne Peneia . . .

We may all enjoy the ingenuity of Ovid's transitions, on which Quintilian (4,1,77) commented, with only mild disapproval, 'ut Ovidius lascivire in Metamorphosesin solet; quem tamen excusare necessitas potest, res diversissimas in speciem unius corporis colligentem'. Such passages often give Ovid a chance to show his mastery of the learned Hellenistic manner, while at the same time maintaining his characteristic lightness of touch. The lines quoted above,¹ marking the transition from Apollo's slaying of the Python to his first love for Daphne, provide an excellent example. Ovid in effect is putting forward two Alexandrian-style ζητήματα. Everyone agreed that the slaying of the Python was a work of Apollo's childhood, or even his infancy.² Supposing that the laurel only came into existence as a result of the god's love for Daphne – though, as we shall see, that was far from a universal opinion – what was the original prize at the Pythian Games, and with what garland did Apollo first crown himself?

Ovid points these problems with 'nondum laurus erat' (450). The 'not yet' motif is often used by learned Greek poets to indicate the chronological relationship of different myths; thus the Amazons had to honour Artemis with the syrinx because the aulos had not yet been invented (Callimachus, Hymn 3,244–245 οὐ γὰρ πω νέβρεια δι' ὅστ' ἔτετα τετρήναντο, | ἔργον Ἀθηναίης ἐλάφωι κακόν).³ The later Alexandrian poet Pancrates, who won the approval of the Emperor Hadrian,⁴ provides a semi-historical example: other flowers had to be used (for a garland?)⁵ because the flower named after Antinous, which would spring from the blood of the lion killed by Hadrian and his young favourite, was not yet available:

οὐπω γὰρ φύεν ἄνθος ἐπόνυμον Ἀντινόσιο⁶

Like Ovid's laurel, the flower of Antinous became a prize at commemorative games, though that consequence may not have been included in Pancrates' poem.

The foundation and history of Games was a constant preoccupation of Hellenistic scholar-poets. Callimachus wrote in prose *Περὶ ἀγώνων* (fr. 403 Pf.) and Euphorion *Περὶ Ἴσθμίων*.⁷ The same subject

¹ I have derived much profit from the article by P. E. Knox, 'In Pursuit of Daphne', TAPA 120, 1990, 183–202, even though that is primarily concerned with Virgil's Sixth Eclogue.

² F. Williams on Callimachus, Hymn 2,103.

³ Cf. e.g. Williams on Call., Hymn 2,88–89 and my note on Call., Hecale fr. 70,10.

⁴ See Athenaeus 15,677d–f.

⁵ The flowers enumerated in Pancrates fr. 3,1–3 are to be found in the list of flowers suitable for garlands in Nicander's *Georgica* (fr. 74).

⁶ Pancrates fr. 3,4 Heitsch. One expects φύεν to be transitive; if so, ἄνθος would be object of the verb, with a subject (e.g. 'the earth') either to follow or, more probably, before the start of the whole extract. Two second-century papyri may belong to this same poem by Pancrates (frs. 1 and 2 Heitsch).

⁷ Fr. 180 van Groningen, who thinks that this work dealt only with the musical contests.

matter appears in their poetry (Callimachus fr. 59,5–9 Pf. = Victoria Berenices, Suppl. Hell. 265,5–9, Euphorion fr. 84 Powell); a particular concern is the nature of the garlands worn by victors at the Games, and the changes in these prizes which time brought about. The passages of Callimachus and Euphorion mentioned above both relate that the original prize at the Isthmian Games was a pine garland, but that this was changed to celery (or parsley) after Heracles instituted the Nemean Games with a garland of celery. Nicander, on the other hand, seems to hold that the Isthmian prize was celery from the very beginning (Alexipharmaca 604–606):

σπέραδός τε σελίνου
 Ἴσθμιον, ὧι θ' ὑπὸ κοῦρον ἀλίβλαπτον Μελικέρτην
 Σισυφίδααι κτερίσαντες ἐπηέζησαν ἀέθλους.

Nicander and Euphorion (quoted below) both describe the funeral rites for Melicertes. One might wonder whether Euphorion is deliberately contradicting Nicander; if Alan Cameron⁸ is right in ascribing the *Theriaca* and *Alexipharmaca* to that Nicander of Colophon, hexameter poet, who was honoured by the Delphians in 254/3 B.C.,⁹ this would be a real possibility.

When Ovid says that the original prize at the Pythian Games was an oak garland which was later changed to laurel (or bay), he is almost certainly indulging in free invention with regard to the oak (cf. M. Blech, 'Studien zum Kranz bei den Griechen', 1982, p. 137). But the pattern is entirely Hellenistic, and I find it hard to believe that Ovid has not modelled these lines specifically on Euphorion fr. 84 Powell:¹⁰

κλαίοντες δέ τε κοῦρον ἐπ' ἀγκιάλοις πιτύεσσι
 κάτθεσαν, ὀκκόθε δὴ στεφάνωμ' ἄθλοις φορέοντο
 οὐ γάρ πω τρηχεῖα λαβὴ καταμήσατο χειρῶν
 Μήνης παῖδα χάρωνα παρ' Ἀσωποῦ γενετείρηι,
 ἐξότε πυκνὰ σέλινά κατα κροτάφων ἐβάλοντο.

Both poets describe the original establishment of the games, with the wreath given as their prize; then we have the 'not yet' motif, followed by the events which led to a change in the nature of the garland.

The reason which Ovid gives for the original unavailability of the laurel – that this shrub did not even exist at the time when Apollo killed the Python – was far from orthodox. It clearly would not have

⁸ 'Callimachus and his Critics', Princeton, 1995, pp. 202–205.

⁹ SIG³ 452. Gow and Scholfield in their Cambridge, 1953, edition of Nicander, pp. 3–8, preferred to date the inscription to c. 220 B.C., ascribing the surviving didactic poems to a younger namesake (nephew or grandson) who praised the last Attalus in fr. 104, which Cameron ('Callimachus and his Critics', pp. 199–202) considers to have been addressed by the younger Nicander to Attalus I c. 200 B.C. Cameron is inclined to attribute all the fragmentary poems from which we have significant verbatim quotations to the author of the *Theriaca* and *Alexipharmaca* (i.e., in Cameron's view, the elder Nicander). Although the surviving fragments of the *Georgica* total less than 150 lines, I note that almost 10 % of the hexameters have a spondaic fifth foot, compared with 2.6 % in *Ther.* and *Alex.* The *Georgica* fragments also contain a paucity of the adjectives in -όεις and -ήεις which are such a prominent feature of both *Ther.* and *Alex.* Fr. 110 (from an unknown poem) αἰνήσεις υἷα πολυμνήστοιο Δαμαίου, which Cameron (p. 198) gives to the younger Nicander in view of the parentage (the elder is 'son of Anaxagoras' in the Delphian decree), looks as though it might come from a personal seal at the end of a didactic poem: '< if you follow the instructions in this book and achieve success> you will commend the son of memorable Damaeus', cf. *Ther.* 957–958, *Alex.* 629–630, Ovid, *A. A.* 2,743–744 'sed quicumque meo superarit Amazona ferro | inscribat spoliis "Naso magister erat"', 3,811–812. Conceivably the ending of Nicander's *Georgica* (cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 4,563ff.)?

¹⁰ On the funeral rites for the drowned Melicertes (cf. Nicander, *Alex.* 604–606 quoted above, noting κοῦρον identically placed in both poets) which led to the establishment of Isthmian Games with a pine-garland for the prize – until Heracles killed the lion and established Nemean Games, whereupon the Corinthians too adopted the Nemean prize of a celery garland. I print the text of Euphorion fr. 84 Powell as in *Collectanea Alexandrina*; there are serious doubts about the first two lines and about καταμήσατο in line 3 (see the discussion in van Groningen's *Euphorion*, his fr. 89). Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *Academic Papers: Greek Comedy, Hellenistic Literature . . . etc.*, pp. 156–157, takes Ἀσωποῦ γενετείρηι to mean 'the mother of Asopus', i.e. the mountain Kelousa, just west of Nemea.

troubled Callimachus, who in book 4 of the *Aetia*¹¹ related how Apollo, after killing the Python, went to Tempe and washed in the river Peneius; in the account ascribed to Theopompus¹² he was purified by the Thessalians on the orders of Zeus and took both a bough and a garland from the laurel of Tempe before returning to Delphi. Clearly the laurel did not depend for its existence upon Apollo's unsuccessful love for the nymph Daphne.¹³ The transformation of the nymph can indeed be traced back to the third century B.C.,¹⁴ but does not predominate, either in literature or art,¹⁵ until the first century A.D.

Yet divine garlands, with their origins, changes and explanations, were another theme beloved of the Hellenistic poets, which occurs in several papyrus fragments of Callimachus' *Aetia*. This may be illustrated from a passage of Tertullian (*De Corona* 7,4–5)¹⁶ which we have already touched upon. I mark the likely allusions in the footnotes:

Iunoni vitem Callimachus¹⁷ induxit, ita et Argi signum eius palmite redimitum, subiecto pedibus corio leonino, insultantem ostentat novercam de exuviis¹⁸ utriusque privigni. Hercules nunc populum capite praefert, nunc oleastrum,¹⁹ nunc apium.²⁰ habes . . . Callimachum²¹ qui et Apollinem memorat interfecto Delphico dracone lauream induisse, qua supplicem.

Ovid's 'tempora cingebat de qualibet arbore Phoebus' (451) most naturally implies that Apollo took whatever shrub was to hand, not always the same one. But our poet was surely aware that a learned predecessor had raised the same question (with what did Apollo first garland himself?) and supplied a definite answer. Among the antidotes to hemlock, Nicander (*Alexipharmaca* 198–200) prescribes:

ἢ ἀπὸ δάφνης
 Τεμπίδος ἢ δαυχομοῖο φέροις ἐκ καυλέα κόψας
 ἢ πρώτη Φοῖβοιο κατέστερε Δελφίδα χαίτην.

Gow–Scholfield's treatment of these lines seems confused (similarly the paraphrase of the *Alexipharmaca* by Eutecnius, p. 37 ed. Geymonat, 1976). They translate 'bring him twigs of SWEET BAY or BAY OF TEMPE (this was the first plant to crown the Delphian locks of Phoebus)', apparently taking Τεμπίδος with δαυχομοῖο, while in their Index (p. 229) they say that δαυχομός means the same as δάφνη. But Nicander's ἢ . . . ἢ surely indicates that he is thinking of two different plants. And, although both were connected with Apollo,²² it was, according to Nicander, not the δάφνη but the humbler

¹¹ Frs. 86(?)–89 Pfeiffer (note the papyrus Diegesis, and particularly fr. 89 from Tertullian, ' . . . Callimachum, qui et Apollinem memorat interfecto Delphico dracone lauream induisse qua supplicem').

¹² F.Gr.Hist. 115 F 80, quoted by Pfeiffer, *Callimachus* vol. I p. 95.

¹³ And when, in *Call. Hymn* 4,94, Apollo, still in his mother's womb, proposes to speak τομώτερον ἢ ἀπὸ δάφνης, we are surely not meant to infer that the δάφνη does not yet exist.

¹⁴ It appeared in an elegiac poem by Diodorus of Elaea (*Suppl. Hell.* 380), according to the sources attached to Parthenius, *Narr. Amat.* 15. These notes of sources can hardly derive from Parthenius himself (*pace* Alan Cameron, 'Callimachus and his Critics', p. 124), and it would be rash to conclude that Parthenius always had the named authors in mind (I refer to an Oxford 1995 D. Phil. thesis on Parthenius by Jane Lightfoot of All Souls' College, to be published in due course as an Oxford Classical Monograph). The promulgation of a Syrian version of the Daphne legend by Seleucus Nicator indicates that her transformation was reasonably well known at that time.

¹⁵ See Olga Palagia in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, s.v. Daphne.

¹⁶ In 7,6 Tertullian expresses a debt to the work *De Coronis* by Claudius Saturninus (perhaps mid second century A.D.).

¹⁷ Fr. 101 Pf.

¹⁸ Note λάφυρα in the papyrus Diegesis to *Call. fr.* 101.

¹⁹ These two are probably both Callimachean, = fr. 804 Pf. incerti auctoris.

²⁰ Cf. 'Probus' on Virgil, *Georgics* 3,19 'sumptaue apiacea corona', from Callimachus' *Victoria Berenices*, *Suppl. Hell.* 266 = *Call. fr.* 54 Pf.

²¹ Fr. 89 Pf.

²² Τεμπίδος suggests the purification of Apollo, performed by the Thessalians, and the return of the god to Delphi with a bough and garland of δάφνη, cf. τῆς δάφνης τῆς Τεμπικῆς in Theopompus, F.Gr.Hist. 115 F 80, mentioned above, and *Call. frs.* 86(?)–89 Pf. 'Ἀπόλλων Δαυχναφόριος' appears on a Cypriot inscription (O. Masson, 'Les inscriptions chypriotes syllabiques', 1983, p. 312 no. 309).

δαυχιμός (whatever that might be)²³ which garlanded the god.²⁴ Nicander does not explain – it seems unlikely that he envisaged the δάφνη as not yet in existence,²⁵ although he may have given this idea to Ovid.

There remains one teasing little problem, which may have wider implications. Granted that Ovid has invented the original prize at the Pythian Games ('aesculeae capiebat frondis honorem', 449),²⁶ is there any reason why he should have hit upon an oak garland? It will be noticed that an oak garland²⁷ occurs both at the very beginning (449) and the very end (563) of the Daphne episode. In both places the oak and laurel appear together; first as the successive prizes at the Pythian Games (449–450), and secondly in a contemporary Roman context (562–563):

postibus Augustis eadem fidissima custos
ante fores stabis mediamque tuebere quercum.

Here the laurel represents Augustus' victories, and the oak wreath is a 'civica corona', awarded for the saving of fellow citizens. Apollo too has won a victory which saved his own (Delphian) people from great danger (439–440 'populisque novis, incognite serpens | terror eras'). To make a lasting memorial of this achievement (445 'neve operis famam posset delere vetustas'), the god instituted what the Greeks called a στεφανίτης ἄγών (449), in which the prize for victory was supposed to be no more than a wreath. These Games included (448) wrestling and boxing ('manu'), foot-racing ('pedibus') and horse-racing ('rota').

Everything described above was also done by Augustus. As an enduring monument to his victory at Actium (Suetonius, Div. Aug. 18,2 'quoque Actiacae victoriae memoria celebratior et in posterum esset . . .'), Augustus set up²⁸ games, likewise in honour of (Actian) Apollo, who had presided over the victory. Unusually for this period, the competition was a στεφανίτης ἄγών, of a traditional Greek pattern and of equal status²⁹ to the four great national Games of Greece (including the Pythian). These Actian Games included all the events mentioned in Met. 1,448,³⁰ and were sufficiently important to be prefigured in Virgil's Aeneid, explicitly in 3,280 'Actiaque Iliacis celebramus litora ludis' and more

²³ Whatever the linguistic relationship between δάφνη, δαύχνα and δαυχιμός, Nicander here can not have intended the δάφνη and the δαυχιμός to be identical. See F. Bechtel, *Die griechischen Dialekte*, 1921, vol. I p. 205.

²⁴ It is interesting that this unique piece of lore is connected with Delphi, since, as we have seen, the elder Nicander was honoured there, perhaps for celebrating Delphian cult and myths in verse (Cameron, pp. 51, 298), and he may have given his son (Damaeus, father of the younger Nicander in fr. 110 G.–S.) a name which is hardly found outside Delphi (cf. n. 9 above, Gow–Scholfield, Nicander, p. 8, Cameron, 'Callimachus and his Critics', p. 198). G.–S. surprisingly nowhere mention Jacoby, *F.Gr.Hist.* vol. IIIA, 1940, nos. 271 and 272 (Nicander son of Anaxagoras and N. son of Damaeus), pp. 85–86 and 229ff.

²⁵ though one of the two Nicanders (perhaps the younger?) wrote a transformation poem entitled *Heteroeumena*, which was clearly an important source for Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

²⁶ A passage in *Natalis Comes* (concerning whom, see Pfeiffer on Callimachus frs. 378 and [818]) does mention an oak garland at Delphi, but probably from Ovid; its reference to Istros, *De Coronis*, though not apparently doubted by Jacoby (*F.Gr.Hist.* 334 F 54), could be fraudulent.

²⁷ which became an appropriate prize at the Capitoline Games founded by Domitian (e.g. Statius, *Silvae* 5,3,231, Irene Ringwood Arnold, *AJA* 64, 1960, 247–248).

²⁸ Strictly speaking, this Actian festival was not a new creation, since there had been Ἄκτια mentioned by Callimachus in his *Περὶ ἁγώνων* (fr. 403 Pf.). As Strabo explains (7,7,6), νυνὶ δ' ἐντιμότερον ἐποίησεν ὁ Καῖσαρ. See further Reisch in Pauly–Wissowa s.v. Aktia and W. H. Willis, *TAPA* 72, 1941, 404–405; S. Weinstock, 'Divus Julius', Oxford, 1971, p. 315, and now the full discussion in R. Gurval, 'Actium and Augustus', Michigan, 1995 (see his *General Index* s. v. Games).

²⁹ A winner at Nicopolis could call himself Ἀκτιονίκης (P. Frisch, 'Zehn agonistische Papyri', *Papyrologica Coloniensia* 13, 1986, nos. 3,33 and 4,22), and count this victory towards his ambition of becoming περιόδονίκης (for the περίοδος in Imperial times, see Frisch p. 42 on 1,23, J. and L. Robert, *Revue des Études Grecques* (Bulletin épigraphique) 67, 1954, 113–115).

³⁰ Dio Cassius 51,1 certifies the horse-racing.

generally in the games of Aeneid 5.³¹ I doubt whether Ovid's first audience could have heard Met. 1,445–449 without being reminded of the contemporary festival. So far as I have been able to discover, we do not know the precise nature of the wreath worn by victors at the Actian Games. If it was of laurel (most naturally, though that would duplicate the Pythian prize), this would give an extra point to Ovid's 'nondum laurus erat' (Met. 1,450).³²

In any case one may see here a veiled compliment to Augustus (rather in the Virgilian manner), adding to the two open references to the Emperor (lines 200–205 and 562–563) contained in this first book of the *Metamorphoses*.³³ It may seem odd for Ovid to have combined the style and subject matter of poets like Nicander and Euphorion with a contemporary allusion to Augustus' Actian Games. But he has probably done something very similar at the end of the Daphne episode: F. Williams³⁴ has argued plausibly that Apollo's prophecy of Daphne's future (including the association with Augustus) in Met. 1,557–565 should be read with one eye on the (self-) praise of the laurel in Callimachus' Fourth Iambus (fr. 194,24–40 Pf.).

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³¹ See R. D. Williams' Oxford, 1960, edition of Aeneid 5, pp. x–xi. Virgil may also have had the Actian Games in mind when he wrote *Georgics* 3,17ff. (see Mynors ad loc.). Ovid mentions Actian Apollo briefly in Met. 13,715.

³² I have also wondered whether it might have been an oak wreath, so accounting for Met. 1,449 'aesculeae capiebat frondis honorem'.

³³ Gordon Williams, 'Change and Decline', University of California Press, 1978, p. 91, saw deliberate ring composition in the references to Augustus in Met. 1 balanced by those in Met. 15.

³⁴ 'Augustus and Daphne', *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 3, 1981, pp. 249–257. See also B. Curran and F. Williams, 'Laurel Boughs', *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 6, 1981, 209–212.