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ANOTHER RARE EPITHET IN CALLIMACHUS’ HECALE?

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In ZPE 115, 1997, 55–56, I suggested, on the basis of Michael Choniates vol. I, p. 157, 5 ff. ed. Lambros, that near the beginning of the poem Callimachus described his heroine as πέμπελος, ‘very old’, an excessively rare epithet\(^1\) which occurs twice (682, 826) in the Alexandra of Lycophron, a poet with many links to Callimachus. Here I wish to put forward an equally rare addendum to the Index Verborum of the Hecale, again based upon Michael Choniates\(^2\), and again paralleled in a learned Hellenistic poet associated with Callimachus, but this time to be located very near the end of the epyllion.

Michael writes of Theseus’ commemoration of Hecale (Theano 339–340)\(^3\):

καὶ ἐθανόσαν ἐνὶ μνήμῃ θέτο οὐ θησισκόμῃ
οὐ γάρ ἔνν ἐνκοστα ἐτήσια δείπνον Ἐκάλεια.

One may suspect that some of these words or phrases come straight from Callimachus. Pfeiffer (on his fr. 264) drew attention to ἐνὶ μνήμῃ θέτο and ἐτήσια δείπνα. But neither he nor I\(^4\) said anything about ἐνκοστα, ‘unheard’. The form ἐνκοστέω and ἐνκοστος\(^5\) are not uncommon. In Iliad 20, 14 we find the unique νήκοστείω, and it is likely\(^6\) that Empedocles\(^7\) coined νήκοστος, in an active sense, ‘unhearing’. His only follower was Aratus, in a passive sense, ‘unheard’ (Phaenomena 172–173):

καὶ λίνν κεῖνον ὄνομ’ εἴρεται, οὐδὲ τοι σύντος
νήκοστοι Ὀδης.

It seems to me highly probable that νήκοστα in Mich. Chon. Theano 340 reflects use of that epithet in the Hecale. We know that Callimachus admired Aratus\(^8\); for the latter’s influence upon the Hecale, see fr. 25 H. = 269 Pf. Callimachus might have had a philological interest in νήκοστος, since the prefix νη- was a matter for debate among Hellenistic scholars. The effect was usually privative, but in some cases it was held that νη- had an intensifying force, e.g. νήχυτος, probably coined by Philetas (fr. 21 Powell) and occurring in Hecale fr. 11 H.\(^9\) So Callimachus may have used the prefix in both senses in the Hecale\(^10\).

The resolve to remember hospitable Hecale was expressed both by her neighbours (fr. 80, 3–5 H πολλάκι σείο, / μαία, (’) ϕιλοζείνου καλής / μνησόμεθα) and by Theseus (fr. 82 (b) from Mich. Chon. ὡς ἀεὶ μεμνήσθαι τῆς ἀληγῆς τραπέζης ἐκείνης καὶ αὐχμηρᾶς). In Mich. Chon. the epithet νήκοστος is applied to the ἐτήσια δείπνα. Perhaps also in Callimachus – alternatively Theseus may have said that the ἐτήσια δείπνα will ensure that Hecale’s name is ‘not unheard’ (for the litotes cf. also Aratus, Phaen. 172–173 οὐδὲ . . . / νήκοστοι) among future generations. Mich. Chon., writing long after the pagan rituals had been discontinued, naturally uses the past tense (οὐ γάρ ἔνν νήκοστα), but in Theseus’ mouth this would have been a prophecy.

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1 Perhaps I should have noted that Pempelos is the personal name of an obscure Pythagorean from Thurii.
2 Probably the owner of the last complete copy of the Hecale.
3 Vol. II p. 386 Lambros.
4 In my Oxford 1990 edition on fr. 83 H; despite the fact that Ida Kapp (Callimachi Hecalaes fragmenta, Berlin, 1915, p. 52 n. 1) had drawn attention to νήκοστος.
5 Usually passive in sense, whereas ἀνήκος is mostly active.
6 The text is not certain, but the adjective seems secure.
7 Fr. 137, 3 = fr. 124, 3 Wright, 1995.
9 See my note ad loc. for other alleged examples of intensifying νη-.
10 Similarly the prefix ὁ-, normally privative, has an intensifying force in fr. 124 ἀστογῆς ὑδορ.