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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 epithet¹ 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 Choniates², 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:

καί ἐ θανούσαν ἐνὶ μνήμηι θέτο οὐ θνησκούση·
οὐ γὰρ ἔην νήκουστα ἐτήσια δειπν' 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 δειπνα. But neither he nor I⁴ said anything about νήκουστα, 'unheard'. The form ἀνηκουστέω and ἀνήκουστος⁵ are not uncommon. In Iliad 20, 14 we find the unique νηκουστέω, and it is likely⁶ that Empedocles⁷ coined νήκουστος, in an active sense, 'unhearing'. His only follower was Aratus, in a passive sense, 'unheard' (Phaenomena 172–173):

καὶ λίην κείνων ὄνομ' εἴρεται, οὐδέ τοι αὐτῶς
νήκουστοι Ἰάδες

It seems to me highly probable that νήκουστα in Mich. Chon. Theano 340 reflects use of that epithet in the Hecale. We know that Callimachus admired Aratus⁸; for the latter's influence upon the Hecale, see fr. 25 H. = 269 Pf. Callimachus might have had a philological interest in νήκουστος, 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 Hecale¹⁰.

The resolve to remember hospitable Hecale was expressed both by her neighbours (fr. 80, 3–5 H πολλάκι σεῖο, / μαῖα, < > φιλοξείνοιο καλιῆς / μνησόμεθα) and by Theseus (fr. 82 (b) from Mich. Chon. ὡς αἰεὶ μεμνήσθαι τῆς ὀλίγης τραπέζης ἐκείνης καὶ ἀχμηρᾶς). In Mich. Chon. the epithet νήκουστος is applied to the ἐτήσια δειπνα. Perhaps also in Callimachus – alternatively Theseus may have said that the ἐτήσια δειπνα will ensure that Hecale's name is 'not unheard' (for the litotes cf. also Aratus, Phaen. 172–173 οὐδέ . . . / νήκουστοι) among future generations. Mich. Chon., writing long after the pagan rituals had been discontinued, naturally uses the past tense (οὐ γὰρ ἔην νήκουστα), 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 Hecalaefragmenta, Berlin, 1915, p. 52 n. 1) had drawn attention to νήκουστος.

⁵ Usually passive in sense, whereas ἀνήκοος is mostly active.

⁶ The text is not certain, but the adjective seems secure.

⁷ Fr. 137, 3 = fr. 124, 3 Wright, 1995.

⁸ Ep. 37 Pf. = 56 G.–P. = Anth. Pal. 9, 507, cf. Call. Test. 10 Pfeiffer and Pf. on fr. 460.

⁹ See my note ad loc. for other alleged examples of intensifying νη-.

¹⁰ Similarly the prefix ἀ-, normally privative, has an intensifying force in fr. 124 ἀσταγές ὕδωρ.