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CALLIMACHUS AND THE ARCADIAN ASSES: THE AITIA PROLOGUE
AND A LEMMA IN THE LONDON SCHOLION

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 105 (1995) 209–213

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Callimachus and the Arcadian Asses: The Aitia Prologue and a Lemma in the London Scholion*

Among the strategies which Callimachus uses to defend his poetic program against the criticism of the Telchines, terminology derived from sound effects and animal metaphors occupies a prominent place. The most elaborate animal simile in the *Aitia Prologue* is the pair of the cicada and the donkey, which develops into the aging poet's emphatic wish for identification with the musical insect (29-36). In the first couplet, the λιγύς ἦχος of the cicada is contrasted with the θόρυβος of donkeys (29-30). λιγύς denotes a clear, sweet sound (Pind. *Ol.* 9.47).¹ Callimachus apparently used the word in the *Somnium* as an epithet of the Muse, as can be inferred from the lemma in the London scholion and its references (lines 48-52). λιγύς is therefore a positive term in Callimachean poetics. On the other hand, θόρυβος is found "elsewhere always of *human* uproar, tumult and confusion" (N. Hopkinson, *A Hellenistic Anthology* [Cambridge 1988] 96). Callimachus' literary enemies are clearly visible through the image of the asses. θόρυβος seems to be synonymous with the μέγα ψοφέουσα ἀοιδή (19) in opposition to the well-tuned, delicate song of the cicada by which Callimachus defines his own ἀείδειν. In his second *Iambus*, Callimachus uses the phrase 'voice of an ass' also as a term of abuse against a poet (fr. 192.11 Pf.).

In chiasmic form, Callimachus then continues his *recusatio* of the 'donkey-style', only to launch into a surprising wish to be like a cicada. On the side of the donkey, the emphasis lies still on the sound: ὀγκάζομαι is the onomatopoeic term for the braying of the ass (31). Callimachus may want the reader to draw a connection to ὄγκος, the inflated, bombastic style, which would well befit the taste of his enemies.² Moreover, the position of the spondaic four-syllable verb at the end of the hexameter gives the line a heavy rhythm suggestive of the swollen style.³ On the side of the cicada, the focus shifts away from its voice to different motifs, although the verb ἀείδω is repeated in the position of line-end (33). Callimachus characterizes the envied cicada as ἐλαχύς and πτερόεις (32), with the connotations of smallness and lightness elaborating upon the contrast to the donkey, but also preparing for the wish to shed the burden of old age (βάρος 35).

* I would like to thank Prof. L. Koenen (Ann Arbor) for his seminar on Hellenistic poetry and his support and helpful suggestions that made this article possible, Prof. J. Latacz (Basel) for giving me the opportunity to spend two semesters as an exchange student at the University of Michigan, and the faculty and students at the Department of Classical Studies at the University of Michigan for their hospitality.

¹ λιγύς is found as an epithet of the lyre (*Il.* 9.186; *Od.* 8.67) and of the Muses (*Od.* 24.62; *Alcman* 14a *PMG*; Pl. *Phaedr.* 237a). The sound of the cicada is often praised as ligurὸ εἶδος (Hes. *Erga* 583; Alcaeus 347 L.-P.; cf. Pl. *Phaedr.* 230c, Anacreont. 34.14 West). Σχο! recalls ἄσχοτα, Hesiod's epithet for the cicada (*Erga* 582, *Aspis* 393), which can also be used absolutely (Aristoph. *Peace* 1159, *Birds* 1095).

² Hopkinson, *op. cit.* (above in text) 96; D. L. Clayman, "The Origins of Greek Literary Criticism and the Aitia Prologue", *Wiener Studien* N. F. 11 (1977) 27-34.

³ Hopkinson, *op. cit.*, 96. M. L. West, *Greek Metre* (Oxford 1982) 154, about the spondeiazon in Hellenistic hexameters: "sometimes the rhythm enhances the sense."

Much has been written about the significance of the image of the cicada.⁴ The two central motifs in Callimachus' wish are old age and an existence of pure song. The combination of these motifs may have been suggested to Callimachus by the Iliadic simile which compares the eloquent Trojan elders to cicadas with their 'lily-like' voices (3.150-152). The cicada can be interpreted on several levels. As an insect, it is admired for its sound and said to live exclusively on dew.⁵ Callimachus uses the phrase γῆρα ἐκδύειν (35), the technical term for the sloughing of the skin of insects (see Pfeiffer's app.), which led to the belief in their immortality. Yet inseparable from the cicada is its intimate relationship with the Muses, first explicitly stated in Plato's myth in the *Phaedrus* (259b-d) where the cicadas are said to have sprung from men who forgot to eat and drink for love of song. The musicality of the cicada becomes a standard motif in Hellenistic epigrams (e.g. *A.P.* 6.120, 7.195, 12.98). All the different aspects are assembled in a charming little poem on the cicada (*Anacreont.* 34 West): its diet of dew, its sweet song, and its godlike life as beloved of the Muses and Apollo, untroubled by old age.⁶

The musical, delicate, pure cicada is an appropriate symbol for Callimachean poetry, like the bees in the *Hymn to Apollo* (110-112). Yet Callimachus goes one step further by directly identifying himself with the cicada. This may be a reminiscence of the myth of Tithonus, his infelicitous love to Eos, and his transformation into a cicada. Callimachus re-interprets Tithonus' deplorable fate as a blessed existence, devoted wholly to song (See Diller and Crane, *loc. cit.* [n. 4]). His positive view of the fascinating power of poetry invites to think of the poetics of μανία, the ecstatic, inspired mode of composing poetry.⁷ Indeed, Plato describes the cicadas as "prophets of the Muses" who possess the power of inspiration (*Phaedr.* 262d) and compares them to Sirens (259a).⁸ Moreover, Callimachus' phrasing may recall Plato's poetics of inspiration in the *Ion* (534b), where Socrates calls the poet "light, winged, and holy." Despite Callimachus' emphasis on τῶνῃ, the image of the cicada can be interpreted as "a powerful assertion of poetic craftsmanship and lyric inspiration" (Hunter, *loc. cit.* [n. 4], 2). Since the song of the cicada is from Hesiod on connected with the noontide, the 'magic hour' where dreams and visions take place like the poetic initiation of Simichidas by Lycidas in Theocritus' *Thalysia*, the cicada may even have formed a link to the *Somnium*, as Richard Hunter suggests (*ibid.*).

⁴ I list a few: R. Pfeiffer, "Ein neues Altersgedicht des Kallimachos", *Hermes* 63 (1928) 302-341, esp. 323-326; M. Pohlenz, "Kallimachos' Antwort an die Kritik", *NGWG Philol.-Hist. Klasse* (1929) 150-155, esp. 150-151; H. Diller, "Zu Kallimachos", *Hermes* 90 (1962) 119-120; G. Crane, "Tithonus and the Prologue to Callimachus' Aetia", *ZPE* 66 (1986) 269-278; A. Borgogno, "Appunti sulla poetica di Callimaco", *GIF* 39 (1987) 129-135; R. Hunter, "Winged Callimachus", *ZPE* 76 (1989) 1-2. M. Davies-J. Kathirithamby, *Greek Insects* (Oxford 1986) 113-133, give an excellent account of all the aspects connected with the cicada.

⁵ Sound: see note 1 above; diet of dew: Hes. *Aspis* 395; Theocr. 4.16; Arist. *HA* 532b 11 ff.; Meleager *A.P.* 7.196; Antipater Thess. *A.P.* 9.92; Leonidas *A.P.* 6.120 etc.

⁶ Cf. A. Dihle, "The Poem on the Cicada", *HSCP* 71 (1966) 107-113; P.A. Rosenmeyer, *The Poetics of Imitation* (Cambridge 1992) 201f.

⁷ Crane, *loc. cit.*, 278: "The total absorption in song that archaic poetry eschewed and that Plato described with ironic amusement becomes for Callimachus a banner that proclaims, proudly and without equivocation, his absolute dedication to poetry." Crane also discusses the negative side of 'enchanted' poetry applied to Pindar's Keledones (*Paeon* 8) and Callimachus' Telchines.

⁸ Aristophanes calls the cicada θεπέτιος and ἡλιτομανής (*Birds* 1095 f.), and in later epigrams it sings drunk with dew (*A.P.* 7.196, 9.92; 10.16 μουσομανής).

If the cicada has such a highly programmatic significance, perhaps there can more be gained from its counterpart than simply the notion of its vulgarity and loud bray.⁹ The donkey's stupidity and unmusicality are expressed in the proverbs ἄνο! ἰῆρα! (Menand. *Mis.* 295 and 460 Kō.; cf. Phaedrus *fab. app.* 12), to which Callimachus fr. 23.5 Pf. alludes, and ὄνος κίθαρίξειν περιώμενος (Lucian *Pseudol.* 7).¹⁰ According to the Pythagoreans, the ass is not shaped harmoniously and completely deaf to the sound of the lyre (Aelian *NA* 10.28). In an Aesopic fable, the donkey's frustrated musical ambitions are illustrated by his foolish imitation of the cicadas' diet of dew and his subsequent death from starvation (337 Halm). The donkey's proverbial envy of superior animals is in line with the characteristics of the Telchines. On the mythological plane, the ass appears in the story of Midas, who preferred in a musical contest Pan or Marsyas to Apollo and was punished with asses' ears.¹¹

In a wider context, the story of Midas reflects the association of the donkey with the flute, which was sometimes made of its bones, and with Dionysus, whose favorite mount it is, as opposed to Apollo and his lyre. The great Dionysiac procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus featured Silens and Satyrs mounted on asses (Athen. 5.200e). Pindar mentions the hecatombs of asses sacrificed by the Hyperboreans to Apollo, with the god laughing as he beholds the rampant wantonness of the beasts (*Pyth.* 10.33 ff.), a detail also found in Callimachus' account of the Hyperboreans in the *Aitia* (fr. 186.10 Pf.; cf. 492 Pf.). In Egyptian religion, the ass is sacred to the evil god Seth-Typhon and detested by Osiris and Horus-Apollo,¹² and Seth is sometimes represented with features of a donkey, especially in his fight against Horus in the form of a red ass.¹³ The donkey-Telchines therefore appear not only as the personal enemies of Callimachus, but also as the cosmic enemies of Horus-Apollo and his harmonious world order. The situation bears striking similarities to the *Hymn to Delos*, where Apollo's enemies Hera and Ares are also characterized by their dreadful noises (Hera 'brays': ἐπεβρωμάτο 56; Ares: 136 ff.) and the birth of the god of music is set in parallel to the creation of a new style of poetry.¹⁴ Like the enemies of the Pindaric Zeus, the Telchines loathe the music of Apollo and the Muses (Pind. *Pyth.* 1). Callimachus' preference for the Apollinian cicada over the Dionysiac ass reflects his rejection of Dionysiac poetry,

⁹ Olck, *RE* 6 (Stuttgart 1909) 626-676 and W. Richter, *Der Kleine Pauly* II (Stuttgart 1967) 370-373 (both, s.v. 'Esel'); K. Freeman, "Vincent, or the Donkey", *Greece and Rome* 14 (1945) 33-41; H. Adolf, "The Ass and the Harp", *Speculum* 25 (1950) 49-57; Rostagni, "Nuovo Callimaco, I. Il Prologo degli Aitia. Testo e interpretazione", *Rivista di Filologia Classica* n.s. 6 (1928) 1-35, esp. esp. 18 (*Scritti minori* II.1 [Torino 1956] 259-292, esp. 275-276).

¹⁰ This motif is also found in Egyptian tradition: Satirical illustrations on papyri show animals playing musical instruments, among them an ass with a harp (Adolf, *loc. cit.* [n. 9] 50 and n. 18).

¹¹ Ovid *Met.* 11.146 ff., Hyginus *fab.* 191; Callimachus' ἄνο οἰῆται emphasizes this feature.

¹² Plut. *Sept. sap. conv.* 5 (Mor. 150F); *Is. et Os.* 30-31 (362F-363C), 50 (371C); Ael. *NA* 10.28; Apul. *Met.* 11.6 see J.G. Griffith and Th. Hopfner's commentaries to Plut. *Is. et Os.* 30-31 (Cambridge 1970; Prag 1941, respectively). The inhabitants of Busiris and Lycopolis do not use trumpets since they sound like the braying of a donkey.

¹³ *Apuleius of Madauros, The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses Book XI)*, ed. with an introduction, translation and commentary by J. Gwyn Griffiths, Leiden 1975, p. 162.

¹⁴ P. Bing, *The Well-Read Muse. Present and Past in Callimachus and the Hellenistic Poets*, Hypomnemata 90 (Göttingen 1988) 122-123 and n. 49.

tragedy and dithyrambs expressed in other passages.¹⁵ To be sure, none of these concepts is explicitly mentioned in the text. Yet the highly allusive quality of Callimachean poetry with its often riddling images¹⁶ and its ingenious use of Greek and Egyptian mythology invites an analysis which goes below the surface.

There is an interesting point left to be discussed in connection with the image of the donkey. The London scholiast tells under the lemma Ἄρκαδ() πέμπ() the story of the Arcadian asses which, when bought by the Peloponnesians and put on a diet to accustom them to the new fodder, went straightway back home (*P. Lit.Lond.* 181.53-58 Pf. [*Callimachus* I p. 7]). As far as I see, the only attempt to integrate this lemma into the structure of the text was made by Max Pohlenz, who interprets it as a *recusatio* addressed to queen Arsinoe.¹⁷ According to Pohlenz' reconstruction, Callimachus would have defended the originality of his poetic program with reference to the Arcadian asses which were true to their nature without yielding to lure or force.

Although it is now clear from the Oxyrhynchus commentary that Arsinoe was not explicitly mentioned,¹⁸ the idea of a *recusatio* remains attractive, especially in the light of the following lemma in the London scholion, ὡς ἐνὶ δὴ πατρίοις, explained by the scholiast by οὗτοι ὡς ἐν δημοκρατίᾳ ktl. (lines 58-60), which appears to imply a rejection of the multitude (cf. *epigr.* 28 Pf. [2 G.-P.]). Yet after what has been said above, it seems highly improbable that Callimachus would have likened *himself* to the Arcadian asses. Rather, the example might have illustrated the rejected kind of poetry and its followers who, like the Arcadian asses, could not accustom themselves to a new kind of food/poetry, but stuck to their habitual fodder, epic poetry. The *recusatio* might have been represented as an advice given by the Muse: "Let the old-fashioned poets go back to Arcadia like the asses [Ἄρκαδ(ίαν) πέμπ(ε)??], but you do not write popular poetry!" If it is possible to see Arsinoe in the figure of the tenth Muse, the motif of *recusatio* gains a clever twist: Callimachus represents the queen as the herald of his poetic program who admonishes himself not to write about "kings and heroes". Arcadia seems to have been chosen not because of the quality of its asses,¹⁹ but rather as the land of hill-billies to stand as a symbol for the antiquated style of poetry in blatant contrast to the modern metropolis of Alexandria and its new poetry.

¹⁵ Fr. 192.12 f., 203.32, 215, 604 Pf.; *epigr.* 7 Pf. (57 G.-P).

¹⁶ P. Bing, "Callimachus' Cows: A Riddling Recusatio", *ZPE* 54 (1984) 1-8 and corrigendum in *ZPE* 56 (1984) 16.

¹⁷ M. Pohlenz, "Kallimachos' Aitia", *Hermes* 68 (1933) 313-327, esp. 322-323. A. Rostagni, "Nuovo Callimaco" (see n. 9) 1-35, esp. 35 (*Scritti minori* II.1 259-292, esp. 292) remarks: "Dunque gli asini rappresentano la moltitudine, la democrazia; perciò non si adattano al regime oligarchico dei Peloponnesi."

¹⁸ The Oxyrhynchus commentator gives three different explanations for the lemma δεκάς, of which the first is mutilated and still unclear, while the remaining add either Apollo or Arsinoe to the number of the Muses (fr. 2a.5-15, Pfeiffer vol. II, p. 102). See the most recent discussion in L. Koenen, "The Ptolemaic King as a Religious Figure", in *Images and Ideologies: Self-definition in the Hellenistic World*, ed. by A. Bulloch, E.S. Gruen, A. A. Long, A. Stewart (Berkeley etc. 1994) 25-115, esp. 92-93. The lemma λίγεια in the London scholion (lines 48-52) seems to confirm the view that a single female figure (Arsinoe or a Muse) played a role, although it could theoretically depend on dekā!. The uncertainty might be explained by the fact that the vision appeared suddenly to the dreaming poet without having been introduced by the narrator.

¹⁹ Pfeiffer *ad loc.* quotes Plaut. *Asin.* 333 and Varro *r.r.* II 6.2.

The passage in question belongs to the difficult transition between the *Prologue* and the *Somnium*, which has recently been elucidated to some extent by the efforts of several scholars.²⁰ The story about the Arcadian asses follows almost immediately after the lemma *δεκάς*, which is proved by the coronis in the Oxyrhynchus commentary to have belonged to a part separate from the extant *Prologue* and the *Invocation of the Muses*, i.e. apparently to the *Somnium* or the original prologue of the edition of the first two books, which Callimachus then seems to have reworked for his second edition (so L. Koenen, *loc. cit.* [n. 18] 93). The conjectured presence of Arsinoe and Alexandria in the passage might imply that it stood immediately at the beginning of the account of the poet's abduction from Libya to Mt. Helicon in a dream (*A.P.* 7.42.5 f.).

In any case, the image of the Arcadian asses seems to have been included already in the first edition of the *Aitia*. In the *Prologue* to the second edition, Apollo's advice to the poet to feed the victim to be as fat as possible but to keep the Muse slender (23-24) shows a structure which is remarkably parallel to our reconstructed advice of the Muse: Callimachus again makes a deity the mouthpiece of his poetic program, employing imagery derived from the feeding of animals to express a stylistic concept.²¹ The aging Callimachus may well have composed also the passage about the cicada and the donkey in adaptation of an image which he had already in the original edition of the *Aitia* applied to his literary enemies.

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²⁰ A. Kerkhecker, "Ein Musenanruf am Anfang der *Aitia* des Kallimachos", *ZPE* 71 (1988) 16-24; P. Bing, "A Note on the New 'Musenanruf' in Callimachus' *Aitia*", *ZPE* 74 (1988) 273-275; N. Krevans, "'Invocation' at the End of the *Aitia* Prologue", *ZPE* 89 (1991) 19-23; M. A. Harder, "Between 'Prologue' and 'Dream' (Call. *Fr.* 1a, 19ff.)", *ZPE* 96 (1993) 11-13; Koenen, *op. cit.* [n. 18] 91-94. Kerkhecker tends to attribute the "Invocation" to the first edition of the *Aitia*, Bing, whom Koenen follows, to the second edition.

²¹ For the doublet character of the two scenes of vocation see e.g. W. Wimmel, *Kallimachos in Rom. Die Nachfolge seines apologetischen Dichtens in der Augusteerzeit* (Wiesbaden 1960) 117-119.