C E N S U R A E   L I B R O R U M

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Richard Rawles, ***Callimachus*****,** London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019 (Ancients in Action), 139 pp., ISBN 978-1-4742-5486-1 (hb.) / 978-1-4742-5485-4 (pb.), £50.00 (hb.) / 17.99 (pb.).

I could not resist the instant temptation to say that Callimachus would have probably approved of this book, because it is by no means a big one. The book is also a very ambitious attempt to summarise the most prolific (author of 800 works, according to the *Suda Lexicon*) and influential poet of the Hellenistic period in just 140 pages. The book by Richard Rawles (= R.), however, constitutes part of a relatively new series which in an approachable way introduces general readers and students who are not acquainted with Greek or Latin to major figures of ancient culture and history, ranging from Homer and Vergil to Cleopatra and Boudicca. I would like to add that readers are not only not expected to know dead languages, but are also not required to know any modern ones except English, in which all the further reading recommended in the book was written.

The book under review deals with the life and – most importantly – the works of Callimachus of Cyrene (3rd century BC), a poet who combined the theory and practice of poetry in a masterful manner. R. divided his book into five parts, analysing: Callimachus' poetic and philological contribution, some questions concerning the voices of Callimachean narrators, the presentation of the poet and his attitude towards the gods and religion, the picture of the new world that emerged after Alexander's death, and a very short section devoted to some stories in the *Aetia* that linked Callimachus with the Roman era, that is, the newer world to come.

The method R. used was to combine a brief general presentation of historical and literary questions with a thorough study of selected passages and fragments that are in some way significant to Callimachus' work. This method has proved very effective, since on the one hand it does not tire readers, while on the other it provides them with some detailed analysis of Callimachus' main poetic strategies. This allows R. to show not only other researchers' opinions, reflections and conclusions, but also his own insights into Callimachus' poetics. For instance, he underlines the importance the Alexandrian authors attached to the written word – in contrast to the spoken one – by highlighting two scenes from the *Aetia* (fr. 73 and 75 a–b Harder), where a character expresses his love through writing, namely carving words on the outside of an apple and on the bark of a tree (p. 24). This goes together with a programmatic passage coming from the same work, which depicts the young Callimachus taking a writing-tablet in his hands for the first time, while Apollo is sitting next to him (*Aet*. fr. 1, 21–28). R. also makes an attempt, which proves successful (not an easy task when his readers are not expected to know ancient Greek), to present Callimachus' usage of rare words, which not only point to the poet's erudition, but also modify the tone of a given scene, frequently adding a tinge of humour to it (pp. 26 p.). In a similar vein, R. draws attention to the individualisation of language; he takes Hecale as his example and shows how emotional her manner of speaking is, ranging from love and happiness to despair and hatred (p. 54).

Moreover, R. has managed to tackle a difficult problem connected with the poor state of preservation of Callimachus' œuvre: he translates a fragment as extant and then narrates the rest of the (reconstructed) story. However, sometimes that strategy might be misleading when he does not specify that the information he is giving comes from another source, as in the case of a detail from the story of Acontius and Cydippe, which is preserved in Aristaenetus' *Letters* (I 10, 25–45) and not in the *Aetia*, as the reader might be prompted to understand (p. 20).

As far as the translation is concerned, I would not render the word σχοῖνος as 'parasang' (p. 29, cf. p. 32), although it is provided with the attributive Περσίς. Indeed, the Persian unit

of measurement of distance was *parasang* (Greek παρασάγγης), and not σχοῖνος, which was an Egyptian one. However, when someone as erudite as Callimachus writes the phrase σχοίνῳ Περσίδι (*Aet*. fr. 1, 18 Pfeiffer; Harder) in a very important programmatic passage that constitutes an introduction to his *opus magnum*, the *Aetia*, we should assume that he does so on purpose. It is most likely that he wanted to provoke confusion and to make readers think and seek an explanation for this "error". What they were (and are) supposed to find is a passage from Herodotus' *Histories* (II 6, 7–8), where both terms are mentioned close to each other. The passage was certainly well known to all the Alexandrian readers of the *Aetia*, since it comes from the beginning of the book which gives an extensive account of Egypt, their new land. On the other hand, σχοῖνος Περσίς actually points to *parasang*, and there is another Greek writer who uses the word notably often (actually most often of all), namely Xenophon, in whose *Anabasis* παρασάγγης appears 56 times in repetitive formulaic sentences describing tiresome marches of the Ten Thousand through the vast Persian interior. My guess, then, is that Callimachus used the disagreement between the noun and its attributive to criticise these two works, taking into account their form and content at the same time. While saying: "and hereafter/ judge poetry by its art, not by the Persian *schoinos*" (transl. A. Harder) he wanted to point out the "big book" (Herodotus' *Histories*) and the other one that deals with war (Xenophon's *Anabasis*). Additionally, by mentioning a Persian *schoinos*, he intended to evoke a feeling of the weariness that accompanied not only exhausting marches, but also reading about them. In effect, he manages to encompass his own negative opinion concerning the style and subject matter of both works in just two words.

Since the book is intended for the non-specialist reader and student, perhaps in some particular areas they should be provided with more information to spark their interest. For instance, they probably will not be impressed by information about the sum of fifteen talents that Ptolemy III was willing (and able) to pay for the texts of the three Athenian tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides (p. 6). To catch the reader's eye, it would have been better to mention how much it weighed in gold, and that nowadays it would probably amount to the equivalent of millions of dollars (L. Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World*, New Haven–London 2001, p. 35). Similarly, while mentioning Sotades' abusive verse criticising the marriage of Ptolemy II to his sister Arsinoe (p. 5) it would have been interesting to add that, according to an ancient tradition, the poet was condemned to death by the offended ruler (Ath. XIV 621a–b). The hint that a poet could be locked in a leaden chest and thrown into the sea for having written just one line would definitely have made the story more vivid. On the other hand, even in a book intended for a wider audience some details matter, for instance data (omitted by R.: pp. 9, 10, 12) about the number of hymns, iambs and epigrams that Callimachus wrote. As far as precision is concerned, not all the "Homeric hymns" come from the archaic period (p. 71), but some of them were written later. Moreover, Asterie was not Apollo's mother (p. 96). Actually, she was his aunt (cf. Hes. *Th*. 404–407), although that is what Callimachus expected his readers to know.

Nevertheless, these are not such important details. The *Callimachus* is a good read for all those who want to learn about the very beginnings of poetics and poetry which had a great influence on Roman literature in particular and, consequently, on European culture in general. Perhaps, unlike R. himself, who says that he came to Callimachus through the study of Roman poetry (p. 123), having read the book more readers will take a shortcut and get to him directly.

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