

Aetiology and Descriptions of Works of Art in Callimachus

Aetiological stories abound in Hellenistic poetry, especially in Callimachus. His *Aetia* is not the only case where *aetia* promote Callimachus' new priorities and principles in writing poetry. In his *Hymns* he reworks the typical and inherited hymnic construction which includes the parentage (*γοναί*), the powers and qualities of the honoured deity (*τιμαί, ἄρεται*), by integrating into them a large amount of aetiologies. Notably, he creates many images that lead to an *aition* about names, present cults, genealogies etc. (Depew 1993; Manakidou in print). He also chooses to depict episodes from a god's life that are marked by an aetiological content. Aetiology (combined with vignettes from the god's life and deeds) also recalls well-known visual representations of the god's specific attributes such as e.g. Zeus' nursing, the golden appearance of the eternal youth Apollo, Pallas bathing and caring for her horses.

Nowadays, we are willing to accept that there is more than just a learned game at stake in these aetiological stories. The model of the *poeta doctus* who is interested in *aetia* because of their learned content brings forward a more general interest in legitimating the new world that emerged after the Macedonian intervention in the old order of Greek cities. *Aetia* provide a link between the famous and well-established Greek past and the newly- established present (Harder 2003 offers an overview of the literature about the *aitia* as drawing attention to the connections between the past and the present; also Hopkinson 1984, 141, 142). To be sure, this erudite device serves for the mapping of a *continuum* that allows the present to be a legitimate part and heir of the Greek tradition. As such, aetiology becomes part of identity and aids in its stabilization in a world of mutability and multi-ethnicity.

On the other hand, Callimachean poetry includes works of art among other curiosities (Manakidou 1993). It is noteworthy that, differently from other contemporary poets, who deal with and describe fictional works of art (e.g. the *kissybion* in the first *Idyll* of Theocritus, the

basket of Moschus' *Europa*), Callimachus always introduces real works of art and, moreover, displays a particular fondness for products of a very remote past, both of a strange nature and of a small artistic value (one exception is the famous statue of Zeus in Olympia). These descriptions are often combined with aetiological stories. Examples: the Ephesian Artemis (*Hymn* 3.237-9), the horn-altar in Delos, Aphrodite in Delos (*Hymn* 4.307-9), Charites' statue in Paros, Hera's statue in Samos and that of Apollo with the Charites and the bow in Delos in the *Aetia*.

According to Goldhill, "*in the Hellenistic period, the viewer aims for a clever, pointed, intellectualized revelation of the sediments of meaning. It dramatizes not just an interpretation, but a sophos —an educated wit— interpreting. (...) We see the category of "professional viewer" being developed, contested, and competed for. The critical gaze, which is the sign of the art historian, finds its institutional origin here.*" (2007, 2; already Goldhill 1994 on looking as interpreting).

The paper will modify Goldhill's (2007) question "what is *ecphrasis* for" into "how does aetiology work in Callimachus' *ecphraseis*". I intend to show that Callimachus' extensive use of aetiology within *ecphrasis* (even if with this term we also include small-scale mentioning of a work of art) serves as vehicle for creating a "critical gaze" that displays a high degree of wisdom and professional expertise in matters of art criticism and in poetry's evaluation. Moreover, the aetiological investment of an *ecphrasis* allows Callimachus to bring forward his self-confidence as regards the potentialities of diction and, consequently, his ideas about the relationship of his poetry with visual arts and, maybe, about the inferiority of the latter when compared with his poetic constructions.

Bibliography

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