

The Novella of Heliodorus' Calasiris

Calasiris is as central to the *Aithiopika* as any character in it. Charicleia and Calasiris can be seen to have parallel novels (Paulsen). Calasiris is second as narrator only to the author himself, making his perspective vital. Here I provide a summative reading of the entire novella of Calasiris, which serves as a counterpoint to that of Charicleia and Theagenes. Heliodorus in his romance recasts canonical Greek narratives using non-Greek perspectives (Whitmarsh). My central original observation is that Calasiris functions as a rehabilitated Odysseus/Oedipus, for not only does he prevent his sons from killing each other in combat (as Oedipus cannot), knows (like the Oedipus at Colonus) of his approaching death, and, most importantly, he dies gently with his home restored in the company of his family, as Tiresias predicts Odysseus, reconciled with Poseidon, will do. The wanderings of Homer's Odysseus are linked to his epic failures, such as lead to the death of Ajax and the wrath of Poseidon. Calasiris is noted for his mendacity (Winkler) which recalls practices of philosophers, doctors, as well as the Neoplatonic / Neopythagorean sages of his day (Kim). Calasiris is one of Charicleia's three fathers, representing a ladder of wisdom, with Greece at the bottom and Meroe at the top (Szepessy). Egypt's superior wisdom goes beyond the more straightforward Greek rationalism of the Greeks to uncover hidden, mystic meanings. Note how Calasiris' Egyptian Homer has crafted his Odysseus to be more like an Egyptian than the Greek Achilles, who, unlike Odysseus, is fated to end up on the Island of the Blessed, as Theagenes, his direct descendent, will end up among the now blameless Ethiopians. Egypt's wisdom lacks is a proper respect for chastity and internal ethical purity, which the Greeks excel at, and the Ethiopians even more so. Nectanebo in the *Alexander Romance* is a figure for Egyptian trickery, use of dark magic, and sexual excess.

Calasiris' distinction between high and low magic (3.16) expresses his ideal moral universe (Dowden, Sandy). Calasiris' telling Knemon about his discovery of Charicleia's destiny, willingly revealing his various duplicities, represents his coming to grips with his role in the divine plan at this late stage as he heads for Memphis to die. Charicleia will later gain such knowledge of the divine plan at Meroe. Calasiris is a magic helper on Charicleia's quest for her true identity and home. As the problematical, but supremely talented Nectanebo serves the cosmic order by bringing Alexander into being (who has unique form, as does Charicleia), so Calasiris serves to bring Charicleia to Meroe, where she and Theagenes will eliminate Meroe's last great evil and serve as priest of the Sun and priestess of the Moon. Calasiris describes a dream-vision (3.11) in which Apollo and Artemis commended Charicleia and Theagenes to lead them along a path determined by the gods. But he has no idea where the gods are leading, and has to get Charicles' band to understand the working of a divinely crafted story. Calasiris' claim that Persinna commissioned him to find Charicleia (4.12) is a fiction figuring events from a divine perspective, for Persinna, weaving her message, was, unawares, crafting a commission for him to undertake to bring Charicleia back to her. His vision of Odysseus appearing to him and predicting his wanderings and sufferings, aged but with a vigorous looking thigh, likewise figures how Calasiris feels about himself – nearly used up, but some remaining vigor to finish his mission. At the end, because of his basically proper ideals and the service he has done to the divine plan, Calasiris gain his happy ending, as Odysseus will.

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