

Callimachus' *Hymn 1 to Ptolemy*

The ethical understanding of Justice falls under the domain of the king of the Olympian gods, Zeus, who also has the power to appoint kings and heirs in the mortal realm. Callimachus' *Hymn to Zeus* celebrates Zeus' birth and early life on Crete only to transition into his authority to appoint kings (whether worthy kings or not) by means of citing ancient poets who dismissed his organic rise to power over the heavens in the first place (*Hymn 1.60-1*) (Nisetich-2003). I question Callimachus' controversial choice, especially if this text is meant to be a hymn – or song of praise – to Zeus; and, instead, I suggest that Callimachus wrote this hymn not so much to Zeus, but to Ptolemy II Philadelphus. I support my argument through 1) a comparison of kingship presented in Hesiod and Homer and 2) a study of Callimachus' intertextual references to Hesiod and Homer in his song.

In the *Hymn to Zeus*, Callimachus invoked the hallowed images of Zeus' trials in his rise to supremacy from the *Theogony* (vv. 617-731, 820-68). These moments from his early life describe the importance and even necessity of his kingship with displays of enlightened leadership skills that drastically separate his character from his predecessors Cronus and Uranus (e.g., *Theog.* 624-8). Hesiod's *Theogony* demonstrates a necessary moral authority in the divine realm (Blinkman-1987). The *Works and Days* (vv. 220-1), on the contrary, invokes the Justice of Zeus nostalgically while at the same time lamenting the breakdown of domestic and political stability in the Iron Age (Beall-2005/2006, Canevaro-2013). Zeus, therefore, provides *exemplum* for good kings, but he also entitles unjust rule. A study of leadership in Homeric society likewise demonstrates several instances of heroes living up to societal expectations of just leaders with the ability to reflect upon their privileged elite status (e.g., Sarpedon, *Il.* 12.310-28

and Hector, *Il.* 6.441-6) (Murnaghan-1997) as well as moments when the most powerful seem to be acting most childish (e.g. Agamemnon). Yet Agamemnon's ancestral staff (*Il.* 2.100-8) gives him right as a king legitimized by Zeus to act in his own best interests, even if not in those of his men. Divine appointment does not necessarily mean divine action.

To what extent, then, should we take Callimachus' hymn to Zeus as a sacred song in praise of the god's divine power to appoint just leaders? Like Hesiod and Homer, Callimachus questions the abilities of kings to act fairly and not be persuaded by personal gain (*Hymn* 1.81-3). In opposition to the uncertain moral authority of other kings, Callimachus specifically chose the Homeric word *medeon* ("lord"), which Homer only used for Zeus, to refer to Ptolemy near the end of the song (Nisetich-2003). This term blurs the two kings – one divine, one mortal –, and the correlation between Zeus' early trials and Ptolemy who also "is especially prosperous far and wide" (*Hymn* 1.86) praises the Hellenistic king in similar terms of moral authority and success in battles. Blinkman (1987), moreover, observes a greater meaning to Callimachus' use of the phrase "Kings are from Kings" (*Hymn* 1.79) because it occurs right at the moment when Hesiod praised the Muses and Apollo for legitimizing poets at *Theogony* 96. Since Callimachus previously clarified that Zeus does not pick poets, but lesser gods do (*Hymn* 1.71), I suggest that he made this distinction because, like Hesiod in this context, we imagine him receiving the authority to speak and be heard with the gift of a laurel staff from the Muses (cf. *Theog.* 30) (Stoddard 2003). Callimachus invoked this imagery not necessarily to praise Zeus (and the morally lacking kings he appoints), but to invest himself with the privilege of praising Ptolemy through comparisons to Zeus' early life (cf. also *Hymn* 4.171-5).

Callimachus ultimately closed this hymn with the same request for prosperity that ends *Homeric Hymn 15 to Heracles* (Nisetich-2003), enriching the Ptolemaic *mythos* with his family's

ancestral ties to Zeus by means of Heracles. And like any hymn before this expecting *charis* (Furley-1995), I propose that Callimachus' poem performs acts of continuous praise of Ptolemy's accomplishments and – in return – requests Ptolemy's continued protection of his kingdom in a religious context.

Bibliography

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