

Callimachus, Heracles' Club, and the Literary History of Theomachy

How much textual space does allusion require? Intertextual readings of Hellenistic poetry, including studies of single words and *hapax legomena* (e.g. Rengakos 1992 and Kyriakou 1995), has a long and robust scholarly precedent. However, what makes a small allusion--in terms of words used not interpretive import--plausible? The contextual framing? The specificity and rarity of language involved? What new horizons can open from pushing on a few words in a small poem open? Questions such as these and border ongoing methodological debates interrogating the interpretive limits of allusivity and intertextual readings provide the background for the intertextual reading presented in this paper.

I argue that the language used by Callimachus in the single distich epigram *AP* 6.351 = 22 *HE* to describe an oaken club (φήγινον ὄζον) dedicated to Heracles contains a sophisticated series of allusions that leads the reader to recall the literary tradition of mortal theomachies featuring Heracles and Diomedes from Homer to Theocritus. The phrase φήγινον ὄζον contains a Homeric *hapax* and is directly modeled after the adjective's appearance at *Il.* 5.838 (φήγιμος ἄξων), where it applied to the axle of Diomedes' chariot. Beyond recognition of this parallel (Gow and Page 1965 and Sens 2020), the phrase has received little critical attention. First, I demonstrates that the Homeric *hapax*, when used in the context of Heracles, activates a chain of references to earlier literary accounts of mortal theomachies, particularly the relationship between the Athena-aided theomachies of Diomedes in *Iliad* Book 5 and Heracles in the Pseudo-Hesiodic *Scutum*, which likely knows of and responds to the theomachic narrative in the *Iliad* (Stamatopoulou 2017). Second, I examine the noun ὄζος, used nowhere else in earlier extant literature to refer to Heracles' club. Callimachus has chosen the term to create a “window

reference” (for the term see Thomas 1986) through the description of Heracles’ weapon in Theocritus *Idyll* 17 to yet another literary account of Heracles’ wounding of gods, in this instance the hero’s triple theomachy in *Olympian* 9. Pindar notably rejects this narrative as not being suitable to encomium, a decision that places epichoric in competition with epic (Pavlou 2008). Thus, Callimachus encodes within his description of Archinos’ dedication a reference to the shared theomachic histories of Diomedes and Heracles in the *Iliad*, Pseudo-Hesiodic *Scutum*, and Pindar *Olympian* 9 and in doing provides a literary history of this mythological *topos* for his reader.

The allusivity of the phrase is a microcosm of generic criticism. In its unique combination of terms, φήγινον ὄζον inscribes into the dedication of a club to Heracles the complicated literary history of the hero’s battle with the gods, setting competing versions of theomachy drawn from multiple genres into dialogue and conflict. This clash of genres chimes with Callimachus’ play with the generic conventions of inscribed epigram that lends the epigram much of its witty *pointe* (see e.g., Luck 1968, Köhnken 1993 and Schmitz 2010). Furthermore, the Heracles’ decision to accept the φήγινον ὄζον specifically responds to Pindar’s rejection of the myth. The epigram willingly takes on the massive tradition and myth of epic theomachy, despite its miniature form. In two words, in a poem totalling two lines, Callimachus deploys allusivity to read and criticize a giant literary tradition. In doing so, Callimachus addresses fundamental questions about the relationship between tradition, content, and literary form to his reader.

Bibliography

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