Statius’ praise of his father’s literary culture (Silv. 5.3.156–57)—

_Tu pandere doctus carmina Battiadae latebrasque Lycophronis atri._

You were skilled to expound the poems of Battus’ son and the lurking places of obscure Lycophron.

—echoes an opinion widespread both nowadays and in the Imperial age, that Callimachus’ poetry is difficult and its elucidation requires much scholarly work.1 Were all of Callimachus’ works lost except his epigrams, no modern scholar could—at first glance—subscribe to this point of view. The _Aitia, Iambi,_ smaller elegiac poems and partly also the _Hymns_ often feature challenging erudition coupled with rare glosses, morphological peculiarities, sometimes even a highly elaborate word order. The reader will encounter nothing of this kind in Callimachus’ surviving epigrams. Just compare some lines from the second book of the _Aitia_ (fr. 43.46–53 Pf. = 50.46–53 Massimilla):

οἶδα Γέλας, ἐπεμοίω νῆς κεφαλῆς ἔπι κεῖμεν ἕναν ἄστυ
Λυνδόθεν ἀρχαιὰν [σα]μιπ[τόμενο]γ γενε[νῆ].
Μνυνὴν καὶ Κρήσησαν, ἵνα ζείοντα λοετ[ρά]
χεῦσιν ἐ[πὶ] Εὐρώπης υἱέ Κ[ωκαλί]δες
οἶδα Λεοντίνους[..]δεδρα[..].....[.]
καὶ Μεγαρεῖς ἔτερ[οι] τοῖς ἀ[πέ]νασσαν ἔκει
I know the city lying by the mouth of the Gelas, proud of her ancient lineage sprung from Lindos, and Cretan Minoa where the daughters of Cocalos treated Europa’s son to a boiling bath. I know of Leontinoi... and one set of Megarians sent there by another, those of Nisaia. I can tell of Euboea and Eryx, loved by the Lady of the Witching Belt...

with one of Callimachus’ best known epigrams, on the death of his friend Heraclitus—a subject theoretically not forbidding solemnity and affectation (34 GP = AP 7.80 = 2 Pf.):

εἴπέ τις, Ἰράκλειτε, τεῦν μόρον, ἐς δὲ με δάκρυ ἠγογεν· ἐμνήσθην δ’ ὀσσάκις ὀμφότεροι ἡλίον λέσχη κατεδύσσεμεν. ἄλλα σὺ μέν που, ξείν Ἀλικαρνησεῖ. τετράπαλαι σποδή· αἰ δὲ τεαὶ ζωοειν ἀμβόνες, ἦσιν ὁ πάντων ἀρπακτής Αἴδης οὐκ ἐπὶ χεῖρα βαλεί.

Your death, a casual remark, moved me to tears,
for I recalled, Herakleitos, how often you and I put the sun to bed with our talking. But all that’s left of you is ashes now, my friend in Halikarnesos. Your Nightingales are alive, though: Hades who rips all things away will never lay a hand on them.

No affectation here, no abstruse vocabulary or erudite allusions; rare words are very easy to understand, so that their precisity is almost disguised. Ancient readers may or may not have been aware that τετράπαλαι at line 4 and ἀρπακτής at line 6 were either poorly attested forms or Callimachean coinages, but none would have found their meaning unclear.2 This holds true for almost all of Callimachus’ epigrams. Only the poem on the nautilus offered to Arsinoe (14 GP = Athen. 7.318b = 5 Pf.) appears to be a little less plain (no surprise that an encomiastic piece displays a more elaborate style), yet it has nothing in common with the real complexity of other elegiac works by the same author, like the Aithia or Sosibius’ Victory. A few decades later Euphorion, one of the most gifted Hellenistic poets of the second generation, fits

---

2 Τετράπαλαι seems to be a real hapax legomenon; ἀρπακτής does not appear elsewhere apart from the much later Σ [Opp.] C. 1.516, and was probably built by Callimachus on the Homeric ἀρπακτήρ (same meaning). Callimachus’ use of Homeric hapax legomena and other rare words mostly reflects his poetic aims (as Sistakou rightly stresses in this volume), and is not just an obscure game in the manner of Lycophron.