MISCHIEF IN KALLIMACHOS’ HYMN TO ARTEMIS

BY

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In two recent studies of Kallimachos, embracing Hymns 4, 5 and 6 1), I have suggested that what has obstructed our understanding of this poet has been our readiness to confuse his means with his ends. Of course it is natural that we form our impressions on the basis of detected influences. If the treatment of an episode recalls an earlier passage in literature or the mood of another type of composition than the hymn, we define Kallimachos’ originality in terms of the importation of a new spirit, or the application or adaptation of a familiar scene or practice to a new situation. But this seems to me only half of the answer in many cases, for we all too seldom take the enquiry a step further by asking what are the consequences of the application or modification of the familiar. There never was a poet who exploited the commonplace as much as Kallimachos, and it is the subtle distinctiveness of the ‘new look’, the renovation of the old in a spirit of realism or ‘logical consequences’, that sets this poet apart.

In this article I shall apply the principle of Callimachean mischief to several passages in the Third Hymn. When we read the Hymn to Artemis now, after so many centuries have separated us from the poet’s intentions, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that it is a happy-go-lucky composition, in which are strung casually together episodes ranging in merit from the splendour of baby Artemis at the opening to the rather wretched and laboured humour of Kallimachos’ oxen at lines 170-182. If there is a stronger unifying principle in this

straggling composition than the idea of weaving together a number of disparate strands into a 'historic day in the life of Artemis' (with 183-268 as a possibly unfortunate addition), it still eludes us; in its absence there will not be a great deal which any of us at present can add to the careful analysis of the spirit of the Hymn given by Prof. H. Herter \(^1\). But if we recognize that the painstaking craftsman of the Epiphany Hymns is operative at some level behind the motley facade of Hymn 3, a patch or two at least may assume a darker shade of purple.

That Kallimachos is bent on a novel approach to hymnography can quickly be illustrated from the Herakles episode (142-161), one of several which make it difficult to comprehend how Hymn 3 could ever have been seriously imagined to be destined for the cult of Artemis at Ephesos. The episode provides us with a running commentary on the reception of the goddess at Zeus's palace, a mischievous parallel to the reception of her brother in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo. Artemis is met on her return from the hunt by Hermes, the major-domo, who takes her weapons, and by Apollo, who takes her catch. Or so it was before the arrival of Herakles among the gods, for now Phoibos no longer has this aethlos; the 'mighty Alcid' has taken upon himself this supererogatory 'labour'.

Kallimachos casts his hungry Herakles in a heroic mould throughout this delightful episode. It is no longer Apollo's labour, τοῖος γὰρ Τιρόνθιος ἄχμων / ἔστημε πρὸ πυλῶν ποτιδέγμηνος . . . (146 f.). But the image of the champion, eternally vigilant before the city gates, is not to endure; it is whimsically undercut by εἴ τι φέρουσα / νείλα πῖνον ἐδέσμα. The pregnant τοῖος—curious that it once fell under suspicion, the more so with Pelias' magnificent ἕσομαι τοῖος at Pi. P. 4, 156 to guide our thinking \(^2\)—contributes to the effect, for

\(^1\) Kallimachos und Homer in: Xenia Bonnensia, Festschrift zum fünfundsiebzigjährigen Bestehen des Philologischen Vereins und Bonner Kreises (1929), 50-105.

\(^2\) I take the old fox to know what he is about when he uses a thought admitting as complements both ὁλον ὀλέας and ὀλός ἀληθής. G. Norwood, Pindar, 39 f., maintains that the Fourth Pythian contains 'for the first and last time in classical literature . . . in full expression the idea of Chivalry', an intimation to Arkesilas that he should imitate the attributes of his heroic forebears. But this is not all; 'Pelias the villain can on occasion show a knightly manner: his ἕσομαι τοῖος is flawless'. What comfort Arkesilas could derive