CHARITON AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

A Contribution to the Corpus Hellenisticum

by

P. W. VAN DER HORST

Utrecht

The Greek novel is a creation of the Hellenistic period. From Hellenistic novels only tiny fragments have been preserved, e.g. from the Ninus romance which probably dates from the (second or) first century B.C.E. The only five complete examples of Greek novels which we have date from the Roman period (from the first to the fourth cent. C.E.): Chariton’s Chaireas and Callirhoe, Achilles Tatius’ Cleitophon and Leucippe, Xenophon of Ephesus’ Anthisa and Habrocomes (or: Ephesiaca), Longus’ Daphnis and Chloe, and Heliodorus’ Theagenes and Charicleia (or: Aethiopica). As the titles indicate, all these are stories about a man and a woman. They are always young and beautiful and in love with one another. In most cases they experience a lot of suffering: separation, shipwreck, slavery, apparent death, etc., before the happy ending. There is much uncertainty about the relative dating of these novels, but there has been a growing consensus that the oldest is the work of Chariton, who lived in the city of Aphrodisias, in the South-West of Asia Minor. Almost all modern scholars date Chariton between 50 B.C.E. and 150 C.E., most of them preferring the second half of the first century C.E. At the end of the nineteenth century, the great Erwin Rohde still dated Chariton to the fifth or sixth century C.E. But since then, the find of a papyrus (P. Oxy. 1019) with

---

3 Der griechische Roman, Leipzig 1960 (repr. of the third edition of 1914), 522.
parts of Chariton’s text, very probably from the second half of the second century C.E., has proved that Chariton definitely can not be dated later than the first half of the second century C.E. Even if we leave the question open and say that he wrote sometime between 50 B.C.E. and 150 C.E., Chariton can be regarded as a near-contemporary of the authors of the N.T. And indeed, his work reveals a number of interesting parallels and illustrations to passages in the N.T. There are no parallels between the love story of Chaereas and Callirhoe as a whole and the N.T., but there are several scenes, ideas, phrases, and stylistic devices that may illuminate scenes and usages in the N.T., especially in the book of Acts. These will be presented below in the order of the text of the N.T.

This is not the first time Chariton’s novel is used for elucidating N.T. usage. He could not be used by the compilers of Annotationes and Observationes in the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century (including Wettstein) due to the fact that the editio princeps did not appear before 1750. From that time on, however, his work has been used by some N.T. scholars, notably by Walter Bauer in his Wörterbuch. Bauer’s references are, of course, far from being exhaustive, because he only collected lexical parallels. Our collection is more comprehensive, including also conceptual, stylistic, and other kinds of parallels. We will indicate, however, the cases where a parallel adduced below was already mentioned by Bauer.

Mt. 4:23 et passim, Mt. 11:5 et passim (εὑραγγέλιον, εὑραγγελίζεσθαι): Char. VI 5, 5 τούτο πρῶτον εὑραγγέλιον ἔχεις: ἡδέως σε εἰδε (sc. the Persian king looked at you with pleasure). VI 5, 2 (Callirhoe) τάχ’ ὁδοξὲν ἀποδίδοσθαι Χαιρέξ καὶ ἔσπευδε τούτο ἀκούσαι καὶ τῶν εὐραγγελίων ἀμείψασθαι τὸν εὐνοῦχον ὑπισχνομένην. VIII 2, 5 οὗτος γὰρ ὁ ἄνηρ τὰ εὐγγέλια ἤμιν φέρει, sc. that the Persian king has been defeated. Π 1, 1 Λεωνᾶς ... αὐτὸς ἐτι νυκτὸς ἔξηλθεν εἰς τὴν Μίλητον, ἀπεύων εὐγγελίσασθαι τῷ δεσπότῃ τὰ περὶ τῆς νεωνήτου (sc. the enslaved Callirhoe, bought by Leonas and now regarded by him as a suitable wife for his recently widowed lord).

4 See Christ-Schmid-Stählin, op. cit. 808 n. 3, and Molinié, op. cit. 2.
5 This edition, by J. Ph. d’Orville, appeared in Amsterdam. See Christ-Schmid-Stählin, op. cit. 809f., and Molinié, op. cit. 47.