

BOOK REVIEW

Callimachus. By RICHARD RAWLES. *Ancients in Action*. London, UK and New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. Pp. vi + 146. Paperback, \$22.95. ISBN: 978-1-4742-5485-4.

Richard Rawles brings us a concise and informative introduction to Callimachus aimed at the non-specialist. Callimachus is a notoriously difficult author—perhaps even harder to appreciate in translation—and while the general reader may wonder if one really needs to care about three different Greek words for “knife” (26), overall this book is easy to follow, clear and written in an accessible and entertaining style. Rawles includes substantial passages of Callimachus’ work in translation, which allow the reader to get a feel for the actual poetry and follow serious readings of Callimachus’ verse. There are four chapters as well as an introduction and an *envoi*, which examines Callimachus’ Roman reception. Each section is followed by suggestions for further reading, which is especially useful for students.

The introduction gives an overview of Callimachus, placing the poet in his geographical and historical context before moving on to his works. Rawles quite rightly insists on keeping in mind the continuity of the poetics and institutions of earlier periods of Greek history even as we think about what makes the Hellenistic period “Hellenistic.” Although it is a relatively minor part of the introduction, it bears mention that when discussing the Ptolemies, Rawles reinforces the too-common misconception that brother-sister incest was widely practiced among earlier Egyptian pharaohs (4-5, again at 67) when in fact this has long ago been debunked by Egyptologists: while pharaohs sometimes married their half-siblings, they rarely, if ever, married full-siblings.¹ Some later Greek authors write that brother-

¹See Ager, S. 2005. “Familiarity Breeds: Incest and the Ptolemaic Dynasty.” *JHS* 125: 1-34 n.93 for some bibliography; cf. Cerny, J. 1954. “Consanguineous Marriages in Pharaonic Egypt.” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 40: 23-9; Allen, T. 2000. “Problems in Egyptology: Ancient Egyptian Kingship.” *Journal of Black Studies* 31.2: 139-48.

sister marriage was common in Egypt,² but we do not know whether the Ptolemies themselves believed this or the precise motivation for their incestuous marriages. Preserving their dynasty and showcasing their power are two likely reasons, however.

Chapter 1, “Callimachus on Philology and Poetics,” focuses on Callimachus’ preferred aesthetics as well as his role as scholar and critic. Discussion of the *Aetia* prologue and the Acontius and Cydippe episode takes up much of this chapter. Beyond that, Callimachus’ criticism of Antimachus’ *Lyde* is of especial interest to Rawles: he mentions fr. 398 Pfeiffer, a fragmentary epigram in which Callimachus finds fault with the work, and then points to the acrostic suggested by Keyne Cheshire in the programmatic statement at the end of the *Hymn to Apollo*.³ Oddly, he does not cite Cheshire as the source, but points to Susan Stephens’ commentary on the hymn (where she cites Cheshire).

In the second chapter, “Callimachean Voices,” Rawles examines narrator and character voices in Callimachus’ epigrams, the *Hecale* and the *Iambi*. Rawles focuses on the variety of sources for voices from stelae to birds and trees (animal, vegetable, mineral) as well as the way that “speaking” interacts with reading and writing. This is a clever way of making fragmentary texts like the *Hecale* and *Iambi* accessible, as Rawles homes in on what we *do* have and how we can draw connections between various texts and voices.

The next chapter, “Religion and the Gods,” centers on the *Hymns*. Rawles starts with some historical background, which is over-simplified and in some ways misleading. He does not distinguish between pre- and post-mortem worship of kings (highly significant in both Egyptian pharaonic tradition and for the Ptolemies themselves) and matter-of-factly states some rather controversial opinions (e.g., that Demetrius Poliorcetes was worshipped as a god in Athens, 66). Rawles takes the position, which—rightly, in my opinion—is gaining more and more traction, that Callimachus’ *Hymns* should be taken seriously as religious poetry instead of as mere literary play, using Ivana Petrovic’s work on the *Hymn to Apollo* as evidence for correspondence between Callimachus’ work and contemporary religion.

²Diod. 1.27.1; Paus. 1.7.1; Memnon *FGrHist*434 F1 (8)

³In an unpublished paper.

“People and Places” examines the re-centering of the Hellenistic world and the Ptolemies’ connections to various places in that world. Rawles begins by comparing the literary history of North Africa in authors like Pindar and Aeschylus to the area’s new significance in the Hellenistic period. Rawles gives an insightful reading connecting the *Hymn to Delos* and a dedicatory epigram for Arsinoë (*Epigram 5 Pfeiffer*) before turning to the *Aetia*.

Rawles’ last section is “*Envoi: The End of the Aetia, and Callimachus in Rome.*” He demonstrates Callimachus’ awareness of Rome as shown by his action about a wounded Roman soldier and then turns to Catullus’ version of the “Lock of Berenice.” After some examples of Callimachus’ considerable influence on Roman poets—especially Vergil—Rawles reminds his reader that Callimachus is too important in his own right to get lost in the wilderness between Classical Greece and mighty Rome. This is a very important point and a strong place to end.

Scholarship on Callimachus is thriving and this is a useful book to introduce a brilliant but challenging author both to the general reader, but also to the next generation of scholars. Although I have pointed out some problems, especially when the topic of pharaonic Egypt or historical circumstances arises, Rawles excels in modeling how to read a poem and how to read Callimachus in particular.

LEANNA BOYCHENKO

Loyola University Chicago, lboychenko@luc.edu