P.J. Lalleman

Classical Echoes (Callimachus, Chariton) in the Acta Iohannis?


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CLASSICAL ECHOES (CALLIMACHUS, CHARITON) IN THE ACTA IOHANNIS?

In Book III of his *Aetia* Callimachus includes the story of Acontius and Cydippe. The young girl has unwittingly made a vow, of which her father is uninformed, to marry Acontius. Three times divine interventions send illness to the girl in order to prevent marriages with other men projected by her father:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{ἡ τὸτ’ ἀνιγρὴ} \\
&\text{τὴν κούρην ’Λ[ίδ]εω μέχρις ἔτηξε δόμων.} \\
&\text{δεύτερον ἐστόρνυντο τὰ κλισμαία, δεύτερον ἢ πα[ί]ς} \\
&\text{ἐπὶ τεταρταῖον μίνας ἔκαιμεν πυρί.} \\
&\text{τὸ τρίτον ἐμνήσαντο γάμου κάτα, τὸ τρίτον αὐτ[ίς]} \\
&\text{Κυδίππην ὀλοίδος κρυμ[ό]ς ἐσφηκίσατο. (fr. 75.14-19)}
\end{align*}
\]

“That terrible illness then wasted the girl to the house of Hades. A second time the (nuptial) bed was made, a second time the girl was ill for seven months with quatermal fever (= malaria). The third time they planned a marriage, the third time in its turn a terrible cold settled on Cydippe.”

The motif of illness which three times hinders a planned marriage recurs in c. 113 of the *Acta Iohannis* (second century AD).\(^1\) Despite the fact that Christ wants the young John to preserve his virginity, the future apostle three times plans a marriage. All three times it is frustrated by illness:

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\begin{align*}
&\text{μοι γῆμα παρακούσθεις ἔμποδ[ύ]σας μοι (c. 113.3-5).}
\end{align*}
\]

“… who when I was about to marry didst prepare for me a bodily sickness; who, though disobeyed, on the third occasion when I wished to marry didst prevent me …”\(^2\)

It is a commonplace that the Apocryphal Acts of Apostles have a low literary level. But the author of what is probably the earliest of them, the *Acts of John*, may well have known the work of Callimachus: First, the young man who cuts off his testicles after a conflict with his father does so with a sickle (*δρέπανον*, *Acts of John* 53.2), the same instrument that Cronus used to castrate his father, as Callimachus tells in *Aetia* Book II (fr. 43.69-71). Secondly, one of the main characters in the fictional narratives of the *Acts of John* is actually called Callimachus (c.63-86).

The *Acts of John* also display a familiarity with ancient novels, specifically with Chariton’s *Callirhoe*. In addition to the already observed echoes from *Callirhoe*,\(^3\) two more instances may be taken into consideration. First, when confronted by a large crowd with mixed intentions, both Chaireas (*Callirhoe* 3.3.4) and John (*Acts of John* 43.1-2) lift up their hands (ἀνατείνους τὰς χεῖρας) to the heavens and pray. Secondly, when overwhelmed by anguish, both Chaireas (*Callirhoe* 3.3.7) and Lykomedes (*Acts of John* 20.14-19) address their beloved wife to express indignity about their undeserved fate and in trying to explain their future behaviour use the verb ἐπολογοῦμαι. In view of the situational and lexical similarities, these cases may well constitute allusions to *Callirhoe*.

The above seems to show that the author of the *Acta Iohannis* was more familiar with literature outside the emerging New Testament than is often thought.

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the discussion of the similarities in Junod and Kaestli, Acta Iohannis, 517-20, 547-51, where they conclude: ‘La fréquence et l'«atroitesse de ces parallèles confirment de manière décisive que notre auteur comait la production romanesque de son époque’ (550); add now P.J. Lalleman, ‘Classical Echoes (Callimachus, Charito) in the Acta Ioharznis?’, ZPE. She shows that in the second-century novel - Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus and Longus - women were represented as literate without any thematisation of that aspect. In an eleventh-century Persian romance, which is an important source for our knowledge of Parthenope, the heroine is even depicted as a youthful genius. View Callimachus Research Papers on Academia.edu for free. In this project, we offer a study on the Politian’s Latin translation of Callimachus, the Bath of Pallas which consists of the first translation into Spanish, commented and accompanied by a vast explanatory note. Our translation of the Latin hymn is linked to the comparison with the Callimachus’ Greek original and is used for reflecting on Politian’s features of style, bearing in mind, apart from that, the sources from where he has been influenced. The philological comment covers not only the formal study (a study on lexicon, meter, syntactic construction and stylistic devices) but also the st