

An Unnoticed Allusion in Theocritus and Callimachus

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The relative chronology of the major Hellenistic poets and also of poems within each poet's corpus is a subject where modern scholarship is forced to admit considerable uncertainty. Although it is a generally—and, in my view, rightly—held opinion that there is an extremely important degree of cross reference or significant interaction between different texts and poets of the period, it has proved highly problematic to use the perceived relationships between particular texts to demonstrate with any certainty influence between poets or respective dates of composition (as, for example, the disagreement of scholars on the priority of Theocritus' or Apollonius Rhodius' treatment of the Hylas story shows).¹ In this short article, I want to point to what seems a significant echo between passages in Callimachus' *Aitia* prologue and Theocritus' first and seventh *Idylls* not commented on in the editions of either poet. It has become a *communis opinio* that the prologue of the *Aitia* was composed late in Callimachus' life, perhaps even as a prologue to a collected edition of his work (and thus later than Theocritus' *Idylls*).² Since the evidence is far from certain on this matter, as with other aspects of dating, I shall consider the relationship between the passages in question in two ways, first as a Callimachean echo in Theocritus and then as an echo of Theocritus in Callimachus. This primarily heuristic method of argumentation is not put forward with the expectation of finally clarifying the question of dating; but rather with the aim first of pointing out this unnoticed interplay, and second of showing the constant difficulties of using such echoes to prove priority or influence. Indeed, when the allusion, as here, can be brought under the rubric of

¹ For a recent study of our knowledge on Callimachus and Apollonius, see M. Lefkowitz, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 40 (1980), 1–19. On Apollonius and Theocritus, see especially A. Köhnken, *Apollonios und Theokrit* (Göttingen 1965). For a general, traditional view on chronology see T. B. L. Webster, *Wiener Studien* 76 (1963), 68–78.

² See e.g. R. Pfeiffer, *Callimachus* II (Oxford 1949), pp. xxxiii–xlxiii; E. Eichgrün, *Kallimachos und Apollonios Rhodios* (Berlin 1961), pp. 64 ff.; and, especially, P. Parsons, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 25 (1977), 49–50.

Umkehrung, it might seem the very nature of the allusive technique that allows it to be read in this double manner.

It has often been argued that the description of the cup in Theocritus' *Idyll* 1 has a certain programmatic value for Theocritus' pastoral poetry.³ As with the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* (with which the cup is often compared and contrasted), we are offered a particular sort of picture of a particular sort of world.⁴ Each of the scenes on the cup has been thought indicative both of the nature of the pastoral world described by Theocritus and of the λεπτός style of his Hellenistic poetry—especially in the way that the depiction of the cup (in contrast with the shield of Achilles) offers a series of small-scale, unheroic fragments with no pretensions to a holistic picture of the world.

The third picture of the small boy is especially interesting with regard to a "poetic program."⁵ The scene of the vineyard itself echoes descriptions of vineyards at vintage time on the shield of Achilles and the Hesiodic *Scutum*,⁶ but is turned from any heroic associations to a picture of a light-hearted robbery of the child guard's grapes. It is of course the figure of the boy which has attracted most attention in terms of the programmatic nature of the *ecphrasis*. Callimachus writes that the Telchines say that he composes his verse *παῖς ἄτε* (*Aitia* fr. 1. 6). This idea of writing like a child, coupled with the poetic associations of the verb *πλέκει*⁷ (like other words of weaving⁸), and the "grasshopper" (which has been seen as a version of the famous Callimachean desire to be in his verse a cicada rather than an ass⁹) have led critics to see in the picture of the boy weaving a grasshopper cage¹⁰ a typically allusive Hellenistic image, joining Theocritus and Callimachus in parallel poetic interests.

³ Most recently, D. Halperin, *Before Pastoral* (Yale 1983); e.g. "The ivy cup is not only an emblem for the range of subjects in the *Idylls* in general but for the thematic structure of bucolic poetry in particular" (p. 182). See also G. Lawall, *Theocritus' Coan Pastorals* (Washington 1967), pp. 28 ff.; S. Walker, *Theocritus* (Boston 1980), pp. 30 ff.; C. P. Segal, *Poetry and Myth in Ancient Pastoral* (Princeton 1981), pp. 25–46.

⁴ On the *ecphrasis* as a world picture, see P. du Bois, *History, Rhetorical Description and the Epic: from Homer to Spenser* (Cambridge, Mass. 1982). On the shield of Achilles as world-picture, see e.g. O. Taplin, "The Shield of Achilles within the *Iliad*," *Greece & Rome* 27 (1980), 1–21.

⁵ On the significance of children in Hellenistic poetry and art, see T. B. L. Webster, *Hellenistic Poetry and Art* (New York 1964), pp. 158–62; G. Giangrande, "Théocrite, Simichidas et les Thalysies," *L'Antiquité Classique* 37 (1968), 496 ff.; T. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet* (Berkeley 1969), pp. 55–59.

⁶ See A. S. F. Gow, *Theocritus* (Cambridge 1950), *ad loc.*, who notes also the echo of *Il.* XVIII 561.

⁷ See e.g. Pindar, *Ol.* 6. 86–87; *Nem.* 4. 94.

⁸ *ὑφαίνειν* (see e.g. *Il.* III 212 and *LSJ*⁹ *ὑφαίνω*, III. 2); *ῥάπτειν* (see e.g. Hes., fr. 34).

⁹ *Aitia*, Prologue 29–32.

¹⁰ On the cage, see Gow (above, note 6) *ad loc.*, but on *ἀκριδοθήκαν* rather than *ἀκριδοθήραν*, see K. J. Dover, *Theocritus* (London 1971), *ad loc.*

There is a further cross reference in this passage which has been missed by critics and commentators. Callimachus in the *Aitia* Prologue demands that his skill or wisdom as a poet should not be judged with a Persian *σχοῖνος* (17–18):

. . . τέχνη
κρίνετε], μὴ σχοῖνφ Περσίδι τὴν σοφίην.

It is with a *σχοῖνος*, however, that Theocritus describes his boy as “fitting together” the cage (and ἐφαρμόζειν is applied by Plutarch to poetic composition,¹¹ as the uncompounded verb is often used¹²). Where Callimachus uses *σχοῖνος* in its sense of a land measure, Theocritus uses the term from that key passage in the *Aitia* prologue in the different sense of “reed” or “rush.”¹³ In other words, there can be read here a characteristic Hellenistic *Umkehrung*—an allusion to one poet by another which inverts or reuses the earlier material in a pointed or witty manner. “Judge not my poetry with a Persian *σχοῖνος*” writes Callimachus, “I write like a child”—but Theocritus gives us a poetic image of a child who is weaving and fitting together his grasshopper cage precisely with the *σχοῖνος*.

The only other use of *σχοῖνος* in the genuine poems of Theocritus is also in a passage concerned with poetics, namely, v. 133 in *Idyll* 7, another poem which has often been regarded as a key programmatic statement, albeit one about whose tone and attitude critics have argued endlessly.¹⁴ After the exchange of songs (51–127), and the presentation of the λαγωβόλον to Simichidas (128–30), the travellers (in a transition of extraordinary abruptness) turn, and in the space of a single line (132) find themselves in the midst of a *locus amoenus* (132–46). The first description of this poetic bower is ἐν τε βαθείαις / ἀδείας *σχοῖνοιο χαμυνίσιν ἐκλίνθημες*. Lykidas turns off (ἀποκλίνας, 130) and Simichidas with his companions lies down (ἐκλίνθημες) on a bed of sweet *σχοῖνος* in the *locus amoenus*. One allusion here that has been rightly noted by commentators is to Homer, *Od.* V. 462–63:

ὁ δ' ἐκ ποταμοῖο λιασθεῖς
σχοῖνφ ὑπεκλίνθη, κύσε δὲ ζεῖδωρον ἄρουραν,

where Odysseus finally reaches the shore of Phaiacia. Here the *locus amoenus* is the end of a significant part of Simichidas' journey—an image

¹¹ Plut., *Erot.* 769C.

¹² See *LSJ*, ἀρμόζειν, I. 5 for numerous examples.

¹³ On the sense of *σχοῖνος* see S. Hatzikosta, *A Stylistic Commentary on Theocritus Idyll 7* (Amsterdam 1982), ad 133. Hatzikosta surprisingly does not mention K. Lembach, *Die Pflanzen bei Theokrit* (Heidelberg 1971), who discusses *σχοῖνος* on pp. 37–38.

¹⁴ See Segal (above, note 3), pp. 110 ff., for general discussion and bibliography—to which may be added N. Krevans, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 113 (1983), 201–20; H. Berger, Jr., *Classical Antiquity* 3 (1984), 1–39; E. Bowie, *Classical Quarterly* 35 (1985), 67–91.

associated with the discovery of an (intellectual) insight¹⁵—and it ends at a pastoral harvest festival (even if Simichidas does not “kiss the grain-giving soil”). Indeed, there are numerous echoes of the *Odyssey* particularly in the final sections of this poem,¹⁶ and the final two lines with their mention of the planting of one's winnowing fan seem to refer to the famous prophecy of Teiresias concerning the ultimate end of Odysseus' journeying. Simichidas' journey to the pastoral festival ends with an echo of the epic wanderer's prospective travel towards his mysterious final goal.¹⁷ The echo of Odysseus' arrival in Phaiacia as Simichidas enters the pastoral bower may, then, be significant. But, as Fritzsche noted in 1870 (when Callimachus' line was “fr. 481 Schneider”), the determination of *σχοῖνος* as feminine by Theocritus may in itself be an erudite comment on Callimachus' use of the term.¹⁸ Beyond this, however, could the reference to the term from a key passage of Callimachean poetics and Theocritus' own first *Idyll* be significant in the opening line of a description which goes on to invest the landscape with a certain poetic force (as many critics have noted)? It is the nymphs, who earlier were described as forces of poetic inspiration (91–93), that Simichidas addresses (148–50); near by the chattering cicadas (Callimachus' self-description) toil (*ἔχον πόνον*, 139), as Lykidas had said of his poetic composition *ἔξεπὸνάσσα*, 51; bees (142) are flying around (bees are images of poetic inspiration for Pindar in particular, and in this poem they bring honey to the singer Comatas' lips [84–85]); so too the song-birds sing (*ἄειδον*, 141) and the dove moans (*ἔστεινε*, 141) and the holy water—a symbol of poetic inspiration for Callimachus in particular¹⁹—bubbles (*κελάρυζε*, 137). It seems scarcely sufficient to say with Giangrande that this lengthy description is merely a simple and direct way of saying that there was singing in the pleasant surroundings of the festival.²⁰ More precisely, especially with regard to Callimachus' use of *σχοῖνος* and Theocritus' own use of the term in *Idyll* 1, it is quite

¹⁵ See Segal (above, note 3), pp. 116 ff., especially pp. 127–29, who comments on the association of road imagery and the programmatic force of the poem. See also, in general, O. Becker, *Das Bild des Weges und verwandte Vorstellungen im frühgriechischen Denken* (*Hermes Einzelschriften* 4 [1937]), and A. Kambylis, *Die Dichterweihe und ihre Symbolik* (Heidelberg 1965).

¹⁶ See in particular U. Ott, “Theokrits ‘Thalysien’ und ihre literarischen Vorbilder,” *Rheinisches Museum* 115 (1972), 134–49.

¹⁷ See Segal (above, note 3), pp. 158–60, who discusses this image. This aspect of the final lines is not mentioned in Ott (above, note 16) nor in the debate between Giangrande (above, note 5), 493 ff. and Lasserre, *Rheinisches Museum* 102 (1959), 307 ff., on the meaning of the last two lines.

¹⁸ A. Fritzsche, *Theocriti Idyllia* (Leipzig 1870), *ad loc.* *σχοῖνος* may be either masculine or feminine. Herodotus, the only previous author to use the word extensively (sixteen times), appears to use only the masculine, but the feminine occurs certainly at Aristophanes, fr. 34 (*πλεκτην σχοῖνον*), and later several times (e.g. Dioscorides 4. 52).

¹⁹ See Kambylis (above, note 15), pp. 110–24.

²⁰ Giangrande (above, note 5) 491–92.

insufficient to assert that "l'idylle en question ne peut contenir . . . aucune allusion symbolique à la poésie de Théocrite sous forme de métaphores auditives ou végétales."²¹ Rather, the arrival in a place whose very elements are composed of images of poetry and poetics is in a precise way a fitting end to Simichidas' journey with its discussion and display of poetry and the ironic echoing of the Hesiodic *Dichterweihe*. Perhaps σχοῖνος is the first hint of the specially charged nature of this description of the *locus amoenus*?

The adjective ἀδείας, then, about which critics have debated at some length, may have also a further connotation.²² For ἀδύς is regularly used by Theocritus (as by other Greek poets) for the pleasantness of song, and specifically to link the world of nature and the world of song.²³ The opening of *Idyll* 1 draws the parallel precisely:

ἀδύ τι τὸ ψιθύρισμα καὶ ἀ πίτυς, αἰπόλε, τήνα,
ἀ ποτὶ ταῖς παγαῖσι, μελίσσεται, ἀδὺ δὲ καὶ τὸ
συρίσδες.

Is, then, the "sweet reed" in *Idyll* 7 also an expression to be read in terms of Theocritean poetics?

These are the only two uses of the term σχοῖνος in the genuine poems of Theocritus.²⁴ In both cases, it can be seen to have been chosen for a pointed and witty effect in an allusive manner typical of the relations of Hellenistic poets with each other and the tradition of past poetry. In *Idyll* 1, it adds a specific and clever point to the image of the boy; in *Idyll* 7, it may add a further subtle aspect to the complex interrelations of the *locus amoenus* and the journey of Theocritean poetics. In both cases, the allusion to an expression of Callimachus by Theocritus marks the continuing interplay of these two poets.

What significance, however, is there in this echo if we assume the more conventional view of Callimachus as writing after Theocritus? The prologue to the *Aitia* not only sets out to justify what has since become known as "Callimachean poetics," but also aims to do this through a network of allusions to other poets and, in particular, as it would seem at least from the present state of our knowledge, to Theocritus among his contemporaries.²⁵ His rejection of the grandeur of the heroic world and adoption of the imagery and metaphoric structure of the pastoral world can

²¹ Giangrande (above, note 5), 491.

²² Critics debate whether it means "sweet-smelling" (e.g. P. Monteil, *Théocrite* [Paris 1968], *ad loc.*), or "soft to the touch" (e.g. Hatzikosta [above, note 13], *ad loc.*, who has an extended discussion).

²³ See e.g. H. Edquist, *Ramus* 4 (1974), 101–14 for a discussion of ἀδύς in Theocritus.

²⁴ It also occurs at 21. 11 and 23. 29, both of which poems are generally regarded as spurious. At 21. 11, it is used of fishermen's nets (ἐκ σχοίνων λαβύρινθοι); at 23. 39, it is used of the spurned lover's noose (ἀλυσον τῆς σχοίνω με).

²⁵ Bowie (above, note 14) in particular has recently emphasized the need to remember the important influence of the many lost contemporary—and earlier—works.

be seen interestingly to match Theocritus' poetic principles and practice of λεπτότης. But within this general parallel interest between the two poets, specific word plays of the one poet may reverse and manipulate the language of the other. Callimachus develops an image of himself writing like a child (6), but wittily reverses Theocritus' child guard's material of composition. Theocritus' σχοῖνος with its rare feminine gender changes significance with the addition of Περσίδι. With the characteristic Hellenistic interest in scale and distortion of scale, part of a key Theocritean image of λεπτότης is turned by Callimachus to a sign of the very grandeur of style that he is rejecting. On this reading, Callimachus' use of σχοῖνος is seen as a significant echo of a contemporary poet, a further *Umkehrung*.

What conclusions can be drawn from this interplay of language? A particular term is adopted by both Theocritus and Callimachus in passages concerned with poetics, but in different ways. It can be shown moreover that the echo has significance and relevance whichever poet or poem is assumed to have priority. It could be argued that there is a source elsewhere on which both Theocritus and Callimachus draw.²⁶ It could be argued that the term may have appeared with such a charged connotation elsewhere in the lost poems of either poet, and thus the allusion may need to be seen in a more diffuse way than I have claimed. Even if either of these arguments could be shown to be true, the shared metaphorical vocabulary of Callimachus and Theocritus in passages concerned with poetics is marked. The example of σχοῖνος shows again how the texts of the Hellenistic poets are to be read always in relation to contemporaneous and past texts, but also how these relations are unlikely to be simple.²⁷

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²⁶ Indeed J. K. Newman has argued ("Pindar and Callimachus," *ICS* 10 [1985], 181–82) that σχοῖνος in the Callimachus fragment may echo Pindar, *Dithyramb* II, (p. 72, Snell-Maehler), where the poet rejects σχοινοτένεια αοιδά. σχοινοτένης is used several times by later commentators on poetic matters: it is used for "extended" songs (ἄσματα) by Philostratus (*Her.* 19. 17), for ἔννοιαι by Eustathius (946. 8) and twice of "extended" rhetorical κῶλα by Hermogenes (*In*v. 1. 5; 4. 4).

²⁷ My thanks to Neil Hopkinson, whose help enabled me to improve this paper.