Tradition and Originality in Callimachus' *Hymn to Apollo*

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The meaning of the final nine lines of Callimachus' *Hymn to Apollo*, their relevance to an interpretation of the hymn itself and to a more general understanding of Callimachean poetics, has occupied the attention of scholars for some time.[1] Phthonos whispers criticism of the poet into the ears of Apollo; Apollo drives him away with his foot and proceeds to compare the relative size and purity of the Assyrian river and the fine mist of a pure spring from which bees bring water to Demeter (105-13). Several critics pay especial attention to the precise meaning of Phthonos' criticism that the poet "does not even sing as much as the sea" (οὐδ' ὅσα πόντος ἀείδει, 106).[2] Most notably Frederick Williams (1978) has argued that πόντος here means Homer, and that Phthonos is criticizing Callimachus for not singing poems as long as those of Homer (ad 105-13). On this reading, the reply of Apollo introduces purity as a standard of poetic excellence, and, by means of an illusion to the *Iliad* (21.193-7), suggests that the ultimate source of the spring (111-12) is πόντος, or Homer. Moreover, Williams identifies the fine mist with the poetry of Callimachus, small, highly refined, and written for those who can understand "the poet's learning and subtlety" (p. 89). The final lines therefore represent symbolically the technique of imitation and variation of Homer that Callimachus employs throughout the hymn. The spring, unlike the large river, preserves the pristine purity of its original source.[3]

This analysis, however, fails to account for the substantial influence of Pindar on the narrative passages of the hymn. In *Pythian Odes* four, five and nine Pindar gives three separate accounts of the founding of Cyrene, which event is the subject of the longest narrative passage in Callimachus' hymn (lines 65-96).[4] Additionally, Williams' identification of πόντος with Homer has itself been called into question in recent years.[5] This paper then will begin with a discussion of the arguments for and against Williams' πόντος/Homer identification, before turning to a consideration of the prominence of Pindar both in the narrative passages and, as I will argue, in the final lines of the poem.

Williams' interpretation of lines 105-13 draws upon a motif, whereby Homer is compared to a great sea or fountain, from which all later poets draw inspiration. He argues that this image has its origin in a passage from the *Iliad* (21.193-97):

> ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔστι Διὶ Κρονίωνι μάχεσθαι,
> τῷ οὐδὲ κρείων Ἀχελώιος ἰσοφαρίζει,
> οὐδὲ βαθυρρείταο μέγα σθένος Ὠκεανοῖο,
> ἐξ οὗ περ πάντες ποταμοὶ καὶ πᾶσα θάλασσα

[1] See Bundy (1972), Williams (1978) with bibliography on p. 86, Lefkowitz (1980), Köhnken (1981), Cane (1987), Hutchinson (1988) esp. pp. 67f., Cameron (1995), and Traill (1998).
[2] Williams (1978) ad 105-13, Köhnken (1981), Cameron (1995) pp. 403ff., and Traill (1998).
[3] Erbse (1955) p.424 argues that the sea, according to Greek conceptions, was essentially pure; cf. Kambylis (1965) pp. 23-5. Following these scholars, Williams observes that "the streams of the river have become polluted with the refuse of γῆ (the opposite element to water), but the untouched spring retains its pristine purity, and thus its kinship with the pure πόντος from which it ultimately proceeds" (p.88).
[4] On Callimachus' use of the accounts in Pindar see Calame (1993) esp. pp. 38f.
[5] Most notably and vigorously by Cameron (1995) loc. cit.

καὶ πᾶσαι κρῆναι καὶ φρείατα μακρὰ νάουσιν.

It isn't possible to vie with Zeus, son of Kronos, for
whom not even lord Achelous is a match, nor the
great strength of deep-flowing Oceanos, from whom
all rivers and every sea and all springs and deep wells flow.

Williams (p.88) maintains that this was the original model for all subsequent comparisons of Homer to the sea. In support of this he points to statements by Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Quintillian.[6] To establish the comparison's currency in the Hellenistic period (88), Williams gives one example found in a papyrus fragment dated to the Ptolemaic age by Powell (*Coll. Alex.* 187-8). He calls the verses "undistinguished hack-work", and so "it is scarcely conceivable that their author invented the Homer-πόντος comparison" (p. 88-9). Williams also refers to a painting by the artist Galaton which was placed in the *Homereion* founded by Ptolemy IV, and which depicted Homer vomiting and other poets drawing off the vomit.[7] Over against Williams' view are those of Adolf Köhnken and Alan Cameron, who both deny that πόντος means Homer.[8] Cameron asserts that in none of the other passages adduced by Williams "does πόντος or ὠκεανός by itself directly denote Homer, without some other help or indication in the context" (p. 404). He interprets πόντος as simply the sea. Phthonos then criticizes Callimachus for failing to meet the challenge of his theme; for Apollo deserves a hymn that is as endless as the sea (p. 406).

The difficulty with this view, however, is that it makes nonsense of the most natural meaning of Phthonos' statement, ὃς οὐδ' ὅσα πόντος ἀείδει (who does *not even* sing as much as the sea). As Cameron himself admits the construction οὐδέ "not even" implies that the poet is being criticized for singing "*even less* than the sea" (p. 405). A close parallel is found in *Argonautica* 3.932f., where the crow chiding Mopsus says:

ἀκλειὴς ὅδε μάντις, ὅς οὐδ' ὅσα παῖδες ἴσασιν
οἶδε νόῳ φράσσασθαι,

This is a worthless prophet, who does not even
know how to perceive what children know.

Children are used in the comparison because they know little, and so the meaning is that the prophet knows *even less*. To avoid this difficulty Cameron and Köhnken both take οὐδ' as an "emphatic negative". Cameron (p. 405), who cites Denniston's discussion of this rare usage, translates, "I do not admire the poet who positively refuses to sing as much as the sea".[9] More recently David Traill has convincingly shown that this usage is far less common than Cameron suggests; he

[6] *De Compositione Verborum* 24: κορυφὴ μὲν οὖν ἁπάντων καὶ σκοπός "ἐξ οὗ περ πάντες ποταμοὶ καὶ πᾶσα θάλασσα καὶ πᾶσαι κρῆναι" δικαίως ἂν Ὅμηρος λέγοιτο; Quintillian 10.1.46: hic enim [i.e. Homerus], quem ad modum ex Oceano dicit ipse amnium fontiumque cursus initium capere, omnibus eloquentiae partibus exemplum et ortum dedit.

[7] Williams (1978) p. 89; our knowledge of the painting is from a description by Aelian (*Variae Historiae* 13.22). For further discussion of the bearing of this evidence upon Williams' conclusions see Trail (1998) 217f.

[8] See esp. Köhnken (1981) 415f. and Cameron loc. cit.

[9] Denniston (1954) pp. 197-98, 583.

argues that the meaning "not even" should be preserved, in accordance with standard usage by Callimachus and other contemporary poets.[10] Traill also endorses Williams' identification of the allusion to the *Iliad* and of Homer as πόντος: the sequence of sea, river and spring is clearly pointing in that direction, and, given that the context is about poetry and poets, the implication that πόντος means Homer would not be difficult for readers familiar with the Homer-sea metaphor (p. 218).

But what could Phthonos possibly mean by criticizing Callimachus for singing *even less* than Homer? Does Phthonos imply that even what Homer sang came out on the short side? Traill resolves this problem by taking the criticism of Phthonos to refer specifically to the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*.[11] Phthonos implies that the subject of Apollo's exploits is so vast that even Homer's hymn fell short; how much less remarkable, then, is a hymn even shorter than that of Homer. Traill notes that this hymn may originally have existed as two separate poems, but whether we understand Phthonos to mean either the Delian or Pythian hymn, or both, his "observation that Callimachus has not even sung as much as 'Homer' makes good sense": the 104 lines of Callimachus' hymn are shorter than both the combined poem and the shorter of the two separate hymns (p. 221). Phthonos' standard of comparison, therefore, is not all of Homer's poetry but rather the *Hymn to Apollo* specifically.

In my view, Traill has successfully defended the πόντος/Homer identification, and so we can accept Williams' analysis, at least in part, that Callimachus is making a statement about the relationship of later poets to Homer. Williams interprets the μέγας ῥόος (108) of the Assyrian river to represent "the imitation of traditional epic, a genre which in its lengthy course has lost all its vitality" (p. 89). Perhaps in light of Traill's discussion this view needs slight modification. Rather than traditional epic specifically, Callimachus may intend any kind of poetry that mistakes mere size for the mark of true poetic excellence;[12] for it is by τέχνη that poetry should be judged and not the Persian chain (*Aetia* fr. 1.17f.). In contrast to the muddy waters of the large river, the fine mist of the holy spring stands for Callimachus' own poetry. The spring retains the pristine purity of the sea from which it flows, and Williams discovers in this image a representation of the relationship between Callimachus and Homer (p. 89). Yet the image used by Callimachus is more complex than this analysis implies. Certainly the purity of the spring is meant to contrast the dirty waters of the river, but we find also bees carrying water to Demeter. Commenting upon verses 110-12, Williams acknowledges the clear influence of Aristotle, and he has a very good discussion of the richness and ambiguity of their meaning (see esp. p. 93). Yet he gives no indication that any of this bears upon his analysis of the connection with Homer. Additionally, Williams' interpretation wholly neglects the influence of Pindar on the hymn's narrative passages as well as a possible reference to Pindar with the image of the spring.

Of the hymn's major narrative passages, the account of Apollo's involvement in the founding of Cyrene is by far the longest.[13] And yet the story as told by Callimachus is far more concise than the three versions of Pindar. Furthermore, it

[10] Traill (1998) pp. 219-20 esp. nn. 18, 19.

[11] pp. 220f. where he follows a suggestion by Lefkowitz (1980) 5-6, repeated at Lefkowitz (1981) 121-22. On ancient views concerning the authorship of the *Homeric Hymns* see Traill's n. 22.

[12] A notion more or less in harmony with Cameron's final analysis at p. 406.

[13] The account of Apollo's service as herdsman near the river Amphrysus (47-54), and the description of his construction of the altar of horn on Delos (55-64) take up eight and nine lines respectively. The story of Cyrene's founding occupies 32 lines (65-96). There is also a brief reference to Apollo's slaying of Pytho at Delphi, in the form of an aetiology for the ritual cry ἰὴ παιῆον (97-104).

seems that Callimachus is indebted to Pindar not only for certain details of the story but also perhaps for the technique of composition whereby he compresses the three longer accounts. At *Pythian* 9.76-79, Pindar writes:

> ἀρεταὶ δ' αἰει μεγάλαι πολύμυθοι·
> βαιὰ δ' ἐν μακροῖσι ποικίλλειν
> ἀκοὰ σοφοῖς· ὁ δὲ καιρὸς ὁμοίως
> παντὸς ἔχει κορυφάν.
>
> Glorious achievements are always worthy of many words,
> but to tell with art a few things among lengthy is a thing fit
> for the wise to hear; and due measure is best in everything alike.

The question confronting Pindar as he sings the praises of the victor Telesikrates is similar to that facing Callimachus as he takes up singing the praises of Apollo. Pindar's πολύμυθοι is similar to Callimachus' description of Apollo as εὔυμνος (31). Moreover, the notion of elaborating a few things among lengthy material for the hearing of those who are wise, as well as the importance of due measure are both in harmony with Callimachean poetics, both as articulated in the *Aetia* prologue and as suggested by the spring and bees in this poem.[14] It thus appears that Callimachus has reshaped and abridged a story originally told by Pindar on grounds similar to those that Pindar himself put forward. Callimachus, then, is applying the same sort of technique that Williams' discovers in his use of the Homeric material: by carefully selecting and modifying the material of his source, Callimachus creates a "new idiom" in Williams' phrase (p. 4). In this case he does so with a subtle nod toward the technical principles that guide his own work as well as the poet from whom he draws.[15] Homer is a model for both the hymnic form and the epic diction; Pindar on the other hand provides additional subject matter, as well as a model for treating succinctly a very broad theme. It now remains to see how Callimachus further emphasizes this debt in the final lines of the hymn.

Williams (ad loc.) notes that the phrase ἄκρον ἄωτον in line 112 is likely modeled upon a similar phrase in Pindar (*Isth*. 7.18: ἄωτον ἄκρον), but he offers no discussion of the significance of this borrowing. The word ἄωτον/ἄωτος occurs several times in Homer referring specifically to the quality of cloth or wool.[16] Eventually the word is more broadly applied to mean "the choice" or "finest" part of something.[17] Later poets, including Bacchylides and Aeschylus, use the word only once each; Pindar uses it twenty times.[18] It is worth quoting the example that Williams sees as a model for Callimachus. In his seventh *Isthmian Ode* Pindar writes (*Isth.* 7.16-19):

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[14] cf. *Aetia* fr. 1.3-4: οὐχ ἕν ἄεισμα διηνεκὲς ... ἐν πολλαῖς ἤνυσα χιλιάσιν; and 17-18: τέχνη κρίνετε,] μὴ σχοίνῳ Περσίδι τὴν σοφίην.

[15] In this respect it is interesting to note that Pindar's sentence is itself a reminiscence of Hesiod *Op.* 694: μέτρα φυλάσσεσθαι· καιρὸς δ' ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἄριστος. For further discussion see Carey (1981) p. 89.

[16] Williams cites *Od*. 1.443: οἰὸς ἀώτῳ, "the softest of woolen blankets"; cf. *Il*. 9.661, 13.599 and 716.

[17] See Silk (1974) Appendix xi and his comments in *CQ* (1983) 316f. on the meaning and development of this word.

[18] Silk (1974) Appendix xi; see also Slater (1969) *sub* ἄωτος.

ἀμνάμονες δέ βροτοί,
ὅ τι μὴ σοφίας ἄωτον ἄκρον
κλυταῖς ἐπέων ῥοαῖσιν ἐξίκηται ζυγέν·

Mortals do not remember whatever does not reach
the choice pinnacle of wisdom, joined to glorious
streams of verses.

Not only the phrase ἄωτον ἄκρον but also the water imagery used with reference to poetry is similar to the passage in Callimachus. Pindar's following enjoinder to "celebrate Strepsiadas with honey-sweet hymn" (20-1) further suggests a link with Callimachus and his bees. Additionally, there are other passages in Pindar in which water imagery is used with reference to poetry, and these too are relevant to Callimachus' spring.[19]

The end of Pindar's fourth *Pythian* ode, which also describes the foundation of Cyrene, contains a sphragis in which Pindar refers to his poem as "a spring of ambrosial verses" (παγὰν ἀμβροσίων ἐπέων, 299). Again at the end of his sixth *Isthmian* Pindar says he will offer to Lampon and his sons "a drink of the holy water of Dirce" (πίσω σφε Δίρκας ἁγνὸν ὕδωρ, 74), referring to the poem he has written in their honor.[20] The close parallels in imagery and placement between these examples and the spring in line 112 suggest that Callimachus is following Pindar. Yet his variation of the motif is as striking as his imitation; for the addition of the bees which bring water to Demeter is a significant refinement. As noted by Williams (ad loc.), who follows Pfeiffer,[21] Callimachus bases this description upon a passage in Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* (596b).[22] After describing insects which feed on animal flesh or various juices, Aristotle then describes the bee which "alone does not settle near anything rotten and does not eat any food except what has a sweet juice; they also take for themselves the most pleasant water wherever it springs up pure".[23]

Based on the evidence of this passage, both Pfeiffer and Williams argue that the μέλισσαι in 110 are bees and not priestesses as once thought by earlier commentators. But given the presence of Demeter Williams admits that "one must at least concede the possibility that the bees are more than bees, that Callimachus may incidentally be alluding to some rite in which μέλισσαι (priestesses) did carry water to Demeter" (p. 93). Moreover, he goes on to point out that μέλισσα is often used figuratively meaning poet,[24] and he draws a parallel between the bees of this passage and Callimachus' comparison of himself to the cicada that drinks drops of dew (*Aetia* fr. 1.29ff.). But again Williams overlooks a very precise connection between a passage he references in Pindar (*Py*. 10.53-4) and the bees in this hymn. In *Pythian* 10 Pindar writes:

[19] Several of these examples were previously noted in a little discussed article by Michael Poliakoff (1980) *ZPE* 39: 41-7.
[20] Noticed by Lefkowitz (see above n. 10) in her reading of the end of Callimachus' hymn.
[21] See *Hist. Class. Schol.* i. 284.
[22] Cane (1987) p. 400 denies this connection, but the reasons he gives for doing so are, at least to my mind, unconvincing.
[23] ἡ δὲ μέλιττα μόνον πρὸς οὐδὲν σαπρὸν προσίζει, οὐδὲ χρῆται τροφῇ οὐδεμίᾳ ἀλλ' ἢ τῇ γλυκὺν ἐχούσῃ χυμόν· καὶ ὕδωρ δ' ἥδιστα εἰς ἑαυτὰς λαμβάνουσιν ὅπου ἂν καθαρὸν ἀναπηδᾷ.
[24] cf. Bacchylides *Odes* 9 (10).10; Aristophanes *Birds* 748ff.; Pindar *Py*. 10.53-4; Plato *Ion* 543a.

ἐγκωμίων γὰρ ἄωτος ὕμνων
ἐπ' ἄλλοτ' ἄλλον ὥτε μέλισσα θύνει λόγον.

The finest of victory hymns like a bee flits
from one theme to another.

Here the word ἄωτος used of ὕμνοι is compared to the movement of a bee. Callimachus borrows the vocabulary and imagery of his source but works subtle refinements upon it: his bees gather that which is ἄωτον from a pure spring and take it to Demeter.[25] Perhaps this image represents Callimachus drawing upon the poetry of Pindar in service of the god Apollo, yet the other senses of the word μέλισσα are still present as well. There is then a remarkable fusion of possible meanings in this single word: the μέλισσαι are at once actual bees as described by Aristotle, priestesses participating in a rite of Demeter, and poets (especially Pindar and Callimachus) with an outstanding sense for what is most pure. Far more than a simple dichotomy between long and short poems, Apollo's reply to Phthonos is rich in imagery that draws not only upon Homer but also Pindar, and even Aristotle. The reply is not merely programmatic as far as it articulates Callimachean poetics in general terms, but is itself an excellent example of what that kind of poetry should be.

The full significance of the final lines, then, has implications not only with reference to Callimachean poetics generally, but also, and more directly, as a comment upon the simultaneous originality and engagement with literary tradition that constitute the body of the poem itself. Certainly those features of style and procedure which figure prominently in the hymn will be seen as well throughout the Callimachean corpus; yet, Apollo's description of bees bringing water to Demeter, which they draw from the finest mist of a holy spring, has especial relevance to this poem in particular. While Williams is right to identify πόντος as Homer, his analysis fails to account for non-Homeric sources in the hymn, most notably Pindar. I believe that the image of the finest mist of a pure spring owes much to Pindar and has been chosen by Callimachus precisely in order to figure that act of borrowing and remaking that constitutes the composition of this hymn.

[25] So Poliakoff (1980) p. 42: "Callimachus derived and developed from Pindar the imagery of the pure small stream, droplets, and sweetness as terms of literary criticism". Poliakoff, however, takes a different view on the relationship between Callimachus and Homer.

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