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GOATS AND THE SACRED DISEASE IN CALLIMACHUS' *ACONTIUS AND CYDIPPE*

Fragment 75 of Callimachus' *Acontius and Cydippe* in *Aetia* 3 (frags. 67–75 Pfeiffer) is a relatively long and continuous section, part of which describes the illnesses to which Cydippe falls victim when, in violation of her accidental oath to Artemis, she spends the premarital night with a boy who is not Acontius. I hope to show that these lines display erudite allusions to a medical text and thereby to a broader debate on competing and opposed causal accounts of disease and the role of the gods therein. This intertextuality juxtaposes incompatible *aitia* within the ostensible framework of this part of the *Aetia*, a juxtaposition as uneasy as that of the human bedfellows involved.

The first illness is described at lines 12–15 of fragment 75:[1]

δειελινὴν τὴν δ' εἶλε κακὸς χλόος, ἦλθε δὲ νοῦσος,
αἶγας ἐς ἀγριάδας τὴν ἀποπεμπόμεθα,
ψευδόμενοι δ' ἱερὴν φημίζομεν· ἢ τότ' ἀνιγρή
τὴν κούρην Ἀ[ίδ]ε̣ω μέχρις ἔτηξε δόμων.

But in the evening an evil pallor took her; the disease came, the one we send away onto the mountain goats, the one we falsely call sacred. Then the affliction wore the maiden down until she was almost in the house of Hades.

The disease is sacred because it is caused by a god. However, the accuracy of this *aition* for any disease was a matter of well-known controversy long before Callimachus. The classical medical text *On the Sacred Disease* identifies what we call epilepsy as the paradigmatic example of god-caused disease. It also makes explicit in its first lines the author's disagreement with the causal explanation embedded in and inevitably associated with the condition's usual name (*Morb. sacr.* 1.1–3):[2]

Περὶ τῆς ἱερῆς νούσου καλεομένης ὧδ' ἔχει. {οὐδέν τί μοι δοκεῖ τῶν ἄλλων θειοτέρη εἶναι νούσων οὐδὲ ἱερωτέρη, ἀλλὰ φύσιν μὲν ἔχει καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ νοσήματα, ὅθεν γίνεται, φύσιν δὲ αὖτη καὶ πρόφασιν.} οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἐνόμισαν θεῖόν τι πρῆγμα ὑπὸ ἀπορίης καὶ θαυμασιότητος, ὅτι οὐδὲν ἔοικεν ἑτέροισι.

The case of the disease they call sacred is actually like this. It is not, it seems to me, in the least more divine or more sacred than other diseases, but rather has a nature, as other diseases do, from which it arises; a nature and an explanation. Men generally think it is something divine because of their perplexity and amazement, because it seems nothing like other diseases.

This polemical text was by Callimachus' time credited to Hippocrates of Cos. Its author, on both theological and empirical grounds, sharply criticizes the traditional explanation of this disease as one caused by a divinity. He attacks the purifiers and magicians who practice remedies based on such an understanding (1.24–46). The text offers instead an alternative naturalistic explanation: the symptoms of the so-called

1. Text from Pfeiffer 1949. My translation.

2. Text of *Morb. sacr.* throughout is from Grensemann 1968, with my translations. In this passage, Grensemann deletes the second sentence; see van der Eijk 2005, 50 n. 15, for reasons for retaining it.

sacred disease are due to too much phlegm in the brain, which in turn is caused by a combination of inherited disposition and personal regimen.[3]

In the later stages of the fifth century, Herodotus acknowledges the dispute over the causes of madness (3.33), though his own position remains somewhat ambiguous:

> ταῦτα μὲν ἐς τοὺς οἰκηίους ὁ Καμβύσης ἐξεμάνη, εἴτε δὴ διὰ τὸν Ἄπιν εἴτε καὶ ἄλλως, οἷα πολλὰ ἐώθεε ἀνθρώπους κακὰ καταλαμβάνειν. καὶ γάρ τινα καὶ ἐκ γενεῆς νοῦσον μεγάλην λέγεται ἔχειν ὁ Καμβύσης, τὴν ἱρὴν ὀνομάζουσί τινες.
>
> Thus was Cambyses mad against his own kindred, whether because of the Apis bull, or because of some other of the many calamities which tend to fall upon men; for they say that Cambyses suffered by heredity from a terrible disease, the disease which some call "sacred."[4]

Herodotus shows much awareness of contemporary medical and physiological theory,[5] but he also often regards divine causation sympathetically, occasionally explicitly preferring one kind of causation over another. For example, discussing possible causes of Cleomenes' madness at 6.84, he cites several alternative explanations before concluding, "but it seems to me that Cleomenes paid this as penalty for the Demeratus affair," rejecting both other theories involving the gods and the Spartans' more naturalistic suggestion of too much strong wine. At 3.30.1 Herodotus' phrasing implies he accepts the Egyptians' claim that the killing of the Apis bull was the cause of Cambyses' madness. Rosalind Thomas, however, argues that the Cambyses passage shows a shift in emphasis, in that it at least allows as possible the naturalistic notion of a self-originating disease (ἐκ γενεῆς), though this is still a long way from *On the Sacred Disease*'s explicit and vehement rejection of divine causation.[6] Yet whatever the subtleties of Herodotus' own position, it is clear that he expects his audience to be acquainted with such disagreements concerning the cause of the sacred disease. There is no reason to think that the situation had changed significantly by the time Callimachus was writing.

That Callimachus points deliberately to the disputed nature of such diseases is suggested by the parenthetical, and studiedly casual, way in which he characterizes Cydippe's affliction as false in name: ψευδόμενοι δ' ἱερὴν φημίζομεν. In the same breath, Callimachus appears to insist on the falsity of the disease's sacredness and almost simultaneously defines it as something one exorcizes, a procedure that only makes sense if the disease is believed to have divine, non-naturalistic origins. In *Acontius and Cydippe*, however, the disease is "sent away" onto wild goats, which is hardly appropriate to the poet's explicit rejection of its "sacred" nature. Moreover, in this case the disease is sent by Artemis to ensure the fulfillment of Cydippe's oath. Therefore, presumably, sacred is precisely what it is.

Even an alternative reading of "falsely called sacred" as meaning "unholy" or "accursed" rather than "naturalistic"[7] is reminiscent of *On the Sacred Disease*, where

3. For a detailed discussion of the author's views on the divinity of nature and his attitude to forms of religious healing other than those of the magicians and purifiers, see van der Eijk 2005, 45–73.

4. The text is that of Rosén (1987); the translation is by Thomas (2000, 34).

5. Thomas 2000, 34–42; cf. 21–24. She argues that not only do this and several other passages show that Herodotus was well aware of the kinds of methods and arguments found in some classical medical texts, but also that he was himself "attempting to participate at some level in the debates that were current" (40).

6. Thomas 2000, 34.

7. I owe this suggestion to the anonymous reader for *CP*.

diseases cannot be "sacred or divine" if they can be removed "by these sorts of purifications and similar treatment" (1.24–28). Such a claim is in fact impious: ἀσεβές . . . καὶ ἀνόσιον (1.28). The proper course of action for any hypothetical disease that really had been caused by the gods would be to take the sufferers into a temple and supplicate the gods through sacrifice and prayer. And the author goes further. For him the entire notion of disease caused by a god is theologically flawed: "I certainly think that a human body cannot be defiled by a god, the most corruptible by what is most pure" (1.44). For this writer, to describe the disease as "sacred" is false because it misrepresents both the nature of the sacred and the nature of the disease in question. Callimachus' choice of words in line 14 not only preserves but points up these ambiguities, and suggests that he is thinking not just of the broader debate, but of this text specifically.

Technical writings were often used by Hellenistic poets, two obvious examples being Aratus' *Phaenomena* and later Nicander's *Alexipharmaka*. The latter is based largely on the pharmacological writings of doctors, especially the early-third-century B.C.E. physician Apollodorus of Alexandria. Although there is no basis for assuming that any physicians were associated with the Alexandrian museum or commonly received other forms of patronage from Hellenistic rulers (apart from the employment of court physicians),[8] certain doctors were certainly part of elite intellectual and social networks in which poets were prominent. Theocritus' addressee and subject, the doctor Nicias, is one of these, while an apocryphal account has the Alexandrian anatomist Herophilus engaging in dialectic with the philosopher Diodorus Cronus.[9] Herophilus' pupil Andreas became the personal physician of Ptolemy IV, and his literary activities were sufficiently noticeable for him to be described as a "literary Aegisthus" by Eratosthenes.[10] Heinrich von Staden has analyzed the developing interest of physicians in this period in the written forms of medicine and its exegesis. Herophilus himself may have written a work against the *Prognosis* attributed to Hippocrates, and other physicians were authors of lexica, glossaries, and commentaries.[11] The preservation and collection of the Hippocratic Corpus itself demonstrates the importance placed on the textual traditions of medicine, and Callimachus must have personally encountered medical works in the course of developing the *Pinakes*.

Thus, several examples of medical references by Callimachus and others indicate that medical tropes and arguments were part of a more general literary and intellectual discourse. One of the clearest and most striking uses of very new medical ideas is Apollonius Rhodius' description of fine strands that convey pain to the back of the head, an anatomical finding of the Alexandrian anatomists.[12] However, Apollonius

8. With the probable exception of the "prisoners supplied by the kings" to Herophilus and Erasistratus for vivisection: Celsus *Med.* 1, pro. 23–24.

9. Theoc. *Id.* 11, cf. 22 and *Anth. Pal.* 6.337; Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* 2.245. As Sedley (1977, 79) notes, "the story is an obvious Hellenistic fabrication," but it does indicate that such a conversation was thought to be a plausible one.

10. Gaisford 1848, 198.19–21 (col. 570), s.v. *Bibliaigisthos*; cf. Bekker 1814, 1:5:226, s.v. *Bibliaigisthos*. See von Staden 1989, 472 and 475.

11. A work against the Hippocratic *Prognosis* is attributed to Herophilus by Caelius Aurelianus (Drabkin 1950, *TP* 4.8.113). See von Staden 1989, 74–75, for a discussion of this and other evidence. For the doxographical work of Alexandrian physicians in the Ptolemaic period, see von Staden 1982, and 1989, chap. 10 (on the Herophileans).

12. *Argon.* 3.761–65; see Solmsen 1961, 195–96; Hunter 1989, 180; Green 1997, 271. The anatomical work is probably that of Herophilus rather than Erasistratus, although Apollonius' terminology is too vague for certainty.

is not exclusively committed to this theory. Just before the passage placing the experience of pain in the head, he describes Medea's emotions as occurring in her heart: a common and long-standing physiological placement at variance with the anatomists' work. His use of the anatomists' findings should therefore not be read as an epistemic commitment to them. Rather, the existence of a recent and controversial medical account of perception enables him to vary and develop traditional imagery, placing himself simultaneously in a Homeric and a Hellenistic context.[13]

In the fragment under discussion, another element in addition to the claim of falsity implies a specific allusion to *On the Sacred Disease*. In combination, these suggest an account of Cydippe's difficulties that completely contradicts the apparent attitude of the poem.

Callimachus simultaneously remarks on the false name of the sacred disease and asserts, without qualification or doubt, that it can be cured by displacement onto wild goats. Such a cathartic expulsion is of course characteristic of the kinds of healing associated with divine explanations of disease. However, there do not seem to be any actual references to goats in connection with disease expiation earlier than Philodemus, writing in the first century B.C.E.[14] This, given the context, may well indicate an earlier tradition, but not one that can be securely placed before Callimachus. Rudolf Pfeiffer notes that according to the fifth-century C.E. lexicon of Hesychius, displacement onto wild goats was a common saying, especially in regard to "the sacred [disease]," but this is quite probably derived directly from Callimachus' poem.[15]

On the Sacred Disease does mention goats in the context of the sacred disease, explicitly and frequently. However, the role of the goats is not to provide cures but to serve as fellow sufferers and witnesses to the naturalistic and phlegmatic nature of the disease (11.3–5).

> One can grasp this best by the following. In those herd animals seized by this disease and especially in goats (for these are the most severely attacked), if you have cut through the head and looked, you will discover the brain to be wet and full of dropsy and {smelling} foul. And by this you will clearly recognize that it is not a god maltreating the body, but a disease.

According to the author of *On the Sacred Disease*, the only appearance of goats within the divine explanatory framework for the sacred disease is the purifiers' banning of goat parts and products as its *causes*.[16] Indeed, as he sarcastically points out, the goats are within the purifiers' own system acting as a naturalistic cause, not a sacred one. (1.18, 1.22–3):

> [Those who attribute a sacred character to this disease forbid sufferers] to lie on or wear goat skin. . . . I suppose no one of the Libyans living inland could be healthy, if he had anything to do with goat skins or flesh, as there at any rate they have neither bedding nor clothing nor shoe which is not made of goat. For there is no other domestic animal than goats {and oxen}. But if eating and consuming these things produces the disease or

13. See Harder 2002, 223, for the notion of allusion, not simply as a display of poetic virtuosity, but as a means to extend a poem beyond a limited set of meanings.

14. Pfeiffer 1949, ad loc.; *Vol. Herc.* I^2 150, cf. in the third century C.E. Philostr. *Her.* (Kayser 1870–71, 2: 179), and Ath. 3.83.

15. That Hesychius is here directly indebted to Callimachus was suggested by the anonymous reader for *CP*.

16. A sufferer sometimes imitates a goat (1.33), in which case the purifiers' explanation is that Demeter is the cause.

> strengthens it and not eating them cures it, no longer is a god responsible nor do purifications help, but the meats are what help or hinder, and the power of god done away with.

Callimachus' apparently innocuous use of this particular animal, then, is not just a run-of-the-mill displacement of pollution onto a substitute. The mention of goats serves not only to remind the alert audience of the medical text, but once again highlights the disputed origin and treatments of the sacred disease.[17]

This intertextuality with *On the Sacred Disease* does several things. It displays the poet's erudition, but only for those capable of appreciating such subtle allusions, and so reinforces the social and literary self-construction of the Hellenistic elite as an inner community of poet and audience exclusive of the less educated and less Hellenized. For this audience, the oppositional juxtaposition of the medical *aition* with the ostensible divine *aition* of Cydippe's illness suggests that other elements of the story are equally disguised.[18]

A second point is that specialist claims to knowledge, such as medical views about phlegm, may be grist to the poetic mill but not to the extent that their truth claims are privileged over any other kind, such as history or mythology. Thus poetic use by Callimachus of technical or "scientific" materials demonstrates and reinforces the poet's awareness and control over other forms of literary and intellectual activity, in terms that acknowledge such forms of knowledge and coopt them for nontechnical purposes, effectively denying them the power to become the, and not an, *aition*.

Instead, *Acontius and Cydippe* exists in an atemporal literary world in which polluted and epileptic goats coexist uneasily in a false compatibility. Such competing explanations, networked via allusion to other works and materials of Hellenic culture, produce a set of poems hidden within each other like a hall of mirrors, in which the events described are at once pathetic, romantic, or satirical, and which problematize the very concept of an *aition* as a simple cause and single explanation.[19]

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17. A third possible allusion to *Morb. sacr.* can be found in the next misfortune to befall Cydippe at lines 16–17, which happens to be a quartan fever: δεύτερον ἐστόρνυντο τὰ κλισμία, δεύτερον ἡ πα[ῖ]ς / ἑπτὰ τεταρταίῳ μῆνας ἔκαμνε πυρί ("The couches were spread for the second time, for the second time the maiden was ill, with a seven-month quartan fever"). The author of *Morb. sacr.*, in the context of defining a sacred disease, says that "quotidian fevers, tertians and quartans, seem to me to be no less sacred and god-sent than this disease, but nobody wonders at them" (1.6). However, fever was an extremely common diagnosis and even the more specific "quartan" indicates only a superficial acquaintance with medical vocabulary. It is perhaps odd that this fever lasts seven months—a possible duration, in Greek medical thought, of the length of a pregnancy—but it has no connection to *Morb. sacr.* particularly. Her third disease is a similarly generic chill. The fourth occasion of illness, which provokes her father to seek an explanation from Apollo, is not described at all.

18. This would dovetail with how several commentators have read other elements of *Acontius and Cydippe*: Pfeiffer 1949, ad loc.; Cameron 1995, 20–22, on the aetiology of Zeus and Hera's premarital incest for the prenuptial night custom of Naxos; see also the suggestion by Harder (2002, 196–97) that Iphicles and Midas, who appear as owners of goods—speed and wealth—for which Acontius would not trade his eventual wedding night with Cydippe, might also be seen as cases of sterility and near death, a comparison less favorable to Cydippe.

19. I would like to thank the anonymous referee for *CP* for very helpful comments.

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A SEEMINGLY ARTLESS CONVERSATION: CICERO'S *DE LEGIBUS* (1.1–5)

Ars latet arte sua. Scholars, with few exceptions, agree that the opening scene of Cicero's *De legibus* that eventually leads to defining the topic (*Leg*. 1.1–18) is crafted masterfully,[1] not least because of its artful imitation of a seemingly artless conversation, in which speakers smoothly pass from one topic to the other in an associative fashion.[2] The "*sermo*-Stil" and "spontaneità e freschezza" of this opening dialogue (as well as other similar scenes, especially in *De oratore*) have been noted, often in comparison with Platonic dialogues.[3] Yet, the question of how the Roman orator pro-

1. Gigon (1975, 59) reads *De legibus* "als eine erste rohe Skizze," and the opening scene accordingly, in which Cicero failed "die beiden Partner Ciceros so darzustellen, dass sie zu Mitträgern einer *kohärenten* und philosophisch ergiebigen Diskussion wurden" (p. 60, my ital.). Gigon's charge of patchwork, the issue of whether Cicero finished his treatise *De legibus* and—related to it—whether it was revised, dominated German scholarship especially. A convenient summary of this question is provided by Dyck 2004, esp. 10–11 and 53, with further literature cited.

2. Cf. Pohlenz's observation (1938, 112) that "sich das Gespräch nicht geradlinig logisch auf dieses Ziel hinbewegte, sondern sich scheinbar . . . von psychologischen Assoziationen treiben ließ." Hentschke (1971, esp. 127) has interpreted "Digression und Verzögerung" as Cicero's imitation of Plato's technique as used especially in the *Laws*. At roughly the same time as Pohlenz, Becker (1938, esp. 25–28 and 50–51) commented on the "besondere Liebe und Sorgfalt" (25) that Cicero lavished on "das reizvolle Einleitungsgespräch" (50); see also Ruch 1958, esp. 251, De Plinval 1959, esp. 63, and Büchner 1961, 82, who goes as far as to say: "Sie [i.e., the books *De legibus*] enthalten Stücke, und nicht nur in dem Proömium zum ersten und zweiten Buche, die zum Schönsten gehören, was Cicero geschrieben hat, und sich nach dem Urteile vieler Kenner an poetischer Kraft mit platonischen Dialogen wohl messen können." For more recent comments, see Gasser 1999, 32, and Dyck 2004, 51.

3. "*Sermo*-Stil" was coined by Zoll (1962, 105) in his excellent study of "*Cicero Platonis aemulus*" to characterize Cicero's writing in his dialogues, especially *De oratore*. Spontaneity, freshness, and, in fact,