

CALLIMACHUS, EPIGRAM 28, NUMENIUS FR. 20, AND THE MEANING OF κυκλικός¹

Ἐχθαίρω τὸ ποίημα τὸ κυκλικόν: κυκλικός in Callimachus' epigram is variously translated 'cyclic' on the one hand, 'hackneyed', 'banal', *vel sim.* on the other. Thus Cahen² gives 'cyclique' and Gow-Page,³ referring to *A.P.* 11.130, take it in the same way, while Hauvette⁴ renders 'banale' and LSJ, s.v. κυκλικός, II, give Callimachus' line for the variant meaning 'commonplace, conventional'. Perhaps significantly they give no other example of the adjective, though they do adduce their sense IV, where they give the adverb κυκλικῶς 'conventionally', citing *Schb. Od.* 7.115, a text in which it almost certainly does not have this meaning. Again they give it as a variant, now on the alleged sense 'in common use' of *Schb. Od.* 16.195 and 17.25, which, supplying ἔκδοσις with κυκλική (ἢ κυκλική is given as authority for variant readings) they render 'the vulgate'. This is probably irrelevant to, and at best dubious support for, their version of τὸ ποίημα τὸ κυκλικόν, which could, however, be right for other reasons.

If translations like 'commonplace' are correct, then Callimachus would be displaying his, and his contemporaries', predilection for using words in a sense other than their normal one. When κυκλικός occurs elsewhere in other than its literal sense of 'circular', it seems, with one exception, either clearly or probably to have its technical sense 'cyclic', pertaining to the post-Homeric poems or their poets. So in the Homeric *scholia*, where for obvious reasons it and its cognates are most common. Unfortunately, as we have already indicated, the evidence of these *scholia* is not unambiguous. In some texts, which, in spite of LSJ, should probably be treated separately, the word appears without an expressed noun, so in *Schb. Il.* 3.342 and *Od.* 248, where ποιητής (-αί) should be supplied,⁵ or even without adequate context, as with the two cases of κυκλική mentioned above, where the reference is fairly clearly to an edition, and could be to one of, or containing, the cyclic poems.⁶

Some occurrences are reasonably clear, for instance *Schb. Il.* 6.325, ὅτι κυκλικῶς κατακέχρηται, and 9.222, κυκλικώτερον, both linked with a complaint of inappropriateness, and so likely to take their point from the commonly impugned shoddiness of the cyclic epics. If κυκλικός meant 'normal' or 'banal', these comments would hardly apply to an inapposite or conspicuously infelicitous expression.⁷ The uncertainty which must remain has concerned

¹ *Epigr.* 28 Pfeiffer = 2 Gow-Page = *A.P.* 12.43; fr. 20 (= fr. 29 Leemans) is des Places's numbering, *Numenius* (Budé edn., Paris, 1973) used hereafter: the text is from Eusebius, *P.E.* 11.22.9.

² É. Cahen, *Callimaque*² (Budé edn., Paris, 1934). While he prints 'cyclique', his note on the line implies that he is giving 'cyclique' as an interpretation of 'banale': 'cette expression, semble-t-il, désigne ici le poème banale des successeurs d'Homère . . .'

³ A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, *The Greek Anthology. Hellenistic Epigrams* (Cambridge, 1965), ii.155.

⁴ A. Hauvette, 'Les épigrammes de Callimaque', *REG* 20 (1907), 343.

⁵ Cf. also *Schb. Il.* 19.326 and 23.346 and 660, where, as in the notes on *Il.* 3.242 we have ἡ ἱστορία παρὰ τοῖς κυκλικοῖς.

⁶ Cf. W. Dindorf, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Odysseam* (Oxford, 1855), ii.267 ad *Schb. Od.* 16.195 which reads θέλγει] ἢ κυκλική, θέλγεις: *Schb. Od.* 17.25 is similar. T. W. Allen in the apparatus of the O.C.T. tactfully prints *editio* ἢ κυκλική for both lines.

⁷ Cf. also *Schb. Il.* 15.610, and possibly 24.628, if κυκλικῶς should be read there as

editors of the *scholia*,⁸ and one passage, *Sch. Od.* 7.115, the very one that LSJ use to support their translation of Callimachus, has given rise to considerable dispute.⁹ The comment, on the description of the trees at the Phaeacian palace, begins οὐ κυκλικῶς τὰ ἐπιθέτα προσέρριπται, and draws attention to the appropriateness of the epithets. If inappropriateness is a complaint against the cyclic poets, then οὐ κυκλικῶς would suitably mean 'not as in the cyclic poems', while 'not in a normal, or conventional, way' would hardly fit. So here too 'cyclic' would seem to be the more likely rendering. In any case we may say that in none of these cases is the meaning 'cyclic' impossible, and that in most it is clearly appropriate.¹⁰

Now the dating of the Homeric *scholia* is of course sometimes problematic.¹¹ But it should not cause too loud a howl of protest to say that while the *scholia* in question may be Alexandrian, they do not all certainly date back to the Alexandrian period, and so cannot be used to establish 'cyclic' beyond doubt as the standard Alexandrian sense.¹² They may, however, well be evidence for just that.¹³ Thus it is likely that Callimachus' use would have been normal if he meant 'cyclic', and perverse if he meant 'conventional' or 'banal'. He could, of course, have intended both to be understood.

The exception referred to above is Numenius, in a passage whose precise meaning and text is not entirely clear. The relevant part reads: ἰδίᾳ μὲν γὰρ τὸν κυκλικὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ ἐν Τιμαίῳ εἰπὼν· 'Ἀγαθὸς ἦν'· ἐν δὲ τῇ Πολιτείᾳ τὸ ἀγαθὸν εἶπεν 'ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν'. It is clear enough, however, from the context, that κυκλικὸν here does mean 'commonplace' or 'commonly used': ἀγαθός referring to the Demiurge, in the normal sense, is contrasted with τὸ ἀγαθόν in the *Republic*, clearly not used in the standard way when it is applied to the Idea of the Good. This contrast stands whether with κυκλικὸν one should supply λόγον, as did Vigier and Gifford,¹⁴ or ἀγαθόν, as Mras prefers.¹⁵ Numenius then means good in the usual—perhaps uninteresting because un-Platonic sense?—of the word.

proposed by R. Merkel, *Apollonii Argonautica* (Leipzig, 1854), p. xxxi: so too A. Severyns, *Le Cycle épique dans l'école d'Aristarque*. Bibl. de la Fac. de Phil. et Lett. de l'U. de Liège 40 (Liège/Paris, 1928), p. 157.

⁸ And others; cf. Merkel, op. cit., pp. xxx—xxxvi.

⁹ See the discussion in Dindorf, op. cit. 1.335, ad loc. More recently Severyns, op. cit., pp. 155 f., takes κυκλικῶς here as clearly meaning 'in the Cyclic style'; L. P. Wilkinson, 'Callimachus A.P. xii.43', *CR N.S.* 17 (1967), 5, as meaning 'conventionally'.

¹⁰ Severyns, op. cit., pp. 155—9, argues that κυκλικῶς in Aristarchus' comments meant exclusively 'à la manière des Cycliques, comme font les Cycliques'; cf. also R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford, 1968), p. 230: he, however, allows at least the implication of conventionality and triviality.

¹¹ On this cf. H. Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem. Scholia Vetera* i (Leiden, 1969), xii f. Erbse excludes that *scholion* on *Il.* 3.242 in which κυκλικός appears.

¹² Erbse attributes *Schb. Il.* 6.325a and 9.222a to Aristonicus. Severyns, loc. cit. (n. 10) discusses as Aristarchus' *Schb. Il.* 6.325, 15.610, 24.628.

¹³ Dindorf, op. cit. i, p. iii, points out that those on the later books of the *Odyssey* are unlikely to be early, but our examples from these are among the less clear anyhow.

¹⁴ Vigier ap. Mras (see n. 15), E. H. Gifford, *Eusebii Pamphili Praeparatio Evangelica* iv (Oxford, 1903), n. ad 11.22, 544 d: Gifford suggests that the reference is to epitaphs.

¹⁵ K. Mras in the G.C.S. edition (Berlin, 1956), in *apparatu*. Given these alternatives we should clearly follow Mras, making the additional small change of τὸ for τὸν. Not only does the passage suggest ἀγαθόν, but also the frequent occurrence of the word in the following lines could mean that it actually stood in the text here and was simply omitted, as probably happened in line 11 (des Places's lines). But would not τὸ κυκλικόν, 'the standard thing', give the required sense anyhow?

Since Numenius does not otherwise seem to have been a great coiner of new words or significations of words, such a use by him would suggest that he had a precedent, and a clear case of such a precedent is, as will appear from the previous discussion, not easy to find in the extant material. Callimachus could provide one. The epigrams were widely circulated in later antiquity,¹⁶ and Athenaeus, roughly contemporary with Numenius, tells us that they were read by schoolchildren.¹⁷ Numenius was familiar with at least some Greek poetry. There are frequent allusions to Homer,¹⁸ and one or two to Hesiod.¹⁹ If Callimachus can be added to his reading list, that is interesting as evidence for the Greek elements in the intellectual make-up of this cultural hybrid. From the point of view of Callimachus we can then note that the less obvious meaning of *κυκλικός* was already taken in the late second-/early third-century period.²⁰ It may then have come down in the ancient tradition, and is thus more likely to be what the poet himself meant. That still leaves open the possibility that the epigram is a denigration of, *inter al.*, the cyclic poets, and not of the work of Callimachus' contemporaries.²¹ He may, as suggested above, have wanted both senses to be understood, equating the cyclic epics with banality and lack of freshness, as suggested by the comparison with the promiscuous boy in the following lines. Thus Callimachus, who here as elsewhere expresses his distaste for the well used and well known,²² is perhaps actually introducing a new sense of *κυκλικός*—we might convey his full meaning by translating 'the trite cyclic poem'. Since semantic changes do sometimes have a fixed and identifiable starting-point, this poem and the discussion it reflects could have been it.²³

In any case the unqualified entries in LSJ are misleading, and should be appropriately annotated in our margins.²⁴

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¹⁶ Cf. H. Herter, 'Kallimachos 6', *RE* supp. v (1931), 430 and 451 f.

¹⁷ Ath. 15.669 C.

¹⁸ Cf. the index in E. -A. Leemans, *Studie over den Wijsgeer Numenius van Apamea, met uitgave der fragmenten*, Ac. R. de Belg. Cl. des Lett. Mém. 37.2 (Brussels, 1937).

¹⁹ *Tb.* 775–7 in fr. 36 (= Test. 48 Leemans), where Hesiod is named, and perhaps *Op.* 471 in fr. 11 (= 20 L). There may be an echo of Sophocles, *O.T.* fr. 25. 123 (= 2L); cf. des Places, *ad loc.*

²⁰ It may possibly have been implied in the condemnation of *κύκλαιοι* in the Hadrianic epigram by Pollianus, *A.P.* 11. 130, 1 f.: τοὺς κύκλῳ τοῦτους τοὺς αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα λέγοντας μισῶ, where the primary meaning must, however, be 'cyclic': thus Gow–Page, *loc. cit.* (n.3), take this as evidence for 'cyclic' in Call. *Epigr.* 28; cf. also Severyns, *op. cit.*, pp. 158 f.

²¹ For a recent discussion of who, and what, was the target of this epigram see T. M. Klein, 'The concept of the "Big Book"', *Eranos* 73 (1975), 23–5: he argues that Callimachus disapproved of the cyclic poets and not of Apollonius.

²² Cf. now A. Barigazzi, 'Amore e Poetica in Callimaco (*ep.* 28 e 6)', *RFIC* 101 (1973), 186–94, and the references given there; but *Epigr.* 6 (= 55 G.–P.) on the *Capture of Oecalia* is not, as Barigazzi takes it to be, 193 f., evidence for Callimachus' negative attitude to the Cycle: cf. Gow–Page, *ad loc.*

²³ Another possibility—no more—should be mentioned: since the text of Eusebius which provides the Numenius fragment is not unblemished, there could be more amiss than has been thought. So if *κύκλικόν* were simply wrong—not very likely, given its rarity—there would be no clear case of its metaphorical meaning, which does not arise obviously from either the literal, or technical one, except perhaps through reflection on the unsatisfactory qualities of the cyclic poets.

²⁴ I am grateful to Dr. F. T. Griffiths for discussing these matters with me, and to this journal's referee for a number of helpful suggestions, not all of which I have followed.

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