There and back again: Callimachus *Epigr.* 31 and the (Greek) Renaissance

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The present paper investigates the history of a famous Callimachean motif, with a view to examining the ways in which an Alexandrian theme returns to Greek poetry, almost unchanged, after seventeen centuries, through the medium of Roman poetry and Renaissance Italian literature. A hitherto unnoticed intertextual relationship between Cretan Renaissance drama on the one hand and Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* (1532) on the other is identified, thus adding one more piece to the elaborate mosaic which is Italian influence on the literature of the Cretan Renaissance.¹ Last but not least, the literary function of the motif in various contexts, literary genres, and historical periods is evaluated.

The island of Crete became a Venetian colony in 1211 as a result of the Fourth Crusade, and remained in Venetian possession until 1669, when its capital city, Chandax/Candia, modern Herakleion, fell to the Ottoman Empire after a long


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drawn-out war. The four centuries of Venetian rule provided a unique cultural environment, allowing direct access to Italian culture, and the opportunity for the development of a local literature in the spirit of the Renaissance. The ruling classes of the island were constituted by Venetian nobles, well-versed in Latin and Italian literature, but also bilingual in Greek. Outside the Venetian-occupied lands (Crete, the Heptanese, and other islands) access to and knowledge of Latin and Italian literary production was extremely limited.

Fortounatos is a Cretan Renaissance comedy by a Venetian noble, Markos Antoni Foskolos, dated 1655. The plot is in the New Comedy style: a young woman is to be married off to an old but rich merchant, and her lover despairs, until it is revealed that he is the long-lost son of rich merchants, abducted by pirates when a child, and so there is a happy ending with the marriage of the lovers. At one point in the story, the heroine complains to her lover about the fickleness of men (3.5.451–460):

Οἱ ἄντρες πᾶσκοι καὶ κοπιοῦν, ἀετρέχον νὰ μπερδέουν μιὰ κορασία στὰ βρόχεα τῶν, καὶ ὅστε νὰ τὴν κερδέσουν τρέμουσι καὶ λυγώνονται, δείχνουν πῶς τὴν ποθοῦσι, καὶ ὅσαν τὴν κερδέσουσι, ξυμίῳ τὴν μυσίου.

2 “The Cretan Renaissance is no more nor less than the reception and creative exploitation of aspects of Italian Renaissance culture from the fourteenth century to the Baroque on the island of Crete” (Holton viii).

3 On the ethnic constitution of the island during this period see S. McKee, Uncommon Dominion: Venetian Crete and the Myth of Ethnic Purity (Philadelphia 2000).


5 For further information on the linguistic form of this text, i.e. on the Medieval and Modern Cretan dialect, see G. N. Hatzidakis, “Περὶ τῆς γλώσσης καὶ τῆς γραμματικῆς τοῦ Ἐρωτόκρίτου,” in Πλωσολογικὶ Ἐρευνα B (Athens 1977) 197–207, and G. Anagnostopoulos, “Περὶ τῆς ἐν Κρήτῃ ἀναλυμένης καὶ ἴδιος περὶ τοῦ ἰδιώματος Ἀγ. Βαρβάρας καὶ περιχώρων,” Αθηνᾶ 38 (1926) 139–193.
Men work and toil, go to a lot of trouble in order to enmesh a girl in their nets, and until they have won her they tremble and faint, they pretend they desire her, and when they have won her, at once they hate her. Exactly as in this world hunters do, who stalk the hare in the mountains and in the heights, in the heat and in the ice, and they do not think it a great trouble, nor a toil, nor an expense of dogs and men. When they have caught it, they throw it aside and leave it lying, and they stalk again those that run off.

The simile is in fact an almost verbatim quotation of Callimachus, Anth. Gr. 12.102 (= epigr. 31 Pf. = 1 Gow-Page):

᾽ὡγρευτής, Ἐπίκυδης, ἐν οὐρρείς πάντα λαγών
diφά καὶ πάσης ζηνα δορκαλίδος
στείβῃ καὶ νυφέτω κεχρημένος: ἦν δὲ τις εἶπη
“τῇ, τὸδε βέβληται θηρίον,” οὐκ ἠλαβεν.
χούμος ἑρως τοιόοδε τὰ μὲν φεύγοντα διώκειν
οίδε, τὰ δ᾽ ἐν μέσῳ κείμενα παρπέτεται.

On the mountains, Epikydes, the hunter pursues every hare and the tracks of each deer, enduring frost and snow; but if someone says “Look! This animal’s been hit,” he does not take it. This is how my love is: it knows how to pursue what flees, but it flies past anything which lies ready and waiting.  

Could a poet of the Cretan Renaissance have read this epigram? It lay dormant in the Palatine Anthology, until the French scholar Salmasius discovered it in 1606. The poem

must have travelled a much longer indirect road to get back into Greek literature.

Alfred Vincent, the editor of Fortounatos, identified the source of Foskolos’ verses\(^7\) as an earlier Cretan Renaissance play, the Panoria (a pastoral love story with a happy ending) written by Georgios Chortatzis,\(^8\) in all probability in the last decade of the sixteenth century. And indeed, the hare is to be found in Panoria Act 4, vv. 29–38, again in the mouth of a woman, this time advising the heroine to be cautious with her suitor:

\begin{verbatim}
σαν το λαγό π’ ολημερνίς ο κυνηγός ζυγώνει
στο περιβόλι, στα βουνιά, στην κάψα κι εις το χιόνι,
και δε βαριέται κούραση, δε θέλει να σκολάσει,
μα παραδέρνει και κοπιά, ώστε να τόνε πιάσει,
κι ωσάν τον πιάσει, ρίχνει τον και δεν τόνε χρειάζει,
κι εις τ’ άλλους απού φεύγουσα τα πόδια του σπουδάζει,
έτσι το κάνουσα κι αυτοί: κοπιού και παραδέρνου
κι ολημερνίς για λόγου μας σε χίλια πάθη μπαίνου,
ώστε να μας κομπόσουσι. και τότε λησθεύουσα
τόν πόθο μας κι εις άλλη νια γυρεύγουσι να μπούσι.
\end{verbatim}

Like the hare that the hunter stalks all day long in the gardens, in the mountains, in the heat and in the snow, and he does not spare himself trouble, he does not want to stop, but he toils and tires, until he catches it, and when he has caught it he throws it aside and needs it no more, and to others, that run off, turns his feet, that's how they act too. They toil and trouble, and all day long for our sakes they get into a thousand tribulations, until they have fooled us. And then they forget their desire for us and try to take up with another young woman.

Emm. Kriaras, in his edition of Panoria, does not comment on these verses, and is also silent about them in his extensive discussion of the Italian sources for the poem.\(^9\) He provides an

\(^7\) Vincent, Φορτουνάτος με’.

\(^8\) Cf. R. Bancroft-Marcus, “The Pastoral Mode,” in Holton 84–89.

\(^9\) E. Kriaras (ed.), Γεωργίου Χορτάτση, Πανορία, κριτική έκδοση με

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exhaustive comparative table\textsuperscript{10} where direct verse equivalences between \textit{Panoria} and Italian pastoral drama (Aminta by Torquato Tasso [1580], Pastor Fido by Giovanni Battista Guarini [1590], Alceo by Antonio Ongaro 1582, and Amorosa Fede by Antonio Pandimo [1620]) are identified and listed, but vv. 4.29–38 do not figure in it. Another source of the \textit{Panoria}, identified later, the pastoral La Calisto by Luigi Groto (1583) also does not contain the verses in question. However, it is quite probable that the hare motif was used by other (Italian?) poets in the intervening centuries between the Hellenistic poet from Cyrene and his late Renaissance Cretan imitators.

The first extant re-use of the Callimachean motif is the direct imitation of Callimachus’ verses by Horace, as he mocks the pretensions of the choosy lover:\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{verbatim}
leporum uenator ut alta
in niue sectetur, positum sic tangere nolit,
cantat et adponit “meus est amor huic similis; nam
transulat in medio posita et fugientia captat.”

hiscine uersiculis speras tibi posse dolores
atque aestus curasque grauis e pectore pelli?
\end{verbatim}

How the hunter pursues the hare through the deep snow and does not want to touch what lies ready is the subject of the lover’s song, and he adds “My love is like this, for it flies past what lies ready and waiting and goes after what flees’. Do you hope that with these little verses you will be able to drive grief and passions and deep anxieties from your heart?

The image found further success in Roman literature, for

\textsuperscript{10} The table figures in the first edition of \textit{Panoria}, E. Kriaras (ed.), \textit{Γυπαρις, Κρητικων δραμα, πηγαι-κειμενον} (Athen 1940) 112–114.

example in Ovid and Petronius, but nowhere else as a direct word-for-word quotation.\textsuperscript{12} It seems however rather unlikely that a Cretan poet of the Renaissance would directly incorporate Horatian verses in a comedy. A more normal course of events would have been to copy an Italian author who had copied Horace who had copied Callimachus. Out of the dozens of Italian poets’ names that appear in Horace’s Nachleben in the Enciclopedia Oraziana, the one that crops up most often is Ariosto, and indeed the Callimachean hare appears in Orlando Furioso, Canto 10 strophe 7.\textsuperscript{13}

Guardatevi da questi che sul fiore
del lor begli anni il viso han si polito;
che presto nasce in loro e presto muore,
quasi un foco di paglia, ogni appetito.
Come segue la lepre il cacciatore
al freddo, al caldo, alla montagna, al lito,
né più l’estima poi che presa vede;
e sol dietro a chi fugge affretta il piede.

Be specially careful of those whose cheeks are still
downy: in them, as in conflagrations of straw,
the fires of appetite kindle quickly but will
as quickly die out. Or think of a hunter who saw
a hare and now chases it eagerly up a hill
to the top and down again, through gully and draw.
He catches it, then is indifferent, for the pursuit


itself is the prize: they are easy to confute.\textsuperscript{14}

So the hare motif appears in five authors and three languages (or four, if Ancient and Modern Greek are to be treated as different languages, as Latin vs. Italian): Callimachus to Horace to Ariosto to Chortatzis to Foskolos. The shared details make it clear that we are here dealing with literary borrowings by one writer from one or more of their predecessors, rather than with the polygenesis of a motif, or with the kind of motif-transference possible in oral traditions.\textsuperscript{15} More than one scenario is of course possible:

(a) that Chortatzis and Foskolos imitated Ariosto independently
(b) that some other Italian poet imitated Ariosto and was in turn imitated by Chortatzis
(c) that some other Italian poet imitated Horace independently of Ariosto and was in turn imitated by Chortatzis
(d) a combination of the above: Chortatzis may have imitated Ariosto directly, whereas Foskolos may have imitated some other Italian poet who imitated Ariosto, or vice versa.

Nevertheless, we can hardly take Ariosto out of the picture completely. Hare-hunting in Horace takes place only in the mountains, and in the snow. However, in Ariosto the hunt is going on both in the cold, in the mountains, and in the heat, by the shore. The two Cretan hunts are also double: in the heat and in the cold, in the gardens and the mountains (Chortatzis) or in the heat and in the cold, in the hills and in the mountains (στὰ ὄρη στὰ βουνια Foskolos). It is unlikely that an unknown imitator of Horace would embellish his imitation with the same additional hunting grounds, independently of Ariosto. Also, the


context of the simile is identical in Ariosto and the two Cretan poets (the fickleness of men, of which women should be wary), whereas in Horace it is somewhat different (be satisfied, in matters of love and sex, with what you can have easily: don’t try to reach for the unreachable). The original Callimachean context (cool and sophisticated pederastic love) is of course worlds apart from all the subsequent unconscious imitators of the motif.

One further phraseological similarity between Chortatzis and Ariosto must be noted: the hunter’s turning to new victims is described by Ariosto as “a chi fugge affretta il piede” and by Chortatzis as ὅποιον φεύγουσιν, τὰ πόδια του σπουδάζει, a word-for-word correspondence. On the basis of these two similarities, then, we would be inclined to rule out alternative (c).

There is something to be said for alternative (a), i.e. that Foskolos imitated Ariosto directly, independently of Panoria: in his poem there are at least two other intertextual references to Orlando Furioso, which Alfred Vincent (159, 185) notes and considers as evidence that Foskolos had read OF: Fortounatos 5.225 “Deh, ferma un poco il piede” = OF 1.32.3 “Ferma, Baiardo mio, ferma il piede,” and Fortounatos 2.58, where there is mention of the characters of Rodomonte and Nimrod from OF.

But it is still impossible to assess the probability of alternatives (b) or (d), i.e. to know whether there was one more intermediate step, an unknown Italian poet intervening between Ariosto and Cretan drama. James Hutton does not mention any imitators of Callimachus’ epigram 31, but of course one can never be sure: Horace, and Ariosto, had very many imitators. As the situation stands, however, the hare hunt has given some interesting results:

We have seen a motif of Greek poetry returning, Odysseus-like, to the Greek language, almost unchanged, after about seventeen centuries.

We have a new use, almost verbatim quotation, of Orlando

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16 James Hutton, The Greek Anthology in Italy (Ithaca 1935).
Furioso in two works of the Cretan Renaissance; this is the longest one noted until now, and one which escaped, hare-like, the authors of the excellent modern commentaries on these works.

We have a case where we can plot the transformations of a motif across genres and across languages.\footnote{One could follow the fate of the hare simile through alternative routes as well, tracing hitherto unnoticed intertextual echoes between the Cretan Renaissance and major European Renaissance authors. A characteristic example is the repetition of the motif in Miguel de Cervantes’ La gitanilla, one of the Novelas ejemplares (1613), uttered, as in the case of Fortounatos, by a gypsy girl who demands faithfulness from her lover: “los ímpetus amorosos corren a rienda suelta, hasta que encuentran con la razon o con el desengaño, y no querría yo que fueses tú para conmigo como es el cazador, que en alcanzando la liebre que sigue, la coge, y la deja por correr tras otra que le huye” (Bellido Díaz, Anales Cervantinos 40 [2008] 138). Less interesting, as it is a direct quotation and not a literary adaptation, is Michel de Montaigne’s repetition of Ariosto’s lines in his Essays (1580), in order to contrast friendship, “une chaleur generale et universelle” with love, “un desir forcené après ce qui nous fuit” (Essais 1.28). To the long list of genre transformations of the hare motif (epigram, satire, epic, pastoral drama, comedy) one may thus add prose novelistic and philosophical writing.}

We have further confirmation of something well known in late Medieval Greek literature: the ancient Greek world is often forgotten, and returns to Greece only through the intermediary of the Western, Latin, tradition: cf. e.g. La Guerre de Troie by Benoît de St. Maure translated (14th cent.) as the huge vernacular Medieval Greek romance Ὁ Πόλεμος τῆς Τρῳάδος, and Boccaccio’s Teseida translated (ca. 1500), again in vernacular Medieval Greek, as Θησέως καὶ γάμοι τῆς Ἐμύλιας, known as the Greek Theseei.d\footnote{On these works see R. Beaton, The Medieval Greek Romance (London 1996), esp. ch. 9 “Translations and Adaptations of Western Romances.”}

Finally, we may ask why the motif was so popular. Was this simply a matter of chance, or did this variation on the theme of pursuit and flight, the hunt of love, a theme which entered western literature at an early date (cf. particularly Sappho fr.1) and never left, capture something essential about the nature of
erotic desire, which is ever renewed and never satisfied, and thus appeal across the centuries, even as the meaning of love and desire was reconfigured? Be that as it may, Callimachus would no doubt have appreciated the irony that his hunter and hare, figures for a very discriminating and élite poetic persona, became across the ages a very promiscuous simile indeed.

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