The Roman Callimachus: Structure and Coherence in the Propertian Corpus

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The frequently problematic and obscure text of Propertius has the ability to drive readers to distraction and editors to despair. Apart from the hundreds of individual textual difficulties which hinder accurate interpretation, one big question about the whole corpus has long troubled scholars: did Propertius write four or five books of poetry? It is not my intention to go through in detail all the evidence which has been thought to be relevant to the solution of this problem. In recent years Butrica, Günther, Hendry, Heyworth, Lyne and Murgia, for example, have done so in expert fashion, but only to arrive at opposing views. For Günther, Heyworth, Lyne and Murgia, Propertius wrote five books; for Butrica and Hendry, he wrote only four. What I hope to do in this paper is to suggest that there may be some evidence which deserves more attention than it has received thus far, and which should be taken into account in any future discussion of this divisive issue.

From the editio princeps of 1472 up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, editors of Propertius presented his poems in four books exactly as they are still presented in the editions currently in use today, perhaps with the exception of J.P. Postgate’s Select Elegies of Propertius. In 1816, however, Lachmann suggested that the book traditionally thought of as the second book in fact contained the remains of two original books.

It is a pleasure to be able to offer this piece to André Hurst, learned connoisseur of Callimachus and Callimacheanism. I would like to thank James Butrica and Stephen Heyworth for their reactions to some of the ideas presented here. They generously took the time to try to convince me of the error of my ways. My thanks also to Antje Kolde for her patience, and to Margarethe Billerbeck, Francis Cairns, Jocelyne Nélis-Clément, Alessandro Schiesaro and Tony Woodman for help and encouragement of various kinds.


Postgate 1881. I have used the text of Goold 1999.
and he went on to present the Propertian corpus in five groups, with Book 3 beginning with the poem usually called 2.10, the traditional Book 3 becoming Book 4, and Book 4 becoming Book 5. For Lachmann, the transmitted text called Book 2 was corrupt and lacunose, and he found strong support for his division at 2.13.25f:

\[sat mea sat magna est, si tres sint pompa libelli quos ego Persephonae maxima dona feram.\]

He argued that the words *tres libelli* could only make sense if they belonged in an original third book, and so they had to be preceded by a division which had at some stage in the transmission become obscured, a lost division which Lachmann restored between 2.9 and 2.10. He also pointed out other features in support of his argument. Alongside 2.13.25f he put 2.3.4, *et turpis de te iam liber alter erit*, which, he argued, could only belong in a second book of poems. He also pointed out that at 1362 verses the book traditionally called Book 2 was around 300 verses longer than any other extant Augustan poetry book. Many have accepted Lachmann's daring thesis, but many have also rejected it, particularly in recent years, which suggests that the question may be worth another look.

It is well known that Augustan poets, following the example of their Hellenistic models in particular, developed an exquisite sense of structure and proportion in the construction of poetry books. This aspect of their art is apparent in both small details and in large-scale design. In his *Eclogues*, Vergil places the key word *iuvenem* in the middle of the middle line of the opening poem, and scholars have traced complex structures underpinning the unity of the whole collection. In his *Georgics*, he names Maecenas four times in a symmetrical pattern, at 1.2, 2.41, 3.41 and 4.2. Similarly, it has been pointed out that he names the River Euphrates at *Georgics* 1.509 and 4.561, and again at *Aeneid* 8.726, in each case six lines from the end of the book in question, doing so because Callimachus referred to "the Assyrain river" six lines from the end of his *Hymn to Apollo*. Again in the *Georgics*, the four hundredth line of the fourth book has been shown to rework closely the four hundredth line of

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7 The line in question is actually numbered *Georgics* 4.401, but 4.338 is generally taken to be an interpolation; see Morgan 1999, 25f, 223-229. To Morgan's discussion of ancient texts marked up with line numbers can now be added the new Strasbourg papyrus of Empedocles, which clearly marks line 300; see Martin/Primavesi 1998, 21-22, 103-104.


10 The fourth book of Homer's *Odyssey* has been discovered in the *Aeneid* and the appreciation of structural patterns has been shown to be vital to the understanding of Vergil's imitative technique. Similarly, complex strucures have been traced in Horace's *Odes* of course in the work of Propertius himself. One does not have to believe each and every proposition of this kind, or accept the validity of every aspect of all the complex diagrams drawn by scholars to trace numerous links and structural patterns within collections of poems, to agree that this approach to ancient texts has revealed an important element of the artistic sensibility of Roman poets. As Goold has put it in his Loeb edition of Propertius, "[t]he problem raised by the occurrence of the same artistic device at an earlier date or in an earlier context is frequently of great interest, but it is not a problem that it is impossible to solve." It seems likely, therefore, that at the same time as Propertius took care to structure each individual poem and book of poems, he will also have paid attention to the over-arching structure of his oeuvre as a whole. It is generally agreed that the poems we have were written over a fifteen-year period, from around 29 to 15 B.C. Each book was no doubt originally published separately, before they were all gathered together, and thehabit of thinking of and referring to the four books we have as a complete collection is deeply ingrained. But there is in fact considerable disagreement about the form in which his poems circulated after their completion. For Williams Books 1-3 were published as a collection and Book 4 added later. On the other hand, Butrica is convinced that Book 1 "circularly by its author's choice as an autonomous work that never formed part of a larger collection", and that "the remaining
three books must have been published together in a three-book collection.\(^{18}\) Heyworth, on the other hand, has argued that it is “inconceivable that Propertius regarded his first book as an isolated publication, a *Monobiblos*”, and that “the five books of Propertius circulated together in antiquity”\(^{19}\). I agree with Heyworth that Propertius wrote five books, but I also agree with Butrica that Book 1 should not be lumped together with those which followed it. Therefore, I would argue, following Birt, Richmond and Skutsch\(^{20}\), that the Propertian corpus was originally composed in two parts, a single book plus a four-book collection\(^{21}\), and I suggest that this argument is strengthened by the existence of an obvious structural similarity between the books usually referred to as Propertius 2-4 and two four-book works, Callimachus’ *Aetia* and Vergil’s *Georgics*\(^{22}\).

In 1983, following the publication of Parsons’s work on the papyrus fragments known as the ‘Lille Callimachus’\(^{23}\), Thomas demonstrated that the prologue of the third book of Vergil’s *Georgics* is closely modelled on the *Victoria Berenices* which opened the third book of the *Aetia*\(^{24}\). There can be no doubt that the placing of Vergil’s imitation is important.\(^{25}\) The opening 48 lines of *Georgics* 3 famously look forward to the composition of a poem recounting the victories of Octavian (*victorisque arma Quirini, 3.27*; cf. *pugnas / Caesaris, 3.46f*), praise of Berenice by a Greek poet giving way to praise of the Roman victor over Cleopatra. Equally, there can be little doubt that Vergil’s *Georgics* as a whole is deeply influenced by Callimachus’ *Aetia*\(^{26}\). Following his discussion of Callimachus and Vergil, Thomas goes on to treat their joint influence on two later Roman poets, Propertius and Statius. Concerning the latter, he shows how *Silvae* 3.1 resembles both the *Victoria Berenices* which opened *Aetia* 3, and the prologue to *Georgics* 3. Concerning the former, he points to Wimmel’s discussion of the similarities between Propertius 3.1 and *Georgics* 3.1-48. At this point it may be useful to provide evidence of the extent of the links between these two texts:\(^{27}\)

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>primus ego...ferre (3-4)</em></td>
<td><em>primus ego...primus...referam (10-12)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Itala per Graios orgia ferre choros (4)</em></td>
<td><em>Aonio rediens deducam vertice Musas (11)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Graios (4)</em></td>
<td><em>Graecia (20)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>carmen (5)</em></td>
<td><em>carmine (5)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Phoebum (7)</em></td>
<td><em>Cynthia auctor (36)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>morat (7)</em></td>
<td><em>moras (43)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tenuis (5), tenui (8)</em></td>
<td><em>tenera (15)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>aquam (6)</em></td>
<td><em>aquam...Mincius (14-15)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>quo me Fama levat terra sublimis (9)</em></td>
<td><em>qua me quoque possim...tollere humo (8-9)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>a me/nata...Musa triumphant (9-10)</em></td>
<td><em>deducam Musas (11)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fama (9)</em></td>
<td><em>fama (47)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>in curru (11)</em></td>
<td><em>centum quaquirius...currus (18)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>rotas (12)</em></td>
<td><em>rotam (39)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>certatis (13)</em></td>
<td><em>decernet (20)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>non...lata... via (14)</em></td>
<td><em>silvas salusque...intactos (40-41)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>via (14)</em></td>
<td><em>via (8)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>finem imperii (16)</em></td>
<td><em>utroque ab itiore (33)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Bactra (16)</em></td>
<td><em>Niphateni...Parthum (31)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>canent (16)</em></td>
<td><em>canemus (1)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>opus hoc de monte Sororum/deturit</em></td>
<td><em>Aonio...deducam vertice Musas (11)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>intacta pagina nostra via (17-18)</em></td>
<td><em>silvas salusque...intactos (40-41)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>intacta...via (18)</em></td>
<td><em>mollia (41)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>mollia (19)</em></td>
<td><em>victor...ipse caput tonsae foliis</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>serta...captii...corona (19-20)</em></td>
<td><em>ornatus olivae (17-21)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>invidia (21)</em></td>
<td><em>Invidia (37)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>post obitum (22-23)</em></td>
<td><em>modo vita supersit (10)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>nomen (24)</em></td>
<td><em>nominia (36), nomen (47)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>in ora (24)</em></td>
<td><em>per ora (9)</em></td>
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\(^{18}\) Butrica 1996, 93f.

\(^{19}\) Heyworth 1995a, 177-181.


\(^{21}\) This does not preclude Heyworth’s idea that they may in fact have circulated together: on the relationship between the *Cynthia* and the other books see the discussion of Liberman 2002, 53-56.

\(^{22}\) Servius on *Eclogae* 10.1 records that Gallus composed four books of *amores*; see Ross 1975, 45f, Courtney 1993, 261f. We know so little about Gallus’ poetry that it would be a waste of time in this context to speculate about the structure of this collection of poems; in general on Propertius and Gallus see Ross 1975, Cairns 1984, and most recently Miller P.A. 2004, 60-94 and Pincus 2004. Similarly, we know so little about Philetas, with whom Propertius links Callimachus, that it seems wise not to indulge in speculation; on Philetas see most recently Bing 2003. On Propertius and the *Georgics* see Batstone 1992, Parker 1992.

\(^{23}\) Parsons 1977.

\(^{24}\) Thomas 1983 = 1999 68-100.

\(^{25}\) See Conte 1992 on mid-point poems.
Vergil here describes a poetic triumph in which the Muses are led from Greece to the banks of the Mincius, where a temple will be founded and sacrifices and celebrations offered in praise of Octavian's victories, another way of saying that he will compose an epic poem which will embrace the victory at Actium and the subsequent triple triumph of 29 B.C. In doing so he faces up to the challenge set by Callimachean criticism of post-Homeric epic, implying that he will write a poem worthy of both Homer and Callimachus. Propertius reacts by rejecting war as a theme and affirming his commitment to Philetan and Callimachean poetics, imagining a poetic triumph in elegiac terms and leaving Roman historical themes to others. But he also likens himself to Homer, predicting comparable poetic immortality. The two poets are in fact dealing with identical subject matter, and given the Callimachean background to the Vergilian passage it is striking that Propertius created this extraordinary collection of parallels for a poem of which the first word is Callimachi, a poem which is throughout deeply Callimachean in spirit and which even contains a chariot race (11-14), a poetic triumph to cap Berenice's imitation of Nemean victory 29.

On the fact that Propertius opens his third book with such detailed imitation of Georgics 3.1-48, Thomas writes: "I follow Lachmann in the view that Book 2 of Propertius is in fact a conflation of two books, and I agree with Birt (1882) 422-26 that at least in terms of publication the Monobiblos is to be separated from the rest of the collection. If so, and few now have any doubts, then 3.1 is still to be considered the opening poem of the third book. Skutsch (1975) 229-33 has in fact removed any doubts on the matter, but for those who do not believe in a Monobiblos and in the fact that the second book is a conflation, 3.1 will still be 3.1" 30. Thomas may have been correct in 1983 to say that "few now have any doubts" about the division of Book 2, but since then important voices in Propertian scholarship have expressed disagreement with Lachmann 31. Nevertheless, Thomas's point about the structural parallel between the opening of Georgics 3 and Propertius 3.1 is impregnable. And further evidence in support of Lachmann's thesis and of Thomas's assessment of the relevance to it of the prologue of the third Georgic may be provided by the fact that in addition to the close links between Propertius 3.1 and Georgics 3.1-48, Propertius 2.34, the final poem of Book 2, contains close imitation of the closing section of Georgics 2.

In famous lines at Georgics 2.490-4 Vergil refers to the wisdom and happiness to be won from knowing and writing about the mysteries of nature and the countryside and its deities:

felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas
atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum
subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari:
fortunatus et ille deos qui novit agrestis
Panaque Silvanumque senem Nymphasque sorores.

At 2.34.71-4 Propertius, writing about Vergil's poetic career, exclaims:

felix qui vilis pomis mercaris amores!
huic licet ingratae Tityrus ipse canat.
felix intactum Corydon qui temptat Alexin
agricole domini carpere delicias!

I find it impossible to believe, given the massive similarities between Propertius 3.1 and Georgics 3.1-48, that this parallel can be considered both fortuitous and meaningless 32. Further links support the idea that 2.34 is indeed related to the end of the second Georgic. At 2.475-8 Vergil desires to know about natural philosophy:

Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musae,
quarum sacra fero ingenti percussus amore,
accipiant caelique vias? et sidera mostrant,
defectus solis varios lunaeque labores.

Compare Propertius 2.34.27-30 and 51-4, describing the philosophical interests of Lyceus:

quid tua Socraticis tibi nunc sapientia libris
proderit aut rerum dicere possis vias?

It has been argued that 3.2.1ff belong to the opening poem of the book; see Fedeli 1994, app. crit. ad loc. The allusion to Vergil's interea may support this view.


Thomas 1983, 102 n.56 = 1999, 83 n.56.

See especially Hutchinson 1984 and Butrica 1996.
aut quid Cretaei tibi prosunt carmina plectri?
nil lavai in magno vester amore senex.
...
harum nulla solet rationem quaerere mundi,
 nec cur fraternis Luna labore equis,
 nec si post Stygias aliquid restabimus undas,
 nec si consulto fulmina missa tonent.

For rerum causae and caeli vias read rerum vias and ratio mundi. The amor of Vergil differs from that of Lynceus, but their philosophical interests are exactly the same. Each seeks to understand the workings of nature, represented by the interrelated movements of sun and moon, particularly the phases of the moon (lunae labores and Luna laboret). And just as Vergil in this section of the Georgics, albeit implicitly, is aligning his poem with his predecessors in the genre of didactic poetry, Orpheus, Hesiod, Empedocles, Aratus and Lucretius, so Propertius goes on to place himself at the end of a long line of elegists, Varro, Catullus, Calvus and Gallus (2.34.85-94):

haec quoque perfecto ludebat Iasone Varro,
 Varro Leucadiae maxima flamma suae;
haec quoque lascivi cantarunt scripta Catulli,
Lesbia quis ipsa notior est Helena;
haec etiam docti confessa est pagina Calvi,
cum caneret miserae funera Quintiliane.
et modo formosa quam multa Lycoride Gallus
mortuus inferna vulnera lavit aqua!
Cynthia quin vivet versu laudata Properti,
hos inter si me ponere Fama volet.

Contextualising these similarities will help to delineate them more clearly, and to bring out further links between these two texts.

Propertius 2.34 is a puzzling and problematic poem in many respects, but some aspects are clear enough. First of all, it is indeed one poem, not two as suggested by some editors, and it was indeed the final poem of Book 2, the division between Books 2 and 3 being secure, on whatever reckoning of the nature and structure of the Propertian corpus. It is

33 See Nelis 2004a.
34 Contrast the fine readings of Stahl 1985, 172-188 and Newman 1997, 220-228. Intriguingly, the latter suspects the presence of Empedocles in 2.34; for an argument that Empedocles is a key intertext for the end of Georgics 2 see Hardie 2002, Nelis 2004b. But see now especially Cairns 2004 on the poem as a whole.
35 Goold 1999, 217 n.98 curtly states the poem's unity; on poem division and book division see Heyworth 1995b, 138: "it may be historically true that all divisions bar those between books are conjectural." Note, however, Butrica 1997, 201-204, who argues for significant corruption and massive interpolation in 2.34.
37 Buchheit 45-159, Hardie 1986, 33-51; see also Nelis 2004a.
38 Hardie 1986, 33.
career to date and the writing of the Aeneid. Furthermore, Propertius explicitly links his two poems by naming Philetas and Callimachus at 2.34.31f and 3.1.1, as if to recreate the double panel at the centre of the Georgics. And it is quite possible that this complex pattern of allusion to the middle of the four books of the Georgics, against the background of Callimachus' Aetia, took place in the middle of the four-book collection of love poems, amores/Amores, which Propertius went on to write after the completion of his brilliant monobiblos, his Cynthia.

Given the state of the available evidence, we may never achieve a satisfactory understanding of the relationship between Propertius and his models, and in particular of the intertextual patterns linking his elegies to the Aetia of Callimachus and to Vergil's Georgics and Aeneid, not to mention the relationship between Propertian poetics and the concept of Callimacheanism, however such a concept may have been defined in the mind of an Augustan poet. Propertius is a love poet who presents the Aetia as a key intertext while knowing that the Aetia was not a poem about love. At the same time, he knows that his own elegies could never really be defined simply as love poems and he aspires to Callimachean aetiology as a higher poetic calling, as an alternative to epic. And as a result, his four books of amores/Amores represent the first systematic reaction to and rewriting of Vergil's epic and indeed of Vergil's whole poetic career. In recent years, James Butrica has offered a powerful revisionist reading of Propertius' three-book (i.e. the traditional books 2-4) collection of elegies, making little of Vergil and denying the importance of Callimachus' amores/Amores, which Propertius went on to write after the completion of his brilliant monobiblos, his Cynthia.

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Ut nostris tune facta superiat Umbria libris,
Umbria Romani patria Callimachi!

Bibliography


Théodose le Diacre, auteur –, dont nous ne savons par ailleurs rien de certain – d’un éloge en vers de la reconquête de la Crète menée par Nicéphore Phocas pour l’empereur Romain II, nous invite lui-même à comparer cette expédition à la guerre de Troie et son poème à celui d’Homère.

Nous allons essayer de préciser la perspective dans laquelle s’inscrit cette comparaison, en examinant le statut du texte de Théodose, et ce en quoi il se compare à son illustre devancier ; nous verrons également en passant quelques exemples de l’utilisation que le poète byzantin fait des matériaux glanés chez ses prédécesseurs.

1. L’auteur et son ouvrage

Si l’auteur, en l’absence de tout témoignage extérieur, ne nous est guère connu, mis à part son statut de diacre, vraisemblablement dans l’abondant clergé de Sainte-Sophie, et une certaine forme de proximité de la cour impériale qui correspondrait bien à cette situation, nous pouvons du moins situer très précisément dans le temps la rédaction du poème et sa publication.

L’expédition conduite par Nicéphore Phocas, général de l’empereur Romain II, pour reprendre la Crète aux Arabes qui l’occupaient depuis presque un siècle et demi, eut en effet lieu de la mi-juillet 960 au début du mois de mars 961. La prise de Chandax (La modeme Heraklion, près de l’antique Cnossos ; le nom Xánvawv vient de l’arabe al-Khandaq « le fossé », correspondant bien au rôle de point d’appui fortifié joué par la ville, à partir de laquelle les Arabes qui l’avaient fondée menèrent la conquête de toute l’île, vers 827 ; c’est de la forme Chandax que le nom latin de la ville et de toute la Crète, Candia. 

1 La moderne Héraklion, près de l’antique Cnossos ; le nom Xánvawv vient de l’arabe al-Khandaq « le fossé », correspondant bien au rôle de point d’appui fortifié joué par la ville, à partir de laquelle les Arabes qui l’avaient fondée menèrent la conquête de toute l’île, vers 827 ; c’est de la forme Chandax que le nom latin de la ville et de toute la Crète, Candia.

**Théodose le Diacre**

**ET SES PRÉDÉCESSEURS ÉPIQUES**

**Autour du De Creta capta**

André-Louis REY, Genève