

## VIRGIL'S CALLIMACHEAN PINDAR: KINGSHIP AND THE BABY IAMUS IN *ECLOGUE* 4.23–5\*

### ABSTRACT

This article argues for an allusion in Virgil's *Eclogue* 4 to one of Pindar's victory odes (*Olympian* 6). It will be suggested that this Pindaric pretext is viewed by the Latin poet through a Callimachean perspective which adds to it further layers of significance. Consequently, the evidence will be discussed for reading the allusion in terms of royal ideology which places Virgil's poem in the tradition of Hellenistic ruler-encomia.

**Keywords:** intertextuality; window-reference; panegyrics; Virgil; Pindar; Callimachus; ideology of kingship

The description of the blessings brought by the prodigious advent of the child in Virgil's cryptic fourth *Eclogue* includes the following lines (4.23–5):

ipsa tibi blandos fundent cunabula flores.  
occidet et serpens et fallax herba ueneni  
occidet; Assyrium uulgo nascetur amomum.

Taken at face value, these motifs are conventional vignettes typical of the divine epiphany and the description of the Golden Age.<sup>1</sup> Yet there appears to be more to it than this. If more is going to be written about this well-known poem, it is because the above verses seem to contain a fine literary allusion which has hitherto gone unnoticed. This intriguing allusion is typical of the way in which Virgil views one literary archetype through another, thus contaminating one with the other ('mirror-reference'). I suggest that the text hinted at is Pindar's *Olympian* 6. To make this suggestion plausible it would be useful if we could highlight some other connections between Virgil and this ode. Actually, the proem of the third book of Virgil's *Georgics* contains many verbal allusions to *Olympian* 6 which are placed in a Callimachean framework, to which I will return at the end of this article.<sup>2</sup> A scene from the *Aeneid* may also be related to the mysterious floral shelter of the baby Iamus,<sup>3</sup> although here there

\* This paper was supported by a János-Bolyai-Fellowship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

<sup>1</sup> For the hymnic motif 'spontaneous growth of plants and flowers', see Z. Adorjányi, *Pindars sechste olympische Siegesode. Text, Einleitung und Kommentar* (Leiden, 2014), 213 on Pind. *Ol.* 6.55–6. There I referenced Verg. *Ecl.* 4.23 as a simple case of hymnic convention, as I was at that time unaware of the Pindaric reminiscence in Virgil. For the motif 'dangerous creatures cancelled', cf. e.g. Hor. *Epod.* 16.31–3 (tigers, birds of prey, lions becoming tame in a series of ἀδύνατο), a poem connected with Virgil's *Eclogue* 4 in many respects (see W. Clausen, *A Commentary on Virgil: Eclogues* [Oxford, 1994], 145–50).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Adorjányi (n. 1), 116 on Pind. *Ol.* 6.1–4 (without the Callimachean backdrop). For older literature on this topic, see below nn. 19 and 20.

<sup>3</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 1.691–4: *at Venus Ascanio placidam per membra quietem | inrigat, et fotum gremio dea tollit in altos | Idaliae lucos, ubi mollis amaracus illum | floribus et dulci adspirans complectitur umbra*. For further details, see Adorjányi (n. 1), 215 on Pind. *Ol.* 6.55–6.

are no exact reminiscences, so the allusion remains vague.<sup>4</sup> Hence, it is a working hypothesis that *Olympian* 6, one of Pindar's most celebrated poems, may have been familiar to Virgil.

As our eyes are now free to view the Pindaric allusion, let us go into details. The first verse in the quotation (*ipsa tibi blandos fundent cunabula flores*) introduces the general setting, namely that the second *aition* for Iamus' name is the bed of violas (ἰών) on which the baby lies (lines 55–6). In Virgil there is a cradle (*cunabula*) which teems with flowers.<sup>5</sup> This sensuous and evocative scenario paves the way for a poignant allusion in the consecutive verses. First of all, an aspect of the Latin text: the line with chiasmic positioning of verbs and nouns (*occidet et serpens et fallax herba ueneni* | *occidet*) distinguishes expressively between two things (*serpens* and *herba ueneni*) that are conceptually related. The venomous grass is the food of the adder which induces its poisonous nature (Hom. *Il.* 22.93–4 δρόκων ... | βεβρωκὸς κακὰ φάρμακ' [simile of Hector]; Verg. *Aen.* 2.471 *coluber mala gramina pastus* [simile of Pyrrhus]).<sup>6</sup> Supposing that herbal venom and snake poison are interrelated, we are reminded of the first *aition* of Iamus' name connected to the ἀμεμφεῖ | ἰὼ μελισσῶν ('harmless poison of the bees', Pind. *Ol.* 6.46–7), with which the baby is nourished by two snakes. While in this case the 'venom' of the snakes is a metaphor for honey fetched by the animals, in Virgil's account the snake itself and its poison are cancelled out (*occidet*).

The rare word *amomum*, which concludes the verse, contributes to the allusion with yet another verbal element. The word for the aromatic shrub, from which a fragrant balsam was made, is in Greek ἄμωμον, which is also the neuter form of the adjective ἄμωμος which means 'impeccable', 'blameless'.<sup>7</sup> This is synonymous with the Pindaric attribute ἀμεμφεῖ which in this context has the function of turning the negative notion ἰός into something positive, honey, a substance comparable in its scent to the *amomum*. Consequently, both terms (*amomum* and ἀμεμφεῖ) mark a change from

<sup>4</sup> A clear-cut case of influence is Horace's translation of θεόφροννα κοῦρον (Pind. *Ol.* 6.41, denoting Iamus) with *animosus infans* (*Carm.* 3.4.20) as part of his autobiographical fiction (the poet as protégé of gods and the Muses). For more details about this allusion, see Adorjáni (n. 1), 82–3.

<sup>5</sup> E. Norden, *Die Geburt des Kindes. Geschichte einer religiösen Idee* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1924), 72 n. 2 quotes Eur. *Phoen.* 649–54, where the newborn Dionysus is covered by rampant ivies. Yet here there are no flowers (nor at Callim. *Hymn* 4.262 [laurel foliage], quoted by Clausen [n. 1], 135 ad loc.), while ivy is a conventional attribute of Dionysus. Norden himself has some qualms about the relevance of this parallel. K. Büchner, *P. Vergilius Maro, der Dichter der Römer* (Stuttgart, 1958), 188 (= *RE* II 8 A [1955], 1021–264, at 1208) and G. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1968), 277 find this motif without precedent. R.G.M. Nisbet, 'Virgil's fourth *Eclogue*: easterners and westerners', *BICS* 25 (1978), 59–78, at 65 hints at Iamus (next to Hermes, Apollo, Bacchus) not as a direct allusion but as general picture of children lying in luxuriant vegetation.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. E.K. Borthwick, 'Zoologica Pindarica', *CQ* 26 (1976), 198–205, at 204–5.

<sup>7</sup> N. D'Anna, *Mistero e profezia. La IV egloga di Virgilio e il rinnovamento del mondo* (Cosenza, 2007), 246–51 takes the attribute *Assyrium* as a clue for the Indo-Iranian origin of the concept of the struggle between opposite forces and the victory of the good symbolized by the mysterious substance *haoma* (see also F. Altheim, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* [Baden-Baden, 1953], 2.159–60). For doubts about this connection, see W. Kraus, 'Vergils vierte Ekloge: ein kritisches Hypomnema', *ANRW* 2.1.81 (1980), 604–45, at 620. This kind of approach is different from my interpretation, which assumes a Western strain of literary tradition used by Virgil, while he makes it look exotic (*Assyrium*). For the etymology of *amomum*, cf. B. Arnold, 'The literary experience of Vergil's fourth *Eclogue*', *CJ* 90 (1994), 143–60, at 153. The anonymous referee alerts me to a possible poetological allusion to Callimachus' *Hymn to Apollo*, where the personified Φθόρος and Μῶμος are associated with the muddy *Assyrian* river (Euphrates) and contrasted with Demeter's holy bees (lines 105–13). This poetological reading supplements another hint at the same *Hymn* (line 40 concerning πανάκεια) entailing a political innuendo.

venom (*ueneri* ... ἰῶ) to a fragrant plant/sweet liquor (*amomum*/honey). The honey is not mentioned explicitly in our Virgilian passage, but it appears a little later on as a conventional element of spontaneous growth characteristic of the Golden Age (*et durae quercus sudabunt roscida mella*, 30).<sup>8</sup> The three relevant notions (*ueneri*, *amomum*, *mella*)<sup>9</sup> are placed at the end of the verse and marked by a dynamic string of association with explicit counterparts in the Pindaric expression alluded: poison (negated) ~ ἰῶ, odorous *amomum* ~ ὀμιεμφεῖ, sweet honey ~ μελισσῶν.

These reminiscences seem sufficiently strong to warrant the Pindaric allusion. But what is Virgil's intention with the reference to Iamus' birth-scene and what makes him conjure up such an elaborate wordplay? Are there general affinities between Virgil's *Eclogue* 4 and Pindar's *Olympian* 6 that make the parallel of the *puer* and Iamus meaningful? First of all, the Arcadian centre of Iamus' story may be a metapoetical hint at the Arcadian background of the genre 'idyll' (not so much the fourth *Eclogue*, although Arcadia appears briefly in lines 58–9). In fact, the mythical narrative of *Olympian* 6 deals with the prophetic vocation of the protagonist who receives this gift from his father Apollo,<sup>10</sup> and who subsequently becomes a seer in Olympia as well as ancestor of the prophetic guild of the Iamidae. Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* presents itself at the beginning as singing about events foretold in the Cumaean prophecy (*ultima Cumaei uenit iam carminis aetas*, 4). Thus the narrative element of prophecy in *Olympian* 6 becomes the discursive frame of *Eclogue* 4. We may ask ourselves whether Virgil was a sensitive reader of the Pindaric poem and if he realized that prophesying in *Olympian* 6 is not restricted to Iamus but extends to Pindar's encomiastic 'I' as well.<sup>11</sup> In this case Virgil reflects more deeply upon the structure of the Pindaric ode, and transforms the objective programme of the Pindaric poem (mythical narration) to the subjective programme (poetic discourse) of his *Eclogue*.

The centrepiece of the allusion, however, is to be sought elsewhere. It includes the parallel of Iamus and the *puer*, whereby Virgil capitalizes on a clue in Pindar's text which is peripheral for the ode as a whole and problematic in its original context. At midnight Iamus wades into the river Alpheus, prays to his grandfather Poseidon and to his father Apollo, and requests a 'people-nourishing' honour (αἰτέων λαοτρόφον τιμῶν τιν' ἔῶ κεφαλαῖ, 60). This is arguably the honour of a king, but it is not clear what Iamus means exactly when he requests a kingly honour upon his head. Fortunately, this matter does not affect our argument here,<sup>12</sup> since Virgil might have

<sup>8</sup> The term *roscida mella* means 'honeydew', which was identified with honey originating from the sky as a kind of dew or rain. Cf. J.H. Waszink, *Biene und Honig in der Dichtung der griechisch-römischen Antike* (Opladen, 1974), 5–6.

<sup>9</sup> Two of them (honey and *amomum*) also appear in *Ecl.* 3.89 *mella fluant illi, ferat et rubus asper amomum* without serpents (contrast line 93), in a context related to Pollio's *aduentus* (for further ramifications of this connection, cf. W. Berg, *Early Virgil* [London, 1974], 158–62). A Pindaric allusion is also in this case to be considered (for the thorny *rubus*, cf. Pind. *Ol.* 6.54 σχοίνω βατιῶ τ').

<sup>10</sup> The *puer* in Virgil's *eclogue* also bears some Apolline traits. The relevant verse is *casta faue Lucina; tuus iam regnat Apollo* (10). Lucina is invoked and asked to facilitate the appearance of the child who comes into a world dominated by Apollo (there might be a pun on the name of the consul Pollio [line 12], who is 'Apollo on earth' in Rome). The possessive pronoun *tuus* suggests that Apollo is *sensu concreto* the brother of Lucina-(Eileithyia)-Artemis/Diana (cf. Callim. *Aet.* fr. 79, dieg. 33–6) or—in a more general kinship of competence—a light-god similar to the Birth-Goddess (emphasis on the stem \**luc-*).

<sup>11</sup> For an in-depth analysis of this question, see Adorjányi (n. 1), 71–109.

<sup>12</sup> For a thorough discussion, see Adorjányi (n. 1), 225 on Pind. *Ol.* 6.58–61, 227–8 on 60 (with the references which support λαοτρόφος as 'kingly').

interpreted λαοτρόφον τιμάν at face value as 'kingly honour' and thought that the competence of the seer and that of the king are related and that the meaning can be brought home by a single word.<sup>13</sup> Now, if Virgil interpreted the figure of Iamus as an outstanding personality endowed with (prophetic and) kingly charisma, this also has some bearing on the way in which the Pindaric allusion accords with the entire poem. I will not go into the mass of interpretations surrounding the fourth *Eclogue*. It will suffice to voice my sympathy with the line of exegesis which reads the poem in the tradition of Hellenistic encomia for rulers.<sup>14</sup> Virgil's originality consists chiefly in the tour de force through which he transmogrifies the person of the ruler, who is conventionally presented as a mighty person, into a newborn baby. The decision to do so, though original within the confines of Latin literature, is not without precedent, but it follows well-established Hellenistic literary traditions. It is well known that Hellenistic literature has an affinity for the topic 'childhood' and for presenting mythical persons as children, thus gaining a new vista upon topics which through long, canonical usage seemed to have become trite and obsolete.<sup>15</sup> Regarding the prophecy about the *puer* we may think of Apollo in Callimachus' *Hymn to Delus* (*Hymn* 4), who delivers his prophecy in a foetal condition from the womb of Leto (lines 88–98, 162–95), foretelling the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus.

Consequently, the concept of the baby/child-king in Virgil is part and parcel of a very Hellenistic literary agenda. If we return to the Pindaric allusion with this insight, we realize that the parallel of the *puer*-to-be-king and the baby Iamus who is going to be a great seer-(king) is most relevant to the conception of the fourth *Eclogue*. This is why Virgil views Pindar's *Olympian* 6 through the eyes of Hellenistic poetry. However, we can be more precise about the issue concerning one expression in the given passage. The fragrant balsam *amomum*, which within the framework of the Pindaric allusion is associated with honey, might have been linked by Virgil to a passage in Callimachus' *Hymn to Apollo* (*Hymn* 2.38–41) as well. Here a mysterious healing substance, the πανάκεια, trickles from the hair of Apollo and repels all kinds

<sup>13</sup> In Homer the king and the seer are also closely connected in terms of insight and piety. Cf. W. Desmond, 'Between gods and mortals: the piety of Homeric kings', in J. Klooster and B. van den Berg (edd.), *Homer and the Good Ruler in Antiquity and Beyond* (Leiden and Boston, 2018), 38–64, at 49–50.

<sup>14</sup> Theocritus' *Idylls* 16 and 17 are two typical pieces of this genre: see R.C. Kukula, *Römische Säkularpoesie. Neue Studien zu Horaz' XVI. Epodus und Vergils IV. Ekloge* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1911), 52–3, 69–74; E. Pfeiffer, *Virgils Bukolika. Untersuchungen zum Formproblem* (Stuttgart, 1933), 76–7, 84; H.J. Rose, *The Eclogues of Vergil* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1942), 166–71; Williams (n. 5), 274; R. Hunter, 'Virgil and Theocritus: a note on the reception of the *Encomium to Ptolemy Philadelphus*', *SemRom* 4 (2001), 159–63. For Virgil's poem as an unconventional ruler's panegyric, see I.M. Le M. DuQuesnay, 'Virgil's fourth *Eclogue*', *PLLS* 1 (1976), 25–99, at 43–68; for the child as an archetypal godlike ruler, see E.W. Leach, '*Eclogue* 4. Symbolism and sources', *Arethusa* 4 (1971), 167–84, at 175. The main difference in relation to other encomia is that Virgil deliberately conceals the identity of the *puer*. This general topical character may have been Virgil's intention, as he wanted to create the essence of a ruler's panegyric, not the panegyric of a concrete ruler.

<sup>15</sup> The most exhaustive treatment of this topic in Callimachus is A. Ambühl, *Kinder und junge Helden. Innovative Aspekte des Umgangs mit der literarischen Tradition bei Kallimachos* (Leuven and Paris, 2005). For the 'childish poetics' of the Theocritean and Virgilian idylls (without explicit reference to *Eclogue* 4), see P. Hardie, 'Cultural and historical narratives in Vergil's *Eclogues* and Lucretius', in M. Fantuzzi and T. Papanghelis (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Greek and Latin Pastoral* (Leiden and Boston, 2006), 275–300, at 282–8. For the 'child' as symbol of Alexandrian poetics (without and against politics), see Ll. Morgan, '*Quantum sat erit*. Epic, acne and the fourth *Eclogue*', *LCM* 17 (1992), 76–9, at 79.

of physical injuries. In another paper I showed that Callimachus identified *πανόκεια* with ambrosia via Homeric allusions. Further, I argued that this substance is a symbol of kingship and represents the divinity of kings.<sup>16</sup> Now, Virgil may have read this passage in exactly the same way. For in a passage of the *Aeneid* (12.418–19 *spargit ... salubris ambrosiae sucos et odoriferam panaceam*, where Venus prepares healing liquids for Aeneas) he juxtaposes both terms in what seems to be a sort of hendiadys expressing the notion that ambrosia and panacea have the same healing properties.<sup>17</sup> This might be an allusion to Callimachus' *Hymn* 2.38–41 with the implication that Virgil understood the play with the identity of both substances. If so, he may also have been cognizant of the royal symbols of the sweet/odorous substance (panacea/ambrosia/honey) here and elsewhere in Hellenistic literature (chiefly Poseidonius, *Epigr.* 36.3A–B γλυκὺν ἰδρῶ), as I showed in the paper cited above. Then the scented plant and the honey-like balsam *amomum* might convey this royal symbolism, an association which accords with the interpretation of the idyll as a ruler's encomium.<sup>18</sup> It is quite clear that this complex meaning is brought about by intermingling the Pindaric allusion (the baby Iamus fed with honey) with Callimachean features (divine kingship and its liquid symbols).

This might be part of a more general metapoetic reflection upon the encomiastic genre. Virgil seems to reconstruct a sort of 'archaeology' of the political encomium and he traces its origin back to Pindar who wrote victory songs to famous rulers of his era. Here we return to the prologue to the third book of the *Georgics*, which is embroidered with Pindaric allusions.<sup>19</sup> Yet the main intertext is Callimachus' *Victoria Berenices* (*Aet.* fr. 54i Harder) from the beginning of the third book of the *Aetia* (the identical placement of both in the book structure is undoubtedly significant).<sup>20</sup> In the *Georgics* the poet's metaphorical chariot-riding is paralleled with the triumph of the ruler Octavian (*G.* 3.17–18), which makes the allusion to the poetic celebration of Queen Berenice's Nemean victory relevant.<sup>21</sup> In the fourth *Eclogue* again the Pindaric reminiscences are integrated into a Callimachean perspective. In this way Virgil suggests that the archetype of celebrating rulers is Pindar's victory ode, which was imitated by Callimachus: now he is imitating Callimachus imitating Pindar.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> 'Ambrosia and kingship: on Callimachus, *Hymn* 2.38–41', *CQ* 70 (2020), 171–6. Virgil may also have had Callimachus' *Hymn* 1 (to Zeus) in mind, where King Ptolemy appears on a par with Zeus, but the god's aretology is unconventionally centred upon his birth and his infancy.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. R. Armstrong, *Virgil's Green Thoughts. Plants, Humans, and the Divine* (Oxford, 2019), 167–8.

<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the Callimachean intertext, where the panacea exudes from the body of the god, in Virgil's text the fragrant plant is extraneous to the person representing the king (*puer*); nevertheless, the relation is definitely causal (the appearance of the *puer* brings about the flourishing of nature).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. L.P. Wilkinson, 'Pindar and the proem to the third *Georgic*', in W. Wimmel (ed.), *Forschungen zur römischen Literatur. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Karl Büchner* (Wiesbaden, 1970), 2.286–90; A. Setaioli, 'Pindaro', in F. della Corte (ed.), *Enciclopedia Vergiliana* (Rome, 1988), 4.107–11, at 4.107.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. R.F. Thomas, 'Virgil's Pindar?', in P.E. Knox and C. Foss (edd.), *Style and Tradition: Studies in Honor of Wendell Clausen* (Stuttgart, 1998), 99–120, at 103–8; R.K. Balot, 'Pindar, Virgil, and the proem to *Georgic* 3', *Phoenix* 52 (1998), 83–94.

<sup>21</sup> Another clear allusion to this chariot victory is in Prop. 3.1.9–12 (the book number again being an arithmetical homage to Callimachus), but here it signals a rejection of the heroic topics (lines 15–20) for the sake of an elegiac (Callimachean and Philitean) poetic programme (line 1). Cf. W. Wimmel, *Kallimachos in Rom. Die Nachfolge seines apologetischen Dichtens in der Augusteerzeit* (Wiesbaden, 1960), 216–18.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. A. Cameron, *Callimachus and his Critics* (Princeton, 1995), 474: 'Indeed in Roman eyes he must have seemed the second encomiast after Pindar—and, since most of his epinicia were in elegiacs,

We may conclude with the assertion that the same double perspective applies to the evocation of the Pindaric Iamus in the fourth *Eclogue*. First of all, we noted similarities of motifs (a baby cushioned upon flowers, absence of venom, a sweet-smelling substance) and reminiscences (*amomum* and ἄμμομῆ), which by themselves are telltale signs for the attentive reader. Moreover, we can discern other elements which have been imported from outside into the Pindaric allusion and they represent a Hellenistic-Callimachean reading of Pindar's text. Here the baby Iamus becomes a prefiguration of the king as child, and the honey, which is his first nourishment, is a symbolic substance that conjures up the essence of divine kingship. Owing to this intricate reflection of various intertexts, we certainly have the right to speak about 'Virgil's Callimachean Pindar'.<sup>23</sup>

Catholic Péter-Pázmány-University, Budapest

ZSOLT ADORJÁNI  
adorjanizs@gmail.com

more accessible and imitable than his great predecessor.' For the reception of the Callimachean 'victory ode' in Roman literature, cf. R.F. Thomas, 'Callimachus, the *Victoria Berenices*, and Roman poetry', *CQ* 33 (1983), 92–103.

<sup>23</sup> This filtering of archaic material through Hellenistic literary channels is the general view of the paper of Thomas (n. 20), especially 101–3. One last possible allusion by Virgil to a Callimachean phrase which went hitherto unnoticed: the syntactic structure of lines 56–7 *huic mater quamuis atque huic pater adsit*, | *Orphei Calliopea, Lino formosus Apollo* is reminiscent of the passage about the Morning Star in Callimachus' *Hecale*, fr. 113 Hollis = 291 Pfeiffer: αὐτοὶ μὲν φιλέουσ', αὐτοὶ δὲ τε πεφρίκασιν, | ἔσπεριον φιλέουσιν, ἀτὰρ στυγέουσιν ἔφῶν.