

In *Iambus 7* Callimachus presents an ancient cult statue of Hermes Perpheraios and makes it speak of its origins and the institution of its cult in the city of Ainos in Thrace. This poem stands in an important place in Callimachus' book of *Iambi*, the middle piece in a collection that represents a revival and a reinvention of the iambic genre. The book's self-referentiality and self-positioning in the iambic tradition have been the subject of extensive study, most recently by Acosta-Hughes (2002), who demonstrated that aesthetic criticism is one of the book's main subjects.

I propose a new, allegorical, interpretation of *Iambus 7* and maintain that its subject is the reception of archaic iambic poetry. The life-story of the ancient, crude statue of Hermes has many striking similarities to the ancient biography of the archaic iambic poet Archilochos of Paros: in rage at being treated unfairly, the poet responded with verses so vitriolic that his enemies hanged themselves. In Callimachus' *Iambus* the cult image of Hermes is insulted and mocked by fisherman, even thrown into the sea and attacked with axes, but its response is even more aggressive – it attacks its enemies with powerful incantations and successfully defends itself. The god Apollo, who, according to the Mnesiepes inscription (SEG XV, 517) played a decisive role in the institution of the cult of Archilochos, also protects the statue of Hermes and helps institute its cult among the simple fisher-folk.

My interpretation of the poem will concentrate on how it represents the iambic genre; I will address the following points:

- The statue of Hermes is described as "crude" and "a by-product of a coward." Archilochos was the first Greek poet to boast about deserting battle. How did the Hellenistic audience perceive the first-person speakers of the archaic iambus? How is the *persona loquens* re-shaped in Callimachus' book of *Iambi*?
- Since the choice of the deity (the "people's god" Hermes) and the description of the statue present the iambic genre as distinctly low, I will address the question of high and low genres, the position of the iambic poetry in this system, and the implications of its status in the Hellenistic period.
- Hermes' incantations are of a grave consequence in *Iambus 7*, since he diverts the attacks of the fisherman with them. What was the role of performance, *deixis* and speech-act in archaic iambic poetry, and how does Callimachus adapt these characteristics of the archaic genre?
- Finally, the general implications of writing oneself into an ancient tradition (i.e. Callimachus' adopting and re-shaping the iambic genre in general) will be addressed.