

A. TAGLIABUE. *Xenophon's Ephesiaca: A paraliterary love-story from the ancient world.*

Ancient Narrative Supplementum 22.

2017. Pp. 243. Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing & Groningen University Library

2017. Hardback € 90.-

ISBN 9789492444127

Reviewed by Jo Norton-Curry, St. Andrews, jonortoncurry@outlook.com

This monograph on Xenophon of Ephesus' (henceforward X of E) ancient Greek novel, the *Ephesiaca* or *The Ephesian Story of Anthia and Habrocomes*, is by Professor Aldo Tagliabue, who teaches at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. It is based on Tagliabue's doctoral thesis, which he wrote under the joint supervision of the University of Padua and the University of Swansea, and which he defended in 2011.

The monograph has an introduction, eight chapters, an appendix, bibliography, and two indices (an *index locorum* and a general index). The chapters have useful sub-headings. The introductory paragraph of each chapter summarises the chapter's aims, as well as the main arguments of the previous chapter. Each chapter has a clear concluding paragraph. The chapters can be read as standalone, but together create a unified and persuasive argument. The beautiful image on the book's cover is *Incontro tra Anzia e Abrocome alle feste di Diana*, which is attributed on the verso of the title page to the Italian painter Jacopo Amigoni. However, the painting is currently on display in the Gallerie Accademia Venezia, where it is attributed to Giambattista Tiepolo. Both Italian painters were active in the mid eighteenth century and are noted for their mythological and religious scenes. The painting dates to 1743–1744. Was the choice of a painting of disputed authorship for this book's cover intentional given that we know so little about the author of the *Ephesiaca*? The painting is doubly appropriate as a cover for this monograph, as it not only depicts the reunion of Anthia and Habrocomes in Rhodes, a key scene in Tagliabue's argument for the novel's focus upon the protagonists' progression in love, but also shows Anthia holding the leads of two dogs, which Tagliabue suggests are intended to recall the dogs which accompanied Isis during her search for Osiris in Diodorus Siculus' version of the Isis and Osiris myth, one of the *Ephesiaca*'s key intertexts according to this monograph.

The main aim of the book, as denoted in its title, is to demonstrate that the *Ephesiaca* is one of the 'Big Five', but has a different literary character to the other four ancient novels which are included in this family grouping (Chariton's *Callirhoe*, Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*,

and Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*), in that the *Ephesiaca* is a love-story leaning towards 'paraliterature', rather than a sophisticated and literary love-story. In his introduction, Tagliabue challenges the prevalence in previous scholarship on the *Ephesiaca* of attributing to its author poor writing skills and a lack of artistic control. He convincingly argues that the *Ephesiaca* should not be viewed through the lens of its sophisticated siblings but instead through the lens of 'paraliterature', on account of its more simplistic, action-oriented narrative. It is argued that one of the ways in which X of E exercises control of his narrative is through the unifying theme of the protagonists' progression in love. Building upon the scholarship of Konstan (1994) and De Temmerman (2014), Tagliabue rebuts the views of Rohde (1914) and Bakhtin (1981) that the protagonists of the *Ephesiaca* are emotionally static, that they fall in love at the beginning of the story, and, despite their period of separation and the various trials they undergo, they are reunited at the end of the story without anything having fundamentally changed with regard to their love for one another and their status in society. Tagliabue contends that the protagonists' love for one another evolves throughout the novel from mere sexual desire to a deathless love based on mutuality and fidelity, and that, instead of reintegrating into Ephesian society at the end of the novel, they form an 'exclusive society of love' with two other couples who have shared portions of their adventures.

Tagliabue adopts an approach to intertextuality which does not rely upon philological proof to identify an intertextual interaction, but also does not omit authorial intent from the equation entirely. He argues that X of E's engagement with the works of his literary predecessors and his contemporaries, such as Homer, Plato, Plutarch and Diodorus, is thematic in nature. In his discussion of intertextuality in the novel, he singles out the *Odyssey* for special attention. The *Odyssey* is both the *Ephesiaca*'s 'exemplary' model and its 'code' model, in that the *Ephesiaca* both exploits themes from the *Odyssey* (wandering, reunion, faithful love) and owes its epic predecessor a structural debt (the novel's oracle of Apollo acts in place of the epic poem's oracle of Tiresias, and the reunion night of Anthia and Habrocomes echoes that of Odysseus and Penelope in their mutual protestations of fidelity).

Chapter 1 concentrates upon the novel's two erotic nights, which Tagliabue successfully demonstrates intertextually engage with scenes from Homer's *Odyssey*. The description of the first erotic night, the night upon which Anthia and Habrocomes consummate their marriage, includes an ecphrasis of the canopy above the couple's bed. On this luxurious canopy is depicted a mythological love-scene famous from the episode in the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus and his Phaeacian hosts are entertained by Demodocus the bard (8.266–366). The story which Demodocus tells is of the adultery of Aphrodite with Ares. Tagliabue highlights

that the lovemaking of the novel's protagonists is intratextually linked to this ecphrasis through shared themes of sexual passion and luxury. He cleverly explains the oddity of the gods' night of adultery being linked to the consummation of the protagonists' marital union by reference to the reception of the story of the gods' affair in later literature. Criticism of the gods' actions (for example in Xenophanes and Plato) focusses not on their infidelity but on their inability to control their passions. Anthia and Habrocomes are, therefore, linked to Aphrodite and Ares through their lack of sexual restraint. In contrast, the second erotic night is focussed upon the fidelity of the young couple. Their dialogue engages with the Homeric scene of the reunion night of Penelope and Odysseus (23.295–309). Tagliabue demonstrates that Anthia's stratagems to preserve her chastity link her to Penelope, who famously kept her suitors at bay with her trick of the loom, and her wanderings in search of Habrocomes link her to Odysseus, in that his wanderings were to find his way back to Penelope. This chapter successfully demonstrates one of the key arguments of Tagliabue's thesis that the type of love which the protagonists have for one another does not remain static, and is of a different nature at the end of the novel to that of the beginning.

The focus of Chapter 2 is the oracle of Apollo, the ending of which has puzzled and perplexed scholars of the *Ephesiaca* for its apparent lack of relevance to the ending of the novel. The oracle predicts that the hero and the heroine will give thanks to Isis on the banks of the Nile, once they are reunited, when in fact they give thanks to Isis at her temple in Rhodes. Tagliabue's solution to the inaccuracy of the oracle is ingenious and convincing. He suggests that there is an Odyssean model for Apollo's words in Tiresias' prophecy to Odysseus (11.100–137). Just as Tiresias' predictions as to what will come to pass in Odysseus' life exceed the bounds of the *Odyssey's* timeframe (that is, they are an external prolepsis), so Apollo's oracle foretells an event in the lives of Anthia and Habrocomes which takes place after the events narrated in the novel.

Chapter 3 argues that, far from being a repetitive and badly written novel, the *Ephesiaca* is an action-filled and immersive narrative, which utilises suspense to entertain the reader. Tagliabue contends that the variation in response of the protagonists to the attacks of enemies and sexual predators not only creates a suspenseful and entertaining narrative but also demonstrates the protagonists' growth in personality: from stupefaction and inaction in Book 1, to simple vows not to submit to the sexual advances of others in Book 2, to elaborate stratagems to deter rival suitors in Book 3. The protagonists become more proactive and confident in their defence of their chastity as the story unfolds.

The protagonists' growing spirituality and mutuality in love is the topic of Chapter 4. Tagliabue comments on the Platonic colour of the depiction of Habrocomes' and Anthia's relationship. His argument that Habrocomes is depicted as Anthia's *erōmenos* and Anthia as his *erastēs* in Book 1 is especially compelling. He writes: 'This unusual variation—which contradicts both the symmetry proper to the novelistic genre and the standard pattern of male dominance—makes mutuality a progressive conquest that is part of the protagonists' growth in love and personality ...' (p. 107).

The attention of Chapter 5 is concentrated on the novel's characterisation of Egypt and on intertextuality with Greek versions of the myth of Isis and Osiris. After a thorough survey of previous scholarship on this topic, Tagliabue briefly attempts to demonstrate that the Egypt of the *Ephesiaca* is both a 'utopian' and a 'real' space. He then moves on to an unforgettable episode of the novel, the hero's encounter with the fisherman Aegialeus. Aegialeus first tells Habrocomes his own love-story, and then reveals that he keeps the mummified corpse of his wife Thelxinoe in his home, where he often kisses her and has intercourse with her (Tagliabue's interpretation of the Greek). Tagliabue argues that Habrocomes views Aegialeus' relationship with his embalmed late wife as 'an admirable example of the timelessness of *eros*', and that the readers of the novel are encouraged to do likewise, despite the preponderance of condemnation of necrophilia amongst Greek writers. The final sections of Chapter 5 have as their theme the intertextuality between episodes of the novel and key episodes from the myth of Isis and Osiris, as recounted by Greek writers of the Imperial period. For example Habrocomes on a crucifix being carried by the Nile river to its mouth recalls Osiris being carried to the mouth of the Nile in an elaborate coffin, designed as a trap for him by his nemesis Typhon (Plutarch, *Moralia* 356E); the dogs which accompany Anthia during her search for Habrocomes recall the dogs which accompanied Isis during her search for Osiris (Diodorus Siculus 1.87.2–3); Anthia's visit to Apis' oracle, where she encounters a group of Egyptian boys who prophesy that she will soon be reunited with Habrocomes, recalls the tale of Isis finding out from a group of children that Osiris' chest had floated to the mouth of the Nile river, and Plutarch's accompanying note that the Egyptians believed that little children possessed the ability to foretell the future (*Moralia* 356E).

Chapter 6 argues for the protagonists' foundation at the end of the novel of an 'exclusive society of love', and for the inclusion of homosexuality in this society. Tagliabue discusses the ending of the *Ephesiaca* in relation to that of the other novels of the 'Big Five'. He concludes that the *Ephesiaca*'s 'exclusive society of love' has no parallel and is, therefore, confirmation of the especial importance of love in this novel.

In Chapter 7, Tagliabue provides a comprehensive explanation of Couégnas's framework for defining 'paraliterature', and then explains how the *Ephesiaca* relates to this framework. He concludes that, whilst the *Ephesiaca* contains some features of sophisticated narratives, such as intertextuality with earlier works of literature and character development (though this is action-based as opposed to psychological/introspective character development), the narrative is in the main a simplistic, action-oriented one, with repetitions of plot elements and stock characters. The novel, therefore, leans towards 'paraliterature'. Tagliabue provides a helpful section on examples of ancient and modern 'paraliterature', which includes the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* and TV/radio soap operas.

Chapter 8 is a careful repudiation of the epitome theory, a theory propounded by Rohde (1876) and Bürger (1892) which suggests that the *Ephesiaca* is an epitome of a more sophisticated novel. Tagliabue argues that the increase in the pace of the novel when the protagonists reach Egypt and the concurrent lack of descriptive passages are not evidence of abridgement but rather evidence of the novel's paraliterary nature. He convincingly suggests that Heliodorus read the *Ephesiaca* in pretty much the same form as it has been handed down to us, and that a dialogic exchange between the characters Cnemon and Calasiris in *Aethiopica* 3.1.1–2 is suggestive of this. Cnemon's interjection during Calasiris' account of the Delphian festival to criticise his lack of detailed description, together with Calasiris' subsequent response to this request, point out the existence of two different ways of narrating an event: an action-oriented succinct method, and a method which provides more descriptive detail with the aim of bringing the event to life before the eyes of the listener/reader. Tagliabue comments that 'Calasiris would be very happy to limit himself to a paraliterary account of the procession and, therefore, to imitate the Xenophontic model, but he is pushed by Cnemon to transform his narrative into a sophisticated one. It can then be argued in this scene Heliodorus not only draws from the *Ephesiaca*, but also considers this novel as a paraliterary text' (p. 207).

The book's appendix comments succinctly on the identity of X of E and the dating of the novel.

Overall, I found Tagliabue's argument original, stimulating and convincing. I am now almost entirely persuaded that the text we have is not an epitome but rather a simpler, more action-focussed narrative than that of the other 'Big Five'. I first read the *Ephesiaca* on a beach in Tunisia, and found it the perfect light accompaniment to my mojito, a novel with a gripping plot, which did not require a huge amount of my concentration nor detract from my experience of a lazy afternoon relaxing in the sun. I have always felt the holiday thriller to be a good analogy for this undervalued member of the 'Big Five' grouping. I am sure that

this monograph will inspire other readings of the *Ephesiaca* which avoid the less interesting and more condemnatory path of judging X of E by the sophistication of his fellow ancient-novel authors. That being said, for me, ironically, the highlights of this book were the sections in which Tagliabue demonstrated that this novel does contain sophisticated elements. For example, Tagliabue's ingenious explanation of the ending of Apollo's oracle as an external prolepsis, and its intertextual relationship with the *Odyssey*'s oracle of Tiresias; his detailed and fascinating discussion of the protagonists' two erotic nights, especially the discussion of the first night with Tagliabue's clever use of moralising interpretations of the gods' lack of sexual restraint to explain the link between the adultery of Aphrodite with Ares and the consummation of the young couple's marriage; and the interesting and well-argued reading of the characterisation of Anthia as the *erastēs* and Habrocomes as her *erōmenos* through intertextuality with Plato's dialogues on love.

I am in agreement with Jacqueline Arthur-Montagne, who previously reviewed this monograph for *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, that the minor weaknesses of this monograph are centred around Chapter 5. Arthur-Montagne contends that this chapter's arguments do not cohere and rather resemble puzzle pieces being jammed together. I feel this assessment to be somewhat harsh, as I did follow the argument of this chapter with great interest, so I will attempt to explain the positives and the negatives as I see them. First, Tagliabue's brief argument for Egypt as both a utopian space and a real space perhaps requires more detailed treatment. The clear emphasis in the novel on the violence and brutality of Egypt, its negative side, are amply demonstrated; however, similar detail is lacking for its positive attributes. To establish Egypt as a 'utopia', Tagliabue relies upon the reference to a sacrifice to Isis 'alongside the streams of the sacred river', a line he admits is controversial, and his readers being convinced by the identical names of Eudoxus, the doctor of the novel who is shipwrecked on his journey to Egypt, and Eudoxus, the mathematician who is well-known in Greek literature for his successful journey to Egypt and the time he spent in the company of Egyptian priests. As a fan of the intertextual linking of names that are found in different narratives—a form of intertextuality utilised to a great extent in my own PhD thesis on Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*—I enjoyed this brief section of the chapter immensely. However, I felt that the argument for Egypt as a place of great wisdom, wonder and ancient learning would have been stronger had Tagliabue provided a greater number of less allusive examples to back up his argument. Second, I am not entirely persuaded by Tagliabue's reading of the Sun-god, who saves Habrocomes from both crucifixion and death by burning, as linked to a dissipation of the wrath of Eros. This too, perhaps, requires more elaboration to

prove the point. I agree entirely that this scene is related to the Isis and Osiris myth, in that both Osiris and Habrocomes are contained within/attached to the wooden means of their death, Osiris' coffin fashioned for him by Typhon and Habrocomes' crucifix, and that they both float down the Nile to its mouth. A further avenue for investigation might be a comparison of the *Ephesiaca*'s intertextual engagement with the myth of Isis and Osiris and that of the other novels. Based on the findings of my PhD research on intercultural intertextuality in Achilles Tatius' novel, I feel that a major difference between the interaction of *Leucippe and Clitophon* with the myth of Isis and Osiris would be noted, as this novel's intertextual engagement is with both Egyptian and Greek versions of the myth, as well as with versions of the myth from the pictorial and plastic arts; at first glance, and according to Tagliabue, the *Ephesiaca* appears to engage with Greek versions of the myth only.

Bibliography

- Arthur-Montagne, J. 2018.11.17. 'Review of A. Tagliabue, *Xenophon's Ephesiaca: A Paralit-
erary Love-Story from the Ancient World*', *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*.
- Bakhtin, M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bürger, K. 1892. 'Zu Xenophon von Ephesus', *Hermes*, 27, 36–67.
- De Temmerman, K. 2014. *Crafting Characters: Heroes and Heroines in the Ancient Greek
Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Konstan, D. 1994. *Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres*. Princeton,
NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rohde, E. 1914. *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*. Leipzig: Breitkopf und Hartel.