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## Heliodorus's *Aethiopica* and the Odyssean *Mnesterophonia*: An Intermedial Reading\*

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**SUMMARY:** The opening scene of Heliodorus's *Aethiopica* has a special ekphrastic quality, and scholars have noted that its tragic banquet recalls the *Mnesterophonia* in Homer's *Odyssey*. I argue that Heliodorus's banquet is not only a literary remaking of the Odyssean episode but also an account that stresses its pictorial quality. This new reading is suggested by the vividness of the description and by the echoes of drinking vessels and tables, the two distinctive features of the iconography of the *Mnesterophonia*, which was likely to be known in Heliodorus's time (third-fourth centuries C.E.).

IN THE STUDY OF HELIODORUS'S *AETHIOPICA*, SPECIAL ATTENTION HAS BEEN drawn to the famous opening scene (Heliod. 1.1–2.4), in which a group of bandits reaches a beach covered with the bodies of people killed or wounded at a banquet. This tableau divides into two parts: the first is dedicated to a banquet transformed into a battlefield (Heliod. 1.1–1.8), while the second is dedicated to the protagonists of the novel, Theagenes and Charicleia (Heliod.

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2.1–4). In recent decades many scholars have highlighted the mimetic, ekphrastic, and even cinematic qualities of this prologue.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper I would like to expand upon the mimetic and ekphrastic features of this scene. I will argue that its first part is written as a pictorial rendering of the *Mnesterophonia*,<sup>2</sup> the famous episode of the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus defeats the suitors upon his return to Ithaca (Hom. *Od.* 22.1–479), and which scholars have already identified as an important literary model for Heliodorus's opening scene. In the first part of this study, I build upon Telò's demonstration of intertextuality between the banquet of the *Aethiopica* and that of the *Odyssey* and, by stressing the vividness of Heliodorus's Homeric echoes, I suggest that readers of the novel were invited to see the opening scene as a vivid reproduction of the Odyssean episode.

I then go on to argue for a more precise way in which this reading can be advanced, which is by understanding Heliodorus's vivid echoes of Homer not only as literary references but also as specific allusions to overturned drinking vessels and tables, the most frequently recurring items of the ancient iconography of the *Mnesterophonia*, which was likely to be known in Heliodorus's time (third-fourth centuries C.E.). In this way, the tragic banquet of the *Aethiopica* reveals itself as a pictorial rendering of its Odyssean model.

Finally, in the third section I discuss how this new reading of the banquet sheds new light on the opening scene as a whole, by emphasizing the way in which narration is frozen at that point and focused on the result of recent actions, and also by subverting readers' generic expectations. With this new reading, the key role of the ekphrastic discourse in the opening scene of the *Aethiopica* will be confirmed. Moreover, I will suggest that in the *Aethiopica*, in which literary models are highly valued, iconographical models may play a more important role than is usually thought.

<sup>1</sup> On the ekphrastic dimension of this initial scene, see Birchall 1996: 78; Bartsch 1989: 46; Whitmarsh 2002: 116–17; Webb 2009: 181; for comparisons with cinematographic technique, see Bühler 1976; Morgan 1991: 86; M. M. Winkler 2000–2001; Fusillo 2007: 131–32. On the representations of this scene in modern art, see Stechow 1953.

<sup>2</sup> With the term “pictorial” I refer to Heliodorus's adoption of a literary style which aims to imitate the way every object is represented in pictorial art. With “vivid,” I refer more generally to a way of writing that gives readers a lifelike impression of the described objects. With “iconography,” I refer to the conventional images associated with a subject in works of art. Finally, for a broad definition of “intermediality,” see Rajewski: “intermediality may serve foremost as a generic term for all those phenomena that (as indicated by the prefix *inter*) in some way take place *between* media” (2005: 46).

## 1 THE VIVIDNESS OF HELIODORUS'S TRAGIC BANQUET

The opening scene of the *Aethiopica* can be classified as an ekphrasis according to the ancient definition offered by the *Progymnasmata*: e.g., λόγος περιηγηματικὸς ἐναργῶς ὕπ' ὄψιν ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον ("a descriptive speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes," Theon *Prog.* 118.7–8). Heliodoros's scene is in fact focalized by the pirates,<sup>3</sup> through whom the text transforms its readers into eyewitnesses.<sup>4</sup>

Critics of Heliodoros have studied the Homeric intertextual debt of this scene,<sup>5</sup> and Feuillâtre, Whitmarsh and Telò suggest that the banquet-turned-battle recalls the *Mnesterophonia*.<sup>6</sup> In this paper, I will introduce an intermedial interpretation concerning this Homeric episode. With this approach I follow Squire in challenging the old-fashioned view of ekphrasis as "a purely literary and textual phenomenon" (2009: 140). For him, the activity of reading about images was informed by viewing them, as is clearly shown by Philostratus's *Imagines*: readers were invited to react to this text while keeping in mind the traditional iconography related to the image evoked in words.<sup>7</sup> Although Philostratus's *Imagines* are certainly an exceptional case, Squire takes this work as representative of a "two-way model of interaction" (2009: 297) between image and text widespread in the Greek Imperial Era. Like Philostratus, Heliodoros in his opening scene may also be "forc[ing] his readers to oscillate between verbal and visual frames of reference" (298)—though less explicitly than Philostratus does in the *Imagines*.

<sup>3</sup> On the identification in this passage between the readers' gaze and the pirates' gaze, see Bühler 1976: 180.

<sup>4</sup> According to the latest trend of studies of ekphrasis developed by Goldhill, Osborne, Elsner and Squire (see, e.g., Goldhill and Osborne 1994; Elsner 1996 and 2002; and Squire 2009), the importance placed on the pirates' gaze stresses the identification of the opening scene as an ekphrasis in the ancient sense. In ancient ekphraseis, in fact, the "true subject is not the verbal depiction of a visual object but, rather, the verbal enactment of the gaze that tries to relate with and penetrate the object" (Elsner 2007: 68).

<sup>5</sup> Whitmarsh (2005: 96–97) argues that the very first metaphor of the day's smile is a rephrasing of the description of daybreak, a formula typical in Homer.

<sup>6</sup> See Feuillâtre 1966: 105; Whitmarsh 2011: 108; Telò 2011. See also Dowden 2013: 43 and Doody 2013: 109. J. J. Winkler 1982: 101n13 argues for Heliodoros's reuse of Philostratus's *Imagines*. In his view, the former may be recalling the latter's painting depicting the aftermath of the slaughter of Agamemnon and Cassandra (2.10). The thematic connections drawn by Winkler are intriguing, but the lack of pointed allusions in the *Aethiopica* to the *Imagines* makes his reading unconvincing.

<sup>7</sup> "[A]lthough a text that alludes to numerous other texts, the *Imagines* also plays upon its readers' familiarity with the images which it describes" (Squire 2009: 298).

In his article, Telò identifies in the *Aethiopica* references to the Odyssean account of the *Mnesterophonía* and the echoes of the specific simile that illustrates Odysseus's predatory survey of the suitors' bodies (*Od.* 22.38–89). In both cases, Telò suggests that readers could fully recall this Homeric model only after they had read the narration of the tragic banquet given by Calasiris in book 5.<sup>8</sup> My analysis will build upon Telò's first kind of evidence and stress the importance of the readers' first response to this banquet.

Telò, drawing on Feuillâtre,<sup>9</sup> highlights the mention of tables and drinking vessels as echoes of the Odyssean episode of book 22. In both the *Odyssey* and the *Aethiopica*, tables are used as shields: see Heliod. 1.1.4: ἕτεροι [τράπεζαι] δὲ ἄλλους ἔκρυπτον, ὡς ῥοντο, ὑπελθόντας (“other tables were hiding those men who had tried to go under them,” my trans.) and *Od.* 22.74–75, with Eurymachus's exhortation to the other suitors: ἀντίσχεσθε τραπέζας ἰὼν ὠκυμόρων (“hold the tables before you, to ward off the arrows of sudden death”). Then, in both works drinking vessels are overturned: see Heliod. 1.1.4: κρατῆρες ἀνατετραμμένοι (“wine bowls upturned”) and *Od.* 22.17–18, where Antinous's death is described: ἐκλίνθη δ' ἑτέρωσε, δέπας δέ οἱ ἔκπεσε χειρὸς/ βλημένου (“he slumped away to one side, and out of his stricken hand fell the goblet”). Finally, in the *Odyssey*, immediately before Antinous's death we read (*Od.* 22.9–12):

ἦ τοι ὁ καλὸν ἄλεισον ἀναιρήσεσθαι ἔμελλε,  
 χρύσειον ἄμφωτον, καὶ δὴ μετὰ χερσίν ἐνώμα,  
 ὄφρα πίῃ οἴνοιο· φόνοσ δέ οἱ οὐκ ἐνὶ θυμῷ  
 μέμβλετο.

He was on the point of lifting up a fine two-handled  
 goblet of gold, and had it in his hands, and was moving it  
 so as to drink of the wine, and in his heart there was no thought  
 of death.

Telò argues that “[i]n line 11 the contiguity of οἴνοιο and φόνοσ signposts the transgressive blurring between feasting and war that is enacted in

<sup>8</sup> At this point readers are invited to a “retrospective journey back to Book 1, one which recomposes the spatiotemporal coordinates of the opening scene and at the same time restores the whole picture of its Odyssean presentation” (Telò 2011: 593).

<sup>9</sup> Feuillâtre highlights three possible parallels with Homer: the fact that Charicleia “tire des flèches infaillibles, comme le fait Ulysse,” that “projectiles le plus divers” are thrown in the battle and, finally, that “les tables renversées servant de bouclier” (1966: 105). The last two parallels are also mentioned by Telò. Later in the paper I will comment on the first.

[*Odyssey*] Book 22" (2011: 586). Such blurring—Telò continues—is recalled by Heliodoros in his reference to destiny as **οἶνον αἷματι** μιάνας ("defiling wine with blood").

In my view, these three parallels point to an intertextual relationship between the novel's opening scene and the *Odyssean Mnesterophonia*.<sup>10</sup> As a result, in contrast to Telò, I suggest that the reference to the *Mnesterophonia* can be perceived even at a first reading. Heliodoros's echoing of the *Odyssean* episode—and especially of the banquet—captures the reader's attention by its vividness (Heliod. 1.1.4):

**τράπεζαι** τῶν ἐδεσμάτων ἔτι πλήθουσαι καὶ ἄλλαι **πρὸς τῇ γῆ** τῶν κειμένων **ἐν χερσίν** ἀνθ' ὄπλων ἐνίοις παρὰ τὴν μάχην **γεγενημένοι** (ὁ γὰρ πόλεμος ἐσχεδίαστο), ἕτεραι δὲ ἄλλους ἔκρυπτον, ὡς ῥοντο, ὑπελθόντας· **κρατῆρες ἀνατετραμμένοι** καὶ **χειρῶν** ἐνιοὶ τῶν ἐσχηκότεων **ἀπορρέοντες** τῶν μὲν πινόντων τῶν δὲ ἀντὶ λίθων κεχρημένων· τὸ γὰρ αἰφνίδιον τοῦ κακοῦ τὰς χρείας ἐκαινοτόμει καὶ βέλεσι κεχρηθῆσθαι τοῖς ἐκπώμασιν ἐδίδασκειν.

There were tables still set with food, and others upset on the ground, held in dead men's hands; in the fray they had served some as weapons, for this had been an impromptu conflict; other tables were hiding those men who had tried to go under them. There were wine bowls upturned, and some slipping from the hands that held them; some had been drinking from them, others using them like stones; for the suddenness of the catastrophe had caused objects to be put to strange, new uses and taught men to use drinking vessels as missiles.<sup>11</sup>

In this tragic banquet both tables and drinking vessels are overturned and used as weapons. The final comment in this vivid scene stresses the originality of these new weapons, and some earlier phrases invite readers to take note of the two locations shared by tables and drinking vessels—the ground and previously the banqueters' hands. Attention is drawn to the ground by the phrase **πρὸς τῇ γῆ** ("on the ground"), referring to the tables, and by the two participles **ἀνατετραμμένοι** ("upturned") and **χειρῶν ... ἀπορρέοντες** ("slipping from the hands"), which both signal that the drinking vessels have lost their original position. On the other hand, the double occurrence of **ἐν χερσίν** ("in ... hands") and **χειρῶν** ("from the hands") indicates the banqueters' past

<sup>10</sup>This hypothesis is supported by the role of the *Odyssey* as the main intertextual model of the novelistic genre, for which see, e.g., Morgan and Harrison: "The *Odyssey*, with its combination of travel adventures and marital reunion validated as a correct narrative destination, is the principal foundation-text of romance" (2008: 220). Furthermore, see Hunter and Russell 2011: 9 on the *Odyssey*'s popularity among the *literati* of the Imperial Era.

<sup>11</sup>"Other tables ... under them," my trans.

handling of these objects. Moreover, it is striking that the words *τράπεζαι* and *κρατήρες* (“tables” and “drinking vessels”) are placed at the beginnings of the two main sentences: in this way emphasis is placed on both of them. Finally, in the phrase *ἕτεραί δὲ ἄλλους ἔκρυπτον, ὡς ῥοντο, ὑπελθόντας* (“other tables were hiding those men who had tried to go under them,” my trans.), the tables are paradoxically treated as agents, and their personification further specifies their current location on the floor by their placement over the dead men.

## 2 THE ICONOGRAPHIC TRADITION OF THE *MNESTEROPHONIA*

This reading of Heliodorus’s tragic banquet can be deepened by bringing into play the standard iconography of the *Mnesterophonia*. I will argue that readers could see in Heliodorus’s echoes of Homer the most important features of the Odyssean episode as represented in vase paintings and sculpture reliefs.

In the second part of the opening scene (Heliod. 2.1–4), which turns readers’ attention from the banquet to the protagonists, Heliodorus exploits the literary tradition of describing artworks that extends back to Homer (see Elsner 2002: 3–13). An ekphrasis of a work of art is introduced in the section starting with the phrase *θέαμα ... τῶν προτέρων ἀπορώτερον* (“a sight even more inexplicable than what they had seen before,” 1.2.1). As Whitmarsh argues, the description of Charicleia, the female protagonist of the *Aethiopica*, is made “in the manner of a statue” (2002: 116), as we read: *καὶ τῷ λαίῳ βραχίονι τὸ τόξον ὑπεστήρικτο* (“her left arm leant on the bow,” 1.2.2). Furthermore, this reading is encouraged by the second group of pirates, who later in the text assume that she is either a priestess seized from a temple or *ἔμπνου* ... **τὸ ἄγαλμα** (“the living statue of a goddess,” Heliod. 1.7.2).<sup>12</sup> This reference to a statue in the second section of the opening scene raises the possibility that the first section focused on the banquet may also include an ekphrasis of a work of art. I will now suggest a way in which this possibility is made real in connection with Heliodorus’s exploitation of the *Mnesterophonia*.

The extant ancient iconography of this episode consists of about twenty pieces, both pictures and relief sculptures,<sup>13</sup> dating between the fifth century B.C.E. and the third century C.E.<sup>14</sup> In this section, I will suggest that readers

<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Charicleia’s portrait “may even evoke a specific statue type, that of the Vatican ‘Penelope’” (Whitmarsh 2002: 116). See also Rattenbury and Lumb 1960: 4, who think of a statue of Artemis as Heliodorus’s model, without, however, giving further details.

<sup>13</sup> See Touchefeu-Meynier 1992: 632–34, where the listed works are “Peinture,” “Vases,” “Relief,” “Vases à reliefs,” “Urnes funéraires,” and “Sarcophages.”

<sup>14</sup> For details and references, see below in this section.

of the *Aethiopica*, which was probably written in the third or fourth century C.E.,<sup>15</sup> could have been aware of this iconographical tradition.

First, all extant representations of the *Mnesterophonia* share a bipartite structure focused on the contrast between Odysseus—sometimes accompanied by Telemachus—and the suitors, and the latter “sont étroitement associés au thème iconographique du banquet”<sup>16</sup> and “totalement désarmés”<sup>17</sup>; as a result, they are “futilely trying to ward off Odysseus’ arrows with whatever was at hand at the feast: tables, their garments, rugs, etc.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, as shown by the following examples, tables and drinking vessels are the most frequently recurring items.

The first piece is an Apulian krater dated to 400 B.C.E. and attributed to the Hearst Painter (see Fig. 1).<sup>19</sup> As Trendall and Cambitoglou argue, “Of the extant representations in Greek vase-painting of this episode from the *Odyssey* this was probably in its original state the fullest and most impressive.”<sup>20</sup> Although “la figura dell’eroe ... non ci è pervenuta,”<sup>21</sup> a very young Telemachus is fighting with a suitor and trying to grasp his hair, and “les meubles du banquet (tables, coussins, auxquels s’ajoute ici un candélabre) font office d’armes offensives ou défensives.”<sup>22</sup> More precisely, in the left corner a table also functions as a shield, and in the right corner a table functions as a weapon.

The second piece is the relief sculpture of the Heroön at Trysa in Lycia.<sup>23</sup> In this funerary monument—built in the first half of the fourth century B.C.E.—“[f]ra le diverse raffigurazioni spicca la rappresentazione della strage

<sup>15</sup>The *Aethiopica* is “[u]sually dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. on the basis of perceived borrowings from the emperor Julian; but sometimes put in the third century, and occasionally even the second” (Whitmarsh 2011: 262). For the former interpretation, focused on the similarity between the fictitious siege in book 9 of the *Aethiopica* and the historical third siege of Nisibis described by Julian, see, e.g., van der Valk 1941 and Morgan 1996: 417–21; for the latter, based on the Emesan connection and on Aurelian’s adoption of the cult of the Sun (270–275 C.E.), see, e.g., Rohde 1914<sup>3</sup>: 496–97 and Swain 1996: 423–24. This second view is also supported by identification of the novelist with Heliodorus the Arab mentioned by Philostratus (*VS* 2.32), who died around 240 C.E.: see, e.g., Rattenbury and Lamb 1960<sup>2</sup>: XIV–XV, and again Swain 1996: 423–24.

<sup>16</sup>Touchefeu-Meynier 1992: 634.

<sup>17</sup>Pasquier 1992: 38.

<sup>18</sup>Buitron 1992: 169.

<sup>19</sup>See *LIMC* “Mnesteres (II),” 11 and Trendall 1974: 47 no. B 28.

<sup>20</sup>Trendall and Cambitoglou 1970: 102.

<sup>21</sup>Poggio 2007: 68.

<sup>22</sup>Pasquier 1992: 35.

<sup>23</sup>See *LIMC* “Mnesteres (II),” no. 14 and Oberleitner 1994.





Fig. 1. The killing of the suitors. Apulian calyx-krater fragment, attributed to the Hearst Painter, ca. 400 B.C.E. Basel, Collection of Herbert Cahn. Reproduced by permission.



Fig. 2. The killing of the suitors. Relief sculpture, Heroön de Gjölbасchi-Trysa, ca. 400–350 B.C.E. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum–Museumsverband. Reproduced by permission.

dei pretendenti da parte di Odisseo” (Poggio 2007: 64). One of the two scenes focuses on Odysseus's and Telemachus's attack, and within it “[i] pretendenti sono raffigurati in una grande varietà di posizioni e di atteggiamenti: alcuni cercano riparo facendosi scudo con i tavoli del banchetto o nascondendosi dietro le *klinai*, altri hanno appena il tempo di sollevarsi su un braccio, altri ancora giacciono ormai colpiti a morte” (Poggio 2007: 65; see Fig. 2). In particular, on the left side of the relief, a suitor uses a table as a shield.

The third piece is a Campanian krater dated to the last quarter of the fourth century B.C.E. and attributed to the Ixion Painter (see Fig. 3).<sup>24</sup> Here a complex scene is portrayed in which the three attackers on the right—in the upper register the white-bearded Eumaeus, below him Odysseus with a bow and Telemachus with a shield—are facing many enemies. Moreover, a special emphasis is placed on the unarmed suitors<sup>25</sup> and on their “mouvements les plus passionnés,”<sup>26</sup> which lead the fourth suitor from the top in the upper register to throw a cup and protect himself with a table.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, upturned drinking vessels are visible on the ground.

Finally, a fragment from an imperial sarcophagus shows a suitor using a table as a weapon (see Fig. 4).<sup>28</sup>

Overall, these works illustrate that the ancient representations of the *Mnesterophonia* share a common iconography in which tables and drinking vessels have a special relevance, the former being used both as weapons and shields,<sup>29</sup> and the latter either being thrown at Odysseus or lying upturned

<sup>24</sup> See *LIMC* “Mnesteres (II),” no. 13, and Trendall 1989: 161.

<sup>25</sup> “Le Peintre d’Ixion ... s’écarte de la tradition homérique en ce qu’il insiste fortement sur le fait que les Prétendants, sous les flèches d’Ulysse, sont totalement désarmés” (Pasquier 1992: 38).

<sup>26</sup> Pasquier 1992: 28.

<sup>27</sup> “[L]a peinture insiste plus que le poème sur les vases renversés, et renforce l’image du banquet tragique en plaçant dans les mains des Prétendants des pièces de cette vaisselle en guise d’armes de jet” (Pasquier 1992: 37). Later, Pasquier highlights another important detail of the representation: “c’est celui de la table de banquet que l’occasion métamorphose en bouclier, voire en arme offensive,” an “élément fondamental” (1992: 37)—Pasquier argues—of every representation of the *Mnesterophonia*.

<sup>28</sup> *LIMC* “Mnesteres (II),” no. 23, in which a suitor “va lancer une *trapeza*.” For a very similar sarcophagus, see *LIMC* “Mnesteres (II),” no. 24: “Deux M., l’un avec une *trapeza* comme sur 23.” For further discussion of the same two sarcophagi, see Koch and Sichtermann 1982: 415–16n17. On the other hand, a sarcophagus from St. Petersburg has a table as a shield: see *LIMC* “Mnesteres (II),” no. 22.

<sup>29</sup> For the former use see *LIMC* “Mnesteres (II),” nos. 11, 12, 23; for the latter, nos. 9, 11, 13, 14, 22.

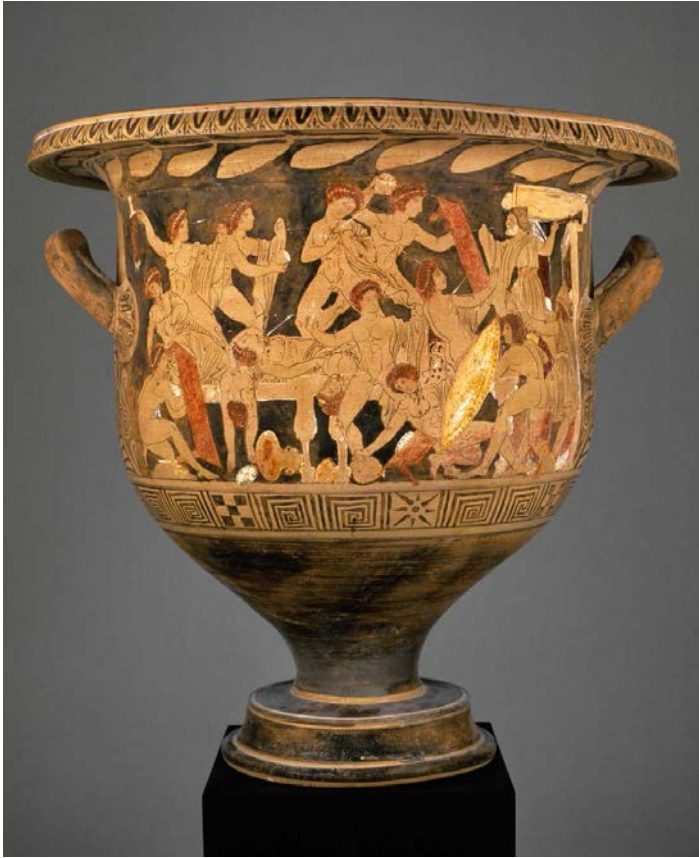


Fig. 3. Massacre of the suitors by Odysseus and Telemachus. Campanian krater, attributed to the Ixion Painter, ca. 325–300 B.C.E. Bpk/RMN–Grand Palais/Paris, Musée du Louvre/Hervé Lewandowski. Reproduced by permission.

on the floor.<sup>30</sup> This suggestion is important for our analysis: if readers of the *Aethiopica* were aware of this common image, they could then take Heliodorus's vivid representation of tables and drinking vessels as an echo of this iconography.

The extant representations of the *Mnesterophonia* are very similar to one another and are found throughout the ancient world.<sup>31</sup> As the *LIMC* shows,<sup>32</sup> this subject first appears on a group of fifth-century B.C.E. vases, and slightly

<sup>30</sup> For the former use see *LIMC* “Mnesteres (II),” nos. 12, 13 and 17; for the latter, nos. 13 and 14.

<sup>31</sup> See also Buitron, who highlights that most of them “contain strikingly similar motives” (1992: 169).

<sup>32</sup> See Touchefeu-Meynier 1992.



Fig. 4. The killing of the suitors. Attic sarcophagus fragment, ca. 300 c.e. Istanbul, Archaeological Museum. Reproduced by permission.

later on the Heroön from Trysa dated to the beginning of the fourth century B.C.E. Later, two Greek vases, some funerary urns from Etruria and a painting in the Corinthian Peribolus of Apollo attest to the presence of the same theme in the Hellenistic Era.<sup>33</sup> Finally, three or four sarcophagi extend the

<sup>33</sup> See Paus. 2.3.3: ἔτι γε δὴ καὶ Ἀπόλλωνος ἄγαλμα πρὸς τῇ Πειρήνῃ καὶ περιβολός ἐστιν, ἐν δὲ αὐτῷ γραφὴ τὸ Ὀδυσσεῶς ἐς τοὺς μνηστήρας ἔχουσα τόλμημα (“Moreover near Peirene are an image and a sacred enclosure of Apollo; in the latter is a painting of the exploit of Odysseus against the suitors”). As to the date of the Peribolus, Pausanias specifies that this is one of the many monuments in the city which ἐπὶ τῆς ἀκμῆς ἐποιήθη τῆς ὕστερον (“belong to the period of its second ascendancy,” Paus. 2.2.6), the period subsequent either to Lucius Memmius’s destruction of Corinth in 146 B.C.E. or even to a massive earthquake of 77 C.E. (for discussion of these dates, see Musti and Torelli 1986: 223 and Murphy-O’Connor 2002<sup>3</sup>: 5).

exploitation of this theme to the beginning of the third century C.E.<sup>34</sup> It seems that the iconography of the *Mnesterophonia* had a Classical origin and was then reproduced—with no substantial variation—in both the Hellenistic and Imperial Eras, thus extending to the period in which the *Aethiopica* was written.

Moreover, the appearance of the *Mnesterophonia* on sarcophagi reliefs further supports the link between Heliodorus's readers and this iconography. As these sarcophagi were often exported from Athens to the East in the third century C.E.—and especially to Syria, Palestine and Arabia<sup>35</sup>—some of those portraying the *Mnesterophonia* may also have reached the Syrian Emesa, the region where Heliodorus claims to have been born (Heliod. 10.41.4) and was probably active as a writer in the third or fourth centuries C.E. Furthermore, “the widespread use of elaborate mythological sarcophagi” in the Imperial Era was “an epi-phenomenon of the Second Sophistic,”<sup>36</sup> to which Heliodorus and his readers were linked. Finally, as recently argued by Borg, the sarcophagi, despite being private funerary monuments, were visually accessible,<sup>37</sup> and they were thus known to educated people of that time.<sup>38</sup>

I would therefore suggest that readers of the *Aethiopica* would have been aware of the traditional iconography of the *Mnesterophonia* and that their reading of the opening scene would have been affected by it: this iconographical memory—activated by Heliodorus's vivid representation of drinking vessels and tables—would have led them to identify in the *Aethiopica* a pictorial rendering of the *Mnesterophonia*. Moreover, although the text of the novel does not refer to any specific artistic medium, given the level of detail in this

<sup>34</sup> See LIMC “Mnesteres (II),” nos. 22–24, and the sarcophagus from Istanbul mentioned by Koch and Sichtermann 1982n416.

<sup>35</sup> “In Syria, Palaestina und Arabia gab es keine eigenständige Sarkophagproduktion; aufwendige Stücke mußten importiert werden, und zwar vor allem aus Athen, aber auch aus Rom und Kleinasien. Der großen Zahl der attischen Sarkophage entspricht der attische Einfluß auf die lokale Produktion” (Koch and Sichtermann 1982: 472).

<sup>36</sup> Ewald 2004: 232. For a similar argument, see Zanker 2005.

<sup>37</sup> See Borg 2013: 236–40, esp. 236: “Even in smaller tombs, patrons made an effort to elevate sarcophagi off the ground, so that at least a larger number of people must have cared about their permanent visibility.” Borg's study focuses on Roman sarcophagi of the third century C.E., but her conclusions can also be applied to sarcophagi circulating in Greece and in the East in this period. See also Meinecke: “Different occasions in the course of the funerary ritual when the sarcophagus could be displayed were the lying-in-state, the transport to the grave, and the burial ceremony” (2013: 45).

<sup>38</sup> “With the sarcophagi of the second and third centuries, death becomes the occasion and opportunity for visual storytelling on a grand scale” (Ewald 2010: 263).

ekphrasis, I would suggest that readers were most likely to imagine a painting or a relief sculpture—the two media in which the iconography of this theme is found. To be clear: I am not arguing that Heliodorus is exactly reproducing the iconography of the *Mnesterophonia*—after all, the surviving works of art reproduce the moment of the battle and not the aftermath.<sup>39</sup> Rather, the text of the novel leads readers to visualize Heliodorus's own version of this iconography.

### 3 THE TRAGIC BANQUET AS A PICTORIAL RENDERING OF THE *MNESTEROPHONIA*

What is the impact of this suggested interpretation on the understanding of the opening scene? I will show three different ways in which Heliodorus's pictorial *Mnesterophonia* emphasizes the non-sequential form of the beginning of the *Aethiopica* and makes a subversive impact upon the readers' expectations.

#### *a) Enhanced vividness and an apparent freezing of narrative*

The opening scene of the *Aethiopica* stands out not only for its ekphrastic qualities, but also for its narratological status as a “result-oriented” account that interrupts the initial sequential narration. My intermedial interpretation further highlights this special status.

At the very beginning of the *Aethiopica*, the brigands undertake some actions that are described in sequence (Helioid. 1.1.1):

... ἄνδρες ἐν ὄπλοις ληστρικοῖς ὄρους ὑπερκύψαντες, ὃ δὴ κατ' ἐκβολὰς τοῦ Νείλου καὶ στόμα τὸ καλούμενον Ἡρακλεωτικὸν ὑπερτείνει, μικρὸν ἐπιστάντες τὴν ὑποκειμένην θάλατταν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἐπήρχοντο καὶ τῷ πελάγει τὸ πρῶτον τὰς ὄψεις ἐπαφέντες, ὡς οὐδὲν ἄγρας ληστρικής ἐπηγγέλλετο μὴ πλεόμενον, ἐπὶ τὸν πλησίον αἰγιαλὸν τῆ θέα κατήγοντο.

... a group of men in brigand gear peered over the mountain that overlooks the place where the Nile flows into the sea at the mouth that men call the Heracleo-

<sup>39</sup>The only ancient representation of the aftermath is mentioned by Pausanias: it was a painting displayed in Plataea in 479 B.C.E. to commemorate the Greek victory over the Persians (see Roscino 2010: 15), attributed to Polygnotus (Paus. 9.4.1–2): Πλαταιεῦσι δὲ Ἀθηνᾶς ἐπικλησιν Ἀρείας ἐστὶν ἱερόν ... γραφαὶ δὲ εἰσὶν ἐν τῷ ναῷ Πολυγνώτου μὲν Ὀδυσσεὺς τοὺς μνηστήρας ἤδη κατειργασμένος. ... (“The Plataeans have also a sanctuary of Athena surnamed Warlike. ... In the temple are paintings: one of them, by Polygnotus, represents Odysseus after he has killed the wooers ...”). It might be argued that by focusing on the aftermath Heliodorus could have had Polygnotus's painting in mind, but this hypothesis has to remain very speculative, since no further element relates the *Aethiopica* to this fifth-century B.C.E. work.

tic. They stood there for a moment, scanning the expanse of sea beneath them: first they gazed out over the ocean, but as there was nothing sailing there that held out hope of spoil and plunder, their eyes were drawn to the beach nearby.

At this point, the sequential narration is interrupted by a long ekphrasis focalized by them. This is its first paragraph (Heliod. 1.1.2):

καὶ ἦν τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ τοιάδε· ὀκκάς ἀπὸ πρυμνησίων ὄρμει τῶν μὲν ἐμπλεόντων χηρεύουσα, φόρτου δὲ πλήθουσα· καὶ τοῦτο παρῆν συμβάλλειν καὶ τοῖς πόρρωθεν· τὸ γὰρ ἄχθος ἄχρι καὶ ἐπὶ τρίτου ζωστήρος τῆς νεῶς τὸ ὕδωρ ἀνέθλιβεν.

This is what they saw: a merchant ship was riding there, moored by her stern, empty of crew but laden with freight. This much could be surmised even from a distance, for the weight of her cargo forced the water up to the third line of boards on the ship's side.

In this section, a series of imperfects describes what the brigands can see in front of them. Through these verbs, the internal focalization is stressed,<sup>40</sup> and the initial sequential narrative of the beginning of the novel is interrupted, as the pirates continue to look at the beach. In the following sentences, more details are given about what they are seeing—a section of the novel already familiar to us (Heliod. 1.1.3–4):

ὁ δὲ αἰγιαλός, μεστὰ πάντα σωμάτων νεοσφαγῶν, τῶν μὲν ἄρδην ἀπολωλῶτων, τῶν δὲ ἡμιθνήτων καὶ μέρεσι τῶν σωμάτων ἔτι σπαιρόντων, ἄρτι πεπαῦσθαι τὸν πόλεμον κατηγοροῦντων. ἦν δὲ οὐ πολέμου καθαροῦ τὰ φαινόμενα σύμβολα, ἀλλ' ἀναμέμικτο καὶ εὐωχίας οὐκ εὐτυχούς ἀλλ' εἰς τοῦτο ληξάσης ἔλεινα λειψανα. τράπεζαι τῶν ἐδεσμάτων ἔτι πλήθουσαι καὶ ἄλλαι πρὸς τῇ γῆ τῶν κειμένων ἐν χερσὶν ἀνθ' ὅπλων ἐνίοις παρὰ τὴν μάχην γεγενημέναι· ὁ γὰρ πόλεμος ἐσχεδιάστο· ἕτεροι δὲ ἄλλους ἔκρυπτον, ὡς ῥοντο, ὑπελθόντας· κρατῆρες ἀνατετραμμένοι καὶ χειρῶν ἔνιοι τῶν ἐσχηκῶτων ἀπορρέοντες τῶν μὲν πινόντων τῶν δὲ ἀντι λίθων κεκρημένων·

But the beach!—a mass of newly slain bodies, some of them quite dead, others half-alive and still twitching, testimony that the fighting had only just ended. The visible signs were suggesting that this had been no proper battle. Amongst the carnage were the miserable remnants of festivities that had come to this unhappy end. There were tables still set with food, and others upset on the ground, held in dead men's hands; in the fray they had served some as weapons,

<sup>40</sup> I am following here Bakker's thesis that the imperfect not only expresses a temporal reference but also a point of view (1997: 37–48).



for this had been an impromptu conflict; other tables were hiding those men who had tried to go under them. There were wine bowls upturned, and some slipping from the hands that held them; some had been drinking from them, others using them like stones ....<sup>41</sup>

In this passage, a greater variety of verb forms is used than in the previous one: along with three imperfects (ἦν, ἔκρυπτον and ᾤοντο) there are two pluperfects (ἀναμέμικτο and ἔσχεδιάστο), one infinitive perfect (πεπαῦσθαι) and many participles—seven present (σπαιρόντων, κατηγορούντων, τὰ φαινόμενα, πλήθουσαι, τῶν κειμένων, ἀπορρέοντες and τῶν πινόντων), five perfect (τῶν ἀπολωλότων, γεγενημένοι, ἀνατετραμμένοι, τῶν ἐσχηκότων and τῶν κεκρημένων) and two aorist (ληξάσης and ὑπελθόντας).

This variety requires an explanation: the two indicative pluperfects and the infinite perfect—ἀναμέμικτο, ἔσχεδιάστο and πεπαῦσθαι—show that pirates see one or more events that have *already* happened and are still impacting their present. Moreover, the mention of ἄρτι πεπαῦσθαι (“had only just ended”) and the inclusion in the description of εὐωχίας οὐκ εὐτυχοῦς ἀλλ’ εἰς τοῦτο ληξάσης ἐλεεινὰ λείψανα (“miserable remnants of festivities that had come to this unhappy end”) and τῶν δὲ ἡμιθνήτων (“half-alive men”) suggest that these events have *recently* happened.

Notably, it is only in the second part of chapter 2 that two indicative aorists lead the sequential narration to a new start<sup>42</sup>: at that point Theagenes ὑπεφθέγγατο (“whispered,” Helioid. 1.2.4) and Charicleia ἀνέθορεν (“leapt up,” Helioid. 1.2.5).<sup>43</sup> As a result of this second action, the bandits ὑπὸ θαύματος ἅμα καὶ ἐκπλήξεως ... τῆς ὄψεως βληθέντες (“were struck ... with wonder and terror at the sight,” 1.2.5, my trans.). As Whitmarsh argues, “This dramatic action has a narratological significance: it is in part the breaking of the ekphrastic frame that terrifies them ...” (2002: 118).

The first chapter and a half of the *Aethiopica*, then, are an ekphrasis that interrupts the sequential narrative of the very beginning and describes the result of recent actions. Such a “result-oriented” account does not fully eliminate action from the narrative, but transposes it to the level of the readers, who are

<sup>41</sup>“Other tables ... under them,” my trans.

<sup>42</sup>See Whitmarsh, who argues that at this point the narrative events return to being “dynamic” (2002: 118).

<sup>43</sup>ὡς δὲ πνεῦμα συλλεξάμενος καὶ βύθιον τι ἀσθμήνας λεπτόν ὑπεφθέγγατο καὶ ὧ γλυκεῖα’ (“He gathered his breath and sighed deeply. ‘My darling,’ he whispered,” Helioid. 1.2.4)—and καὶ ἅμα λέγουσα ἡ μὲν τῆς πέτρας ἀνέθορεν (“As she spoke, she leapt up from the rock,” Helioid. 1.2.5).



invited to reconstruct a narrative about what has happened.<sup>44</sup> But how does my intermedial interpretation affect this reading of Heliodorus's tragic banquet? In a literary text, describing with vividness is not an easy task, since "when it comes to vivid representation or imitation, language, since it unfolds in time ... has difficulties in imitating spatial phenomena" (Wolf 2007: 49) and "seems to have less descriptive potential than painting" (Wolf 2007: 49), which is a "spatial, visual medium" (Wolf 2007: 42). By rendering the *Mnesterophonia* in the form of a painting (or of a relief sculpture), Heliodorus certainly enhances the descriptive vividness of his own opening scene.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, as Lessing argued in 1766, since pictures are windows that freeze the scenes they depict, with his special ekphrasis Heliodorus further stresses the status of his prologue as a scene in which sequentiality is interrupted, by suggesting that action is there frozen.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, although Charicleia appears in the second section of the opening scene, she may also be part of Heliodorus's iconographical rendering of the *Mnesterophonia*. In her statuesque ekphrasis in the novel—to which I referred above—she is depicted with bow and arrows.<sup>47</sup> As Feuillâtre observes, these two features suggest that she plays the role of Odysseus, the infallible archer in book 22 of the *Odyssey*, and is thus responsible for the slaughter. By recalling this model—I would suggest—readers may consider the female protagonist as part of Heliodorus's *Mnesterophonia*. In this way, the tragic banquet would assume a form closer to both the *Odyssey* and its iconographical model, in which Odysseus always plays a key role. Since, however, this literary reference to Odysseus the archer is not striking, it is with a certain amount of speculation that I make this final suggestion.

<sup>44</sup> As shown by Webb, ancient writers, including Heliodorus, were likely to push their readers to "imagine the events that led to the state of affairs that is directly evoked in the ekphrasis" and "to bring to mind two slightly different moments in time: the moment when the signs were seen by the witness, the internal viewer, and the preceding events" (2009: 153).

<sup>45</sup> In this regard, Heliodorus is a precursor of modern novelists, who for their own descriptions also use "intermedial borrowings from, or rather references to, the descriptive medium of spatial representation *par excellence*, namely painting" (Wolf 2007: 49–50).

<sup>46</sup> See Lessing 1962<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> See Heliod. 1.2.2: φαρῆτραν τῶν ὤμων ἐξῆπτο καὶ τῷ λαιῷ βραχίονι τὸ τόξον ὑπεστήρικτο· ἡ λοιπὴ δὲ χεὶρ ἀφροντίστως ἀπὴρώρητο ("from her shoulders hung a quiver; her left arm leant on the bow, the hand hanging relaxed at the wrist").

b) *An intratextual contrast between picture and narrative*

The relevance of this intermedial interpretation of the opening scene is further supported when readers get to book 5, where Calasiris, the Egyptian priest who guides the protagonists to their destined home, recalls the same tragic banquet (Heliod. 5.17.1–5.33.3). Calasiris's account is sequential, as this small section focused on the brigands' arrival shows (Heliod. 5.32.1–2):

τί ἦν ἰδεῖν τὸ ἐντεῦθεν, ὦ Ναυσίκλεις; ... οἱ μὲν γὰρ ὡς τοῦτον οἱ δὲ ὡς ἐκεῖνον ἀποκλίναντες οἱ μὲν αἰδεῖσθαι τὸν ἄρχοντα οἱ δὲ μὴ καταλύεσθαι τὸν νόμον ἐθορύβουν. καὶ τέλος ὁ μὲν Τραχῖνος ἐπανατείνετο ὡς τῷ κρατῆρι πατάξων τὸν Πέλωρον, ὁ δὲ, (προπαρεσκευάστο γάρ), ἐγχειριδίῳ φθάνει διελαύνων τὸν μαζόν. καὶ ὁ μὲν ἔκειτο καιρία βεβλημένος, τοῖς λοιποῖς δὲ ἄσπονδος ἐκτέτατο πόλεμος ἔπαιόν τε συμπεσόντες ἀλλήλους ἀφειδῶς, οἱ μὲν ὡς ἐπαμύνοντες τῷ ἄρχοντι οἱ δὲ ὡς τοῦ Πελώρου σὺν τῷ δικαίῳ προασπίζοντες.

Well, what a spectacle ensued, Nausikles! ... Some sided with Trachinos, bawling that the leader must be respected; others with Peloros, clamoring that the law must be upheld. In the end Trachinos raised his bowl above his head, intending to brain Peloros, but Peloros was ready for him and got in first with a dagger thrust through the heart. Trachinos fell, mortally wounded. For the rest of them this meant open war, with no quarter asked or given. They fell on one another, raining blow after blow, one side claiming to be defending their captain, the other to be championing Peloros and the cause of right.

In this passage, Calasiris explains how the situation described at the beginning of the novel came about. His presentation of the tragic banquet has a special position in the novel, since, as recently noted by Grethlein,<sup>48</sup> it closes down both the first half of the *Aethiopica* and the long retrospective account begun at the end of book 2 (see Heliod. 2.24.5), and it is followed by the beginning of the long-delayed primary narrative (see Heliod. 5.34). By bringing *récit* and *histoire* together,<sup>49</sup> Calasiris launches the sequential narration of the novel and leads readers retrospectively to take note of Heliodoros's attempt at freezing the linear narration at the very beginning of book 1.<sup>50</sup>

This intratextual contrast is reinforced by my intermedial interpretation, as it suggests that Heliodoros may activate, in his own text, an opposition

<sup>48</sup> See Grethlein forthcoming.

<sup>49</sup> According to Morgan, "from 5.33.4 onwards *récit* and *histoire* coincide" (1989b: 303).

<sup>50</sup> This retrospective reading is encouraged by the fact that "[m]any verbal echoes connect the end of book 5 with the opening scene of the novel" (De Temmerman 2014: 292n150).

between picture (via the pictorial style of book 1) and narrative (via Calasiris's sequential narrative). His initial attempt at freezing the linear narration through a pictorial rendering thus assumes greater relevance for the *Aethiopica*.

### c) *Subversions of the readers' expectations*

The generic conventions of the Greek novels provide the readers with a firm frame of expectations (see Morgan 1989a: 300). Scholars, however, have shown that Heliodorus often surprises his readers by subverting their expectations. His initial pictorial rendering of the *Mnesterophonía* is part of this strategy and contributes to the "hermeneutic demand" (Morgan 1996: 441) created by the opening scene.

As Whitmarsh has recently argued, the *Aethiopica* appears to be an intertext not only with most of classical Greek literature but also with earlier novels,<sup>51</sup> and scholars have argued for specific allusions to Longus's and Achilles Tatius's works.<sup>52</sup> From this generic perspective, Heliodorus's decision to begin the novel with a subtle ekphrasis of a work of art appears to be an original response to the explicit ekphraseis of paintings that occur at the beginning of both *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Leucippe and Cleitophon*.<sup>53</sup> By including his own pictorial rendering in the main story, Heliodorus both acknowledges the generic tradition and deviates from it, possibly in order to introduce his readers to what Bartsch and Hardie identify as distinctive features of the style of the *Aethiopica*: the creation of "an illusion of movement and life" (Bartsch 1989: 45) in ekphrastic passages and "the text's wider tendency to confuse art and reality" (Hardie 1998: 29). Later in the novel, both features will clearly emerge in Persinna's conception of Charicleia under the influence of the painting of Andromeda.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Whitmarsh identifies Heliodorus as "arguably the most intertextual of all the romancers, particularly in his use of other romances" (2013: 45).

<sup>52</sup> For Heliodorus's intertextuality with Longus, see Bowie 1995: 278–80, focusing on Heliod. 5.14 and Longus 1.9.1. For Heliodorus's intertextuality with Achilles Tatius, see Neimke 1888–89: 22–57 and Plepelits 1996 (neither convincingly). Furthermore, Whitmarsh 1998: 112 suggests that the mark on Charicleia's left arm recalls not only Odysseus's "famous self-revelation: 'and cunning Odysseus stripped off (*gumnōthē*) his rags ...' (αὐτὰρ ὁ γυμνώθη ῥακέων πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς, *Od.* 22.1)," but also the Iliadic description of Menelaus's wound (*Il.* 4.141) and Achilles Tatius's appropriation of the same Homeric line with reference to Leucippe's cheeks (1.4.3).

<sup>53</sup> See Longus prol. 1–3 and *Ach. Tat.* 1.1.2–13.

<sup>54</sup> See Heliod. 4.8 and 10.14–15 and Whitmarsh, who identifies Charicleia's conception as "the origin of narrative *within* the economy of the text" (1998: 110).

A second subversion of the readers' expectations emerges if we turn our attention from the form of Heliodoros's rendering of the *Mnesterophonia* to its content. Every Greek novel is—to different degrees—a reenactment of the *Odyssey*, a model which gives readers clear indications about the outcome of the story: it will be focused on the protagonists' return home and reunion.<sup>55</sup> By introducing the *Mnesterophonia* at the very beginning of the novel, Heliodoros challenges the generic use of this epic model and destabilizes his readers' expectations,<sup>56</sup> as his text begins almost from where the *Odyssey* ends. By pointing out that in his story one of the last crucial events of the epic has already happened, Heliodoros neutralizes the impact of the circular trajectory of the *Odyssey* on the reading of his novel, and thus not only arouses the reader's curiosity about how the novel has reached this point, but also builds suspense about what is going to happen next. With this innovative take on the *Odyssey*, Heliodoros proleptically introduces a strategy—suspense—that will become relevant in the second part of the novel.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Heliodoros introduces a second variation from Homer by setting the *Mnesterophonia* in Egypt. This is a puzzling first sign of the “complete reorientation of perspective” (Whitmarsh 1998: 98) from the *Odyssey* which readers will experience throughout the novel, since in the *Aethiopica*, in contrast with the epic poem, Greece “is only ever *narrated* in this text, appearing as if a nostalgic dream or simulacrum” (Whitmarsh 1998: 99).

Finally, Heliodoros's subversive interplay with the structure of the *Odyssey* acquires a further nuance in book 5. Scholars have demonstrated that in Calasiris's narration of the opening scene “Pelorus' identification of Charicleia as his military reward (τὸ γέρας, 5.31.3) evokes the quarrel of Achilles and Agamemnon over Bryseis [*sic*], who is likewise referred to as *geras* in the opening episode of the *Iliad* (τὸ ... γέρας, *Il.* 1.185)” (De Temmerman 2014: 292–93).<sup>58</sup> This intertextuality suggests that, when readers reach book 5, they could realize that the *Aethiopica* not only begins from the end of the *Odyssey*, but also recalls the beginning of the *Iliad*. This interpretation is supported by the fact that, as noted by De Temmerman, this Iliadic intertext had already figured in the opening scene of book 1, where “the description of [Charicleia's]

<sup>55</sup> See again Morgan and Harrison 2008: 220.

<sup>56</sup> See Lowe 2000: 236–41 for a comprehensive discussion of Heliodoros's debt to the *Odyssey*.

<sup>57</sup> See Grethlein forthcoming.

<sup>58</sup> See Paulsen 1992: 48–51 and Dowden 1996: 277–78 for the first discussions of this intertext.

clanging arrows” (τῶν ... βελῶν τῇ ἀθρόα κινήσει κλαγξάντων, 1.2.5) alludes to Apollo’s famous descent from Olympus in Book 1 of the *Iliad* (ἐκλαγξαν ... ὅιστοι ἐπ’ ὤμων χωομένοιο αὐτοῦ κινήθέντος, “his arrows clanged on his shoulders as he moved in his anger”) (Whitmarsh 2002: 118–19).<sup>59</sup>

These combined references to the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* increase the subversive impact of the opening scene of the *Aethiopica* on its readers: through these references Heliodorus may be declaring that this text is both a continuation (via the *Odyssey*) and a remaking of Homer’s epic (via the *Iliad*).<sup>60</sup> In this way, readers are challenged to reconcile the implications of these echoes with their generic expectations. The content of the ekphrasis of the *Mnesterophonía* thus plays an important role in the interpretation of the opening scene and contributes to the demand on “hermeneutic activity”<sup>61</sup> placed on readers by this passage.

## CONCLUSION

Heliodorus’s *Aethiopica* is arguably the most sophisticated of the extant novels. In this paper, I have offered an intermedial reading of the opening scene, through which I hope to have confirmed the importance of the ekphrastic discourse within it and to have shed new light on the interpretation of this complex passage.

The impact of this new reading on the *Aethiopica* as a whole cannot be explored here. However, I would like to suggest an aspect of my interpretation that may help to advance new readings of this novel. When dealing with individual scenes of the *Aethiopica*, scholars have tended to look for intertextual references and literary models, on the basis of the correct belief that Heliodorus is subtly reusing many of the Greek texts written before him. I would like to invite scholars to consider the possibility that Heliodorus was also exploiting iconographical models, a possibility that D’Alconzo has recently raised for Achilles Tatius.<sup>62</sup> My interpretation has focused on a specific case but—to

<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, as Dowden argues, “[a]t 1.19.6, Thyamis, as head of the brigands, wishes to award himself Charikleia from the spoils. This obviously evokes Agamemnon’s handling of the allocation of the girls Chryseis and Briseis (*Iliad* 1.12–304)” (1996: 277).

<sup>60</sup> This point reinforces Whitmarsh’s general statement that “[t]he *Aithiopika* ... engages in a direct but agonistic manner with the epic tradition” (1998: 95).

<sup>61</sup> Bartsch 1989: 47. On Heliodorus’s great demand on his readers’ interpretation, see also Bühler 1976: 181.

<sup>62</sup> See D’Alconzo 2014.

give just one example—the same banquet could well include an intermedial reference to the Centauromachia, the iconography of which also features drinking vessels and tables.<sup>63</sup> There are, then, good grounds for thinking that readers of the *Aethiopica*, like those of Philostratus's *Imagines*, were invited to “oscillate between verbal and visual frames of reference” (Squire 2009: 298).

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<sup>63</sup> On the iconography of the Centauromachia, see Buitron 1992: 170. See also Petrocheilos 1997: 703: “Die Lapithen und die K. kämpfen mit Gegenständen vom Mahl, Felsen und Zweigen, im Inneren oder im Freien.” However, in the Imperial Era the iconography of the Centaurs does not focus on tables and drinking vessels as does that of the *Mnesterophonia*. Centauromachiae are in fact often given a “Sepulkralcharakter” (*LIMC* “Kentauroi,” 720) in relationship with the cult of Dionysus or are associated with Eros (see Burn 2004: 146: “In the Hellenistic period they [the Centaurs] extend their capacity as bearers of allegory and metaphor” and “combine their bestial natures with an element of eroticism”). As a result, while I think that an intermedial reference to this scene is possible, I consider Heliodorus's reuse of the *Mnesterophonia* likelier.

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