

## DESCRIBING THE INDESCRIBABLE: CALLIMACHUS, *IAMBUS* 6 AND PHIDIAS' STATUE OF ZEUS\*

### ABSTRACT

*In Iambus 6 Callimachus describes Phidias' statue of Zeus to a friend of his about to leave for Olympia. However, as can be inferred from the Diegesis and the fragmentary text of the iambus, the poet does not elaborate on the statue's iconography, nor does he mention the impression which it made on the viewers within the temple setting. Instead, he focusses solely on its measurements and technical details. This article sheds new light on this much-debated poem by exploring its playful and humorous tones within the broader context of Callimachus' poetical and aesthetic principles. It argues that Callimachus deliberately avoided providing a literary ekphrasis of Phidias' Zeus akin to other known examples of Hellenistic ekphrasis and to other ekphrasis of divine statues which Callimachus offered in the Iambi and the Aetia. By doing this, he avoided crafting a too loudly resounding poem, thereby adhering to his own poetical and aesthetic credo.*

**Keywords:** Callimachus; *Iambus* 6; Phidias; Olympian Zeus; humour; *Aetia* prologue

### INTRODUCTION

Callimachus' *Iambus* 6 is the first of a group of *Iambi* dedicated to divine statues (6, 7 and 9); written in Doric, the poem employs an epodic system combining iambic trimeter and ithyphallic. The same dialect and metrical structure are used in *Iambus* 7, which shares other similarities with the preceding iambus.

The subject of *Iambus* 6 has long puzzled readers. The poet takes the occasion of a friend's departure to Olympia to describe Phidias' masterpiece, the Olympian Zeus. However, Callimachus' description of the statue is quite peculiar. It does not mention the majestic impression that the Zeus was said to create on its viewers. Instead, the poet seems to focus solely on technical details, listing the measurements (length, width and height) of the statue, without offering any portrayal of the iconography or account of the statue's general appearance within the temple setting. This has sparked lively scholarly debate.

This article addresses several questions. Why does Callimachus choose this subject for his iambus? Why does he describe Phidias' statue of Zeus in such a manner? What is the literary purpose of the poem? The article proposes an interpretation of Callimachus' *Iambus* 6 that considers the poem in the broader context of his literary credos, showing how the subject was chosen to showcase Callimachus' refined poetical skills. Engaging in a playful competition with Phidias, Callimachus offers a bare list of technical data, frustrating the public's expectations for a poetic *ekphrasis* of the Zeus similar to those of divine statues found in the *Iambi*, the *Aetia* or other known examples of Hellenistic poetic *ekphrasis*. I argue that Callimachus refrained from offering such an *ekphrasis* to avoid composing a bombastic poem, which would be incongruous within the iambic collection, thus adhering to his own poetical and aesthetic principles detailed in the prologue of the *Aetia*.

\* I thank Professors L. Battezzato, B.E. Borg and E. Magnelli for insightful suggestions.

## STATVS QVAESTIONIS

The Milan *Diegesis* summarizes *Iambus* 6 as follows (7.25–31, transl. Acosta-Hughes, adapted):

Ἀλεῖος ὁ Ζεὺς, ἅ τέχνα δὲ Φειδίᾳ   Γνω-	25
ρίμῳ αὐτοῦ ἀποπλέοντι κατὰ θέαν	
τοῦ Ὀλυμπίου Διὸς εἰς Ἴηλιν διηγείται	
μῆκος ὕψος πλάτος βάσεως θρόνου	
ὑποποδίου αὐτοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὄση ἢ	
δαπάνη, δημιουργὸν δὲ Φειδίαν Χαρμί-	30
δου Ἀθηναίων.	

‘The Zeus is of Elis, but the craft of Phidias’ | To an acquaintance of his sailing off to Elis to see the sight of Olympian Zeus, he narrates the length, height and breadth of the base, the throne, the footstool and of the god himself, and how much was the expense, and that the creator was the Athenian Phidias the son of Charmides.

The peculiar subject of the poem has long perplexed scholars.<sup>1</sup> Callimachus’ *Iambi* exhibit extraordinary variety in terms of their contents and themes, so it is not surprising that the poet devoted an iambus to the description of a statue.<sup>2</sup> Questions remain, however: how can we interpret the dry list of data the poet enumerates to his departing friend? And what is the literary purpose of the iambus?

Following the indications of the *Diegesis*, some scholars have labelled the iambus a *propemptikon*.<sup>3</sup> However, this identification is problematic,<sup>4</sup> since the trip of the poet’s friend is merely ‘the *prophasis* for the poem, not the subject’.<sup>5</sup> Except for the first-person address to his friend at line 45 and the abrupt close, where the poet invites him to leave (line 62), the entire iambus seems to present only a list of technical information concerning the statue of Zeus.

We cannot know whether more indicative elements of *propemptika* (such as blessings for the incoming voyage or wishes for a happy return) were provided by the fragmentary proemial section. However, if there were any, the *Diegesis* omits them, schematically listing in the summary the succession of the measurements (length, height and width)<sup>6</sup> of

<sup>1</sup> See A. Kerkhecker, *Callimachus’ Book of Iambi* (Oxford, 1999), 164–79, for scholarly positions on the matter; also B. Acosta-Hughes, *Polyeideia: The Iambi of Callimachus and the Archaic Iambic Tradition* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London, 2002), 288–94.

<sup>2</sup> For the thematic variety of Callimachus’ *Iambi* see M. Fantuzzi, ‘Il sistema letterario della poesia alessandrina nel III sec. a.C.’, in G. Cambiano, L. Canfora and D. Lanza (edd.), *Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica* (Rome, 1993), 1.2.31–73, at 47–51.

<sup>3</sup> See R. Pfeiffer, ‘The measurements of the Zeus at Olympia’, *JHS* 61 (1941), 1–5, at 1; C. Picard, ‘Callimaque et le Zeus d’Olympie’, *RA* 24 (1945), 129–31, at 130; M. Puelma, *Lucilius und Kallimachos: zur Geschichte einer Gattung der hellenistisch-römischen Poesie* (Frankfurt, 1949), 293–6; C.M. Dawson (1959), ‘The Iambi of Callimachus. A Hellenistic poet’s experimental laboratory’, *YCS* 11 (1950), 1–168, at 72; C.A. Trypanis, *Callimachus. Fragments* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1958), 130; D.L. Clayman, *Callimachus’ Iambi* (Leiden, 1980), 34.

<sup>4</sup> See Kerkhecker (n. 1), 171–4. On *propemptika* see J.N. Rauk, ‘The lover’s farewell: a study of the propemptikon in Greek and Latin literature’ (Diss., University of Michigan, 1987); E.S. Greene, ‘Propemptikon and circumstance: the departure etiquette in archaic Greek poetry and iconography’ (Diss., Princeton University, 2003). On the *klêtikon* as genre see F. Cairns, *The Greek Poetry of Summons and Invitation* (Berlin and Boston, 2024), especially 1–17, 123–5 (on Eur. *Hel.* 1495–511).

<sup>5</sup> Acosta-Hughes (n. 1), 289.

<sup>6</sup> The summaries of the *Diegesis* sometimes overlook significant elements of the poems (see e.g. *Dieg.* 10.10–13, summarizing fr. 228 Pf.). Nevertheless, the scepticism concerning their reliability shown by Kerkhecker (n. 1), 174 and by C.M. Schroeder, ‘Phidias’s Zeus in Cyrene:

the statue. In any case, ‘tying *Iambus* VI to the rhetorical conventions of *propemptika* . . . is to attribute to Callimachus too narrow an understanding of the genre’.<sup>7</sup>

On a strictly formal level, it is also unsatisfactory to regard *Iambus* 6 as an example of *ekphrasis*.<sup>8</sup> The meaning of *ekphrasis* is a debated issue:<sup>9</sup> ancient definitions (often referred to as ‘broad definition’) define *ekphrasis* on the basis of the psychological effects that the description of a given subject had on the readers. According to Theon, an ekphrastic description vividly presents the described object to the eyes of the readers; ἔκφρασις ἐστὶ λόγος περιηγηματικὸς ἐναργῶς ὑπ’ ὄμην ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον.<sup>10</sup>

Well-known examples of ancient *ekphrasis* include the description of the Shield of Achilles (*Il.* 18.478–608), the Shield of Heracles ([Hes.] *Sc.* 139–320), the Goatherd’s Cup (*Theoc. Id.* 1.27–60) or Jason’s Cloak (*Ap. Rhod.* 1.721–68). All of these, however, despite their differences, provide the audience or reader with a visual representation of the described piece; they comment on the shape, visual features and contents of the work, presenting it vividly, ἐναργῶς, to the eyes of their readers. By contrast, in *Iambus* 6 Callimachus provides no account of the iconography of the statue; he does not mention the general appearance of the Olympian Zeus, nor apparently comment on the psychological impression that the statue had on the viewers. In so far as we can infer from the text following the summary of the *Diegesis*, the poem must have merely displayed a list of measurements and technical details, and therefore could in no way provide a vivid, ἐναργῆς, representation of the workmanship of Phidias’ statue.

Cairns<sup>11</sup> has outlined the main features present in other examples of Hellenistic *ekphrasis*: a) the subjects are depicted in motion, allowing for a temporal progression and

rethinking Callimachus’ *Iambus* 6’, *Aevum(ant)* 8 (2008), 195–207, at 203 is excessive. Considering that *Iambus* 6, as far as can be determined, precisely corresponds to the summary provided by the *Diegesis* (as Schroeder acknowledges, page 196), there appears to be no reason or indication that the diegete could have invented the fictitious context of the greeting to the poet’s friend about to leave for Olympia. For the same reason, Schroeder’s idea that Callimachus’ poem may allude not to Phidias’ statue displayed in Olympia, but to a copy of Phidias’ Zeus located in the temple of Zeus in Cyrene, is unattractive. Schroeder defends his assumption by recalling the parallel with *Iambus* 13, where the poet states that it is not necessary to go to Ephesus (Hipponax’s birthplace) to write choliambos. But the poet must have derived the technical information relating to Phidias’ statue from some literary source unknown to us (see below); it is by no means certain that Callimachus visited Olympia and saw Phidias’ statue first-hand. The situation is identical to that of *Iambus* 13 quoted by Schroeder: Callimachus displays his erudition by listing the measurements of a statue, with which he became acquainted through his readings. Therefore, there is no need to think that the poet alluded to the copy of the statue of Zeus in Cyrene.

<sup>7</sup> Acosta-Hughes (n. 1), 121.

<sup>8</sup> See F. Manakidou, *Beschreibung von Kunstwerken in der hellenistischen Dichtung. Ein Beitrag zur hellenistischen Poetik* (Stuttgart, 1993), 238–42; Kerkhecker (n. 1), 174–9; I. Männlein-Robert, *Stimme, Schrift und Bild. Zum Verhältnis der Künste in der hellenistischen Dichtung* (Heidelberg, 2007), 76–8.

<sup>9</sup> For a definition see A. Stravrou, ‘Ekphrasis’, *International Lexicon of Aesthetics* (2018; <https://doi.org/10.7413/18258630047>); for discussion see N. Koopman, *Ancient Greek Ekphrasis: Between Description and Narration* (Leiden, 2018), 1–40.

<sup>10</sup> *Prog.* 118.7. On *ekphrasis* in the *Progymnasmata* see S. Dubel, ‘Ekphrasis et enargeia: la description antique comme parcours’, in C. Lévy and L. Pernot (edd.), *Dire l’évidence (philosophie et rhétorique antiques)* (Paris and Montreal, 1997), 249–64; R.H. Webb, ‘Ekphrasis ancient and modern: the invention of a genre’, *Word & Image* 15 (1999), 7–18; J.P. Aygon, *Pictor in fabula: l’ecphrasis – descriptio dans les tragédies de Sénèque* (Brussels, 2004), 9–20; R.H. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Aldershot, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> F. Cairns, ‘Hellenistic “ekphrasis”?’ in P. Linant de Bellefonds, É. Prioux and A. Rouveret (edd.), *D’Alexandre à Auguste: dynamiques de la création dans les arts visuels et la poésie* (Rennes, 2015), 127–33, at 127.

an internal narrative within the description; b) the author conveys information about the emotions of the depicted subjects, makes predictions or draws moral teachings from them; c) an (internal or external) observer other than the author is introduced; d) the author expresses awe or amazement towards the realism and the quality of the work; and e) two elements frequently present are the morbid psychology of love and luminist effects. In *Iambus* 6 none of these elements appear. Callimachus does not mention the god's severe pose, seated on the throne, nor does he focus on the impact which the majestic statue must have had at first sight within the temple setting. The poet does not describe the features and the subjects of the god's precious cloak nor does he hint at the figures and mythological scenes which adorned the statue, the sandals, the base of the throne and the screens which prevented spectators from entering the cella. Instead, Callimachus seems to provide only a list of data and technical information, more akin to a manual. The components of the statue (the base, the footstool, the Nike, the Horai, etc.) are recalled solely to provide their measurements, in relation to each other.

Such a list of data is a unique occurrence among ancient *ekphraseis* of works of art, especially in the Hellenistic age. Even Pausanias, who offers the most detailed description of Phidias' statue, does not list its measurements, criticizing those who wrote them down, since these measurements fall short of the impression that the statue stirred in its viewers (see below). Similarly, the mention of the overall cost of the statue (lines 45–9?) is unusual, and unmatched in other examples of ancient *ekphrasis*. Considering all this, the *iambus* hardly fits the ancient definition of *ekphrasis* and contrasts with other examples of Hellenistic *ekphrasis*.

Positioned at a crossroads between different literary genres, *Iambus* 6 defies every attempt of categorization; 'Callimachus takes a convention, pushes it to its limits, argues its consequences, and exposes its latent absurdities'.<sup>12</sup>

#### PHIDIAS' STATUE OF ZEUS: AN INDESCRIBABLE MASTERPIECE

To understand why Callimachus offers such a distinctive description of Phidias' statue of Zeus, we must begin by considering ancient evaluations of the statue, which was regarded as Phidias' greatest masterpiece and eventually included among the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.<sup>13</sup>

Despite its immense ancient celebrity, we have no surviving copies of Phidias' statue; yet we know it became a model for representations across various forms of art, as is clear from numerous plausible reminiscences on diverse materials.<sup>14</sup> These echoes align with a series of ancient descriptions, which preserved its memory vividly in classical

<sup>12</sup> Kerkhecker (n. 1), 179; also Manakidou (n. 8), 242.

<sup>13</sup> The formation of the list of the Seven Wonders plausibly dates back to the second half of the third century B.C., as it is already mentioned (albeit fragmentarily) in *P.Berol. inv. 13044<sup>v</sup>* (LDAB 6897 = M–P<sup>3</sup> 2099 + 2068, second century B.C.): F. Condello and L. Floridi, *Pseudo-Filone di Bisanzio: Le sette meraviglie del mondo* (Berlin and Boston, 2023), 8–14.

<sup>14</sup> On the representation of the statue on different records see K.D.S. Lapatin, *Chryselephantine Statuary in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Oxford, 2001), ad loc. For the statue of Zeus see S. Vlizos, 'Das Vorbild des Zeus aus Olympia', in D. Boschung and A. Schäfer (edd.), *Römische Götterbilder der mittleren und späten Kaiserzeit* (Paderborn, 2015), 41–69. On Phidias' Zeus and a possible reconstruction see also C.C. Davison, B. Lundgreen and G.B. Waywell, 'Pheidias: the sculptures and ancient sources', *BICS* 105 (2009), 319–404 (works) and 1352–70 (illustrations); O. Palagia, 'The gold and ivory cult statues of Pheidias in Athens and Olympia', in O. Palagia (ed.), *Handbook of Greek Sculpture* (Berlin and Boston, 2019), 347–59.

literature.<sup>15</sup> Among these, the most detailed is provided by Pausanias (5.11.1), according to whom Zeus is depicted seated in a majestic pose, further accentuated by the contrast between the statue's height (approximately 13 m) and the ceiling of the cella, which was just slightly higher (about 14 m).<sup>16</sup> In Strabo's account (8. 3. 30), this gave the impression that, if the god had stood up, he would have burst through the ceiling of the cella. The magnificence of the statue was emphasized by numerous ancient sources, which praised Phidias' skill in capturing the grandeur of Zeus's divinity.<sup>17</sup> Some texts claim that Phidias was inspired by the description of Zeus nodding his assent to Thetis' request.<sup>18</sup>

The dimensions of the statue are the main focus of Callimachus' *Iambus* 6, which seem to correspond to the measurements of the base and of the cella as established by the archaeological excavations at Olympia.<sup>19</sup> According to the *Diegesis*, Callimachus also mentioned the overall cost of the statue (line 45) and (probably) the artist's signature (lines 59–61). Callimachus probably acquired these data from a technical text stored at the library of Alexandria; this would not be surprising, since he himself wrote technical treatises of different kinds (cf. Call. T 1 Pf.).

He may derive some information from a stele placed inside the temple. For instance, for the analogous case of the chryselephantine statue of the Athena Parthenos,<sup>20</sup> a bronze stele placed beside the statue preserved the name of the artist Phidias.<sup>21</sup> Fortunately, the building accounts of the statue are partly preserved and list the weight and the cost of the materials (per year) along with the names of the overseers.<sup>22</sup> However, the building accounts of the Athena do not provide measurements such as those found in *Iambus* 6, making such accounts an unlikely source for Callimachus.

This notwithstanding, we cannot rule out that these measurements were derived from a sketch of the statue by Phidias himself, who had to ensure that his gigantic statue could fit into the temple cella. To organize his work, Phidias set up a workshop near the temple of Zeus, whose dimensions matched those of the cella.<sup>23</sup> It is therefore probable that Phidias created a preparatory draft of the statue, which could have also included the dimensions of its various components (base, throne, etc.).

We are aware of some ancient treatises that documented highly detailed and technical information related to works of art; in most cases, artists explained and justified the proceedings of their works and the results they achieved.<sup>24</sup> For sculpture, the most

<sup>15</sup> On the literary sources relating to the statue of Zeus see J. Overbeck, *Die antiken Schriftquellen zur Geschichte der bildenden Künste bei den Griechen* (Leipzig, 1868), 125–36 and Lapatin (n. 14), 152–92.

<sup>16</sup> See A. Mallwitz, *Olympia und seine Bauten* (Darmstadt, 1972), 228–31.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Lucian, *Sacr.* 11; Philip, *Anth. Pal.* 1.23.3–4 = 3082–83 *GP*; Quint. *Inst.* 12.10.9; also Lucian, *De mort. Peregr.* 6; Himer. *Or.* 32.37; Plotinus, *Enn.* 5.8.1; Arr. *Epict. diss.* 1.6.23.

<sup>18</sup> *Il.* 1.528–30; Strab. 8.3.30; Val. Max. 3.7.4; Macrob. *Sat.* 5.13.23. According to Livy (45.28), L. Aemilius Paulus was so moved by the sight of the statue that he ordered a larger sacrifice than usual, as if he were about to sacrifice on the Capitol (cf. Polyb. 30.10.6; Plut. *Aem.* 28.6).

<sup>19</sup> See Mallwitz (n. 16).

<sup>20</sup> For this statue see Palagia (n. 14), 347–59.

<sup>21</sup> Plut. *Per.* 13.14. The stele must have provided Philochorus with the dedication date and the total weight of forty-four talents of gold (*FGrHist* 328 F 121). Thucydides (2.13.5) mentions forty talents, Diodorus (12.40.3) fifty; see R. Osborne and P.J. Rhodes, *Greek Historical Inscriptions 478–404 B.C.* (Oxford, 2017), 206.

<sup>22</sup> See T.L. Shear Jr., *Trophies of Victory. Public Building in Periclean Athens* (Princeton, 2016), 69–78; Osborne and Rhodes (n. 21), 202–7, §135.

<sup>23</sup> See A. Mallwitz and W. Schiering, 'Die Werkstatt des Pheidias in Olympia', in E. Kunze (ed.), *Olympische Forschungen* (Berlin, 1964), 5.74–109.

<sup>24</sup> On this topic see S. Settis, 'La trattatistica delle arti figurative', in G. Cambiano, L. Canfora and D. Lanza (edd.), *Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica* (Rome, 1993), 1.2.469–98, at 485–97 and

renowned example is Polyclitus' *Canon*, which presented a complex series of calculations and formulas utilized to achieve perfect symmetrical proportions, the results of his work for the Doryphorus.<sup>25</sup> Following his example, others composed *praecepta symmetriarum* (for example Silanion or Euphranor of Corinth).

It is not implausible, therefore, that Phidias himself documented the measurements of his Zeus. This idea gains further corroboration if, assuming that Mallwitz's calculations are correct, Callimachus did really employ the so-called 'pheidonian' foot (roughly 327 mm) as a metric reference system, reflecting the unit of measurement probably also used by Phidias.<sup>26</sup>

### DESCRIBING THE INDESCRIBABLE

*Iambus* 6 is therefore a unique specimen; on the one hand it describes a work of art, yet on the other it does not. Moreover, the poet does not seem to have expressed any aesthetic judgement on the statue. Several interpretations have been proposed, which I will summarize here:

- 1) Pfeiffer<sup>27</sup> believes that the addressee of *Iambus* 6 'enjoyed the useful information, as well as the workmanship of the poem, felt the touch of irony and understood the fun'. The poet would therefore have provided his friend with some 'touristic' information, albeit loaded with ironic undertones; 'he avoided any sort of flabby rhetoric, he aimed at precise facts'.
- 2) Zanker<sup>28</sup> considers *Iambus* 6 an example of pictorial poetry, a 'monstrous display of erudition'. The poet would make his friend's trip to Olympia pointless, since the description of Phidias' Zeus would already be provided by his own poem.
- 3) Schmidt<sup>29</sup> asserts that Callimachus adopts the *persona loquens* of an Elean 'tourist guide', speaking in Doric, and thinks that the poem is a bitter satire addressed against the 'exteriorization and materialization of art and the divine'.<sup>30</sup>
- 4) Manakidou<sup>31</sup> interprets the poem as an example of *docta poesis*, in which Callimachus demonstrates his technical abilities; 'the poet's erudition is evident in the collection of specialized knowledge about the work, and his virtuosity in the way he

N.J. Koch, *Paradeigma. Die antike Kunstschriftstellerei als Grundlage der frühneuzeitlichen Kunsttheorie* (Wiesbaden, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> See J.J. Pollitt, 'The *Canon* of Polykleitos and other canons', in G.W. Moon (ed.), *Polykleitos, the Doryphoros, and Tradition* (Madison, 1995), 19–24; A.F. Stewart, 'The *Canon* of Polykleitos: a question of evidence', *JHS* 98 (1978), 122–31.

<sup>26</sup> See Mallwitz and Schiering (n. 23), 75–8.

<sup>27</sup> Pfeiffer (n. 3), 5.

<sup>28</sup> G. Zanker, *Realism in Alexandrian Poetry: A Literature and its Audience* (London and Sydney, 1987), 64–5.

<sup>29</sup> E.A. Schmidt, *Notwehrdichtung. Moderne Jambik von Chénier bis Borchardt (mit einer Skizze zur antiken Jambik)* (Munich, 1990), 127–9.

<sup>30</sup> 'Veräußerlichung und Materialisierung der Kunst und des Göttlichen' (Schmidt, 128). See also F. Preisshofen, 'Kunsttheorie und Kunstbetrachtung', in H. Flashar (ed.), *Le classicisme à Rome aux I<sup>ers</sup> siècles avant et après J.-C.* (Geneva, 1979), 261–82, at 267–8, who thinks that *Iambus* 6 could reflect a parodic mockery of the literary genre of 'travel books', which were in vogue in the Hellenistic age. The interpretation of H. Reinsch-Werner, *Callimachus Hesiodicus. Die Rezeption der hesiodischen Dichtung durch Kallimachos von Kyrene* (Berlin, 1976), 276, is somewhere between points 2 and 3.

<sup>31</sup> Manakidou (n. 8), 242.

introduces this non-poetic material into poetry ... it realizes the ideal of learned Callimachean poetry as a whole'.<sup>32</sup>

- 5) Kerkhecker<sup>33</sup> shares the idea of the poet's ironic intent but thinks that the target of this irony is the poet himself; 'Callimachus laughs at himself; his interest is in the pedant's cast of mind'.<sup>34</sup>
- 6) Petrovic<sup>35</sup> proposes an allegorical interpretation of *Iambus* 6. Phidias' Zeus would be the metaphorical representation of Homer, whose poetry would be sarcastically described (and mocked) by the speaker *persona loquens*, one of the Telchines, speaking in Doric as the Telchines were traditionally linked to Rhodes or Crete.

What unites all these interpretations is the idea that *Iambus* 6 is fundamentally ironic. A certain irony is difficult to deny,<sup>36</sup> especially when considering the disparity between the subject of the iambus and its blend of high and low style. Noteworthy is the contrast between a remarkable expressive richness (as evidenced by Callimachus' extreme variety in listing the measurements to avoid monotony: 25 πέντε τε[τ]ρ[ά]κι[ν]υ [πο]δῶν, 26 ἐς ἰθῦ, 27 τετράδορα, 28 παλαστὰι, 31 τρις ἐς τὸ μακρόν, 32 ἵκανιν δ' ἐς εὖρος) and some more colloquial and informal expressions.<sup>37</sup> Both the irony and the juxtaposition of high and low style are not novel elements in Callimachus' *Iambi*. However, no-one has analysed the ironic undertones of the poem by interpreting them within the broader issue haunting Callimachus' *Iambus* 6: the reason why Callimachus chose this specific subject and wrote such an unconventional poem about it.

So, let us return to the question with which we began. Why does Callimachus offer such a description of Phidias' statue of Zeus? How can we interpret the list of measurements the poet presents to his departing addressee (and his readers)? First, as Acosta-Hughes says: 'The description of Phidias' huge chryselephantine sculpture in a collection of iambic poems is in and of itself a declaration, a positioning of the poet in regard to expected and traditional delimitations of the elevated and the unelevated.'<sup>38</sup> Callimachus seizes the opportunity of a friend departing for Olympia to depict Phidias' masterpiece. However, the choice of subject posed a challenge: how could the poet

<sup>32</sup> 'Die Gelehrsamkeit des Dichters zeigt sich in der Sammlung von speziellen Kenntnissen über das Werk, seine Virtuosität in der Art der Einführung dieses undichterischen Materials in die Dichtung ... es verwirklicht das Ideal der gelehrten kallimacheischen Dichtung überhaupt'.

<sup>33</sup> Kerkhecker (n. 1), 171–81.

<sup>34</sup> Kerkhecker (n. 1), 171; see also Puelma (n. 3), 295, although Puelma's argumentation is somewhat ambiguous, as he seems to suggest immediately afterward that the poet's irony is directed at his departing friend: 'first and foremost, however, Callimachus seems to ἰαμβίζειν his friend for his evidently undifferentiated and curious understanding of art, which leads him to visit the colossal monument of Zeus' ('in erster Linie aber scheint Kallimachos, seinen Freund zu ἰαμβίζειν für seine offenbar undifferenziert neugierige Kunstauffassung, die ihn das kolossale Zeus-monument besuchen läßt').

<sup>35</sup> I. Petrovic, 'Delusions of grandeur: Homer, Zeus and the Telchines in Callimachus' *Reply (Aitia* fr. 1) and *Iambus* 6', *A&A* 52 (2006), 16–41.

<sup>36</sup> See also G.O. Hutchinson, *Hellenistic Poetry* (Oxford, 1988), 27 n. 3, who, responding to Pfeiffer (n. 3), thinks that 'the irony is more radical'; see also Acosta-Hughes (n. 1), 289–90.

<sup>37</sup> See for instance the allusion to the fable (or perhaps the proverb?) of the hare and the tortoise (22), the expression οὐδὲ πᾶσι[σ]α[ρ]ῶν in the sense of 'not even a little' (43) or also the reference to the 'greedy' addressee, curious even about the price of the statue (λίχνος, 45). Equally humorous is the amusing 'contest' between the Horai and the Charites quarrelling about their own size (42–4, see Pfeiffer [n. 3], 5), in which, if Gallavotti's integration ἀλλ'ἔει is correct, the Nike took part too (39)? See Acosta-Hughes (n. 1), 294: 'The grandeur of the subject is softened by the touches of iambic, the insertion of animal fable and unelevated vocabulary, and particularly by the juxtaposition of this statuary poem with the one that follows.'

<sup>38</sup> Acosta-Hughes (n. 1), 288.

describe a work of art whose beauty was said to have encapsulated the god's very divine essence? Crafting a literary *ekphrasis* of the statue, akin to other Hellenistic examples such as the Goatherd's Cup or Jason's Cloak (see above, page 309), would entail composing 'loudly-resounding' poetry (μέγα ψοφέουσα), precisely what Callimachus rejects (cf. *Aet.* fr. 1.19–20 Pf.).

The poet therefore devises a method to convey to his departing friend a visual representation of Phidias' magnificent creation while simultaneously avoiding describing it according to the features of Hellenistic *ekphrasis* outlined by Cairns, to avoid the risk of writing a bombastic poem. To achieve this, he conveys the grandeur of Phidias' work by simply listing its measurements and dimensions, which would have left visitors to the temple awestruck, especially considering the visual contrast with the size of the cella. This reading of *Iambus* 6 seems to be corroborated by two ancient sources dealing with Callimachus' poem. In a debated passage, Pausanias (5.11.9, transl. Jones) writes:

μέτρα δὲ τοῦ ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ Διὸς ἐς ὕψος τε καὶ εὖρος ἐπιστάμενος γεγραμμένα οὐκ ἐν ἐπαίνῳ θήσομαι τοὺς μετρήσαντας, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰ εἰρημένα αὐτοῖς μέτρα πολὺ τι ἀποδέοντά ἐστιν ἢ τοῖς ἰδοῦσι παρέστηκεν ἐς τὸ ἄγαλμα δόξα, ὅπου γε καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν θεὸν μάρτυρα ἐς τοῦ Φειδίου τὴν τέχνην γενέσθαι λέγουσιν.

I know that the height and breadth of the Olympic Zeus have been measured and recorded; but I shall not praise those who made the measurements, for even their records fall far short of the impression made by a sight of the image. Nay, the god himself according to legend bore witness to the artistic skill of Phidias.

Pausanias' criticism is generic, but Callimachus himself was probably his target.<sup>39</sup> Pausanias did not consider the possibility that Callimachus was ironic and disapproves of those who had written down the measurements precisely because they failed to catch the majesty of Phidias' statue. Thus, merely presenting a list of its measurements fails to provide a vivid representation of the overarching magnificence and splendour of the Olympian Zeus.

Lucian may also direct a satirical remark towards Callimachus' *Iambus* 6 (*Hist. conscr.* 27, transl. Kilburn):

εἰσὶ γὰρ τινες, οἱ τὰ μεγάλα μὲν τῶν πεπραγμένων καὶ ἀξιωμακρόνεντα παραλείπουσιν ἢ παραθέουσιν, ὑπὸ δὲ ἰδιωτείας καὶ ἀπειροκαλίας καὶ ἀγνοίας τῶν λεκτέων ἢ σιωπητέων τὰ μικρότατα πάνυ λυπαρῶς καὶ φιλοπόνως ἐρμηνεύουσιν ἐμβραδύνοντες, ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ τὸ μὲν ὄλον κάλλος τοσοῦτο καὶ τοιοῦτο ὄν μὴ βλέπει μηδὲ ἐπαινοῖ μηδὲ τοῖς οὐκ εἰδόσιν ἐξηγοῖτο, τοῦ ὑποποδίου δὲ τὸ τε εὐθυεργές καὶ τὸ εὐξέστον θαυμάζει καὶ τῆς κρηπίδος τὸ εὐρύθμιον, καὶ ταῦτα πάνυ μετὰ πολλῆς φροντίδος διεξιῶν.

There are some who leave out or skate over the important and interesting events, and from lack of education, taste and knowledge of what to mention and what to ignore dwell very fully and laboriously on the most insignificant happenings; this is like failing to observe and praise and describe for those who do not know it the entire grandeur and supreme quality of the Zeus at Olympia, and instead admiring the 'good workmanship' and 'good finish' of the footstool and the 'good proportions' of the base, and developing all this with great concern.

<sup>39</sup> Strabo too in 8.3.30 (quoted above) writes ἀνέγραψαν δὲ τινες τὰ μέτρα τοῦ ξοάνου, καὶ Καλλίμαχος ἐν ἰάμβῳ τινὶ ἐξεῖπε ('certain writers have recorded the measurements of the image and Callimachus has set them forth in an iambic poem', transl. Jones). Hence Callimachus' *Iambus* 6 must have become famous, to the point that it was employed as a reference source for the measurements of the statue.

Lucian seems to have criticized Callimachus along similar lines as Pausanias; the focus on minor details fails to capture the overall magnificence of Phidias' statue.

It is indeed plausible that this was precisely the intention behind Callimachus' *Iambus* 6: portraying a majestic statue without resorting to a literary *ekphrasis* akin to the other Hellenistic examples we have seen above and, therefore, attempting to describe an indescribable work of art without creating an excessively grandiose poem, which would not align with the tone of the iambic collection. The criticism offered by both Lucian and Pausanias suggests that the iambus aimed to provide readers with an image of the majesty of Phidias' statue of Zeus, an effort which these authors deemed unsuccessful.

#### *IAMBUS 6: A HUMOROUS DIVERTISSEMENT*

Neither Lucian nor Pausanias, however, takes the humorous tones of the poem into consideration. A certain humour lies in the contrast between the content of the iambus and its (failing) 'descriptive' purpose, as hinted by the mixture of high and low style. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, irony plays a pivotal role and can be discerned at different levels: 1) Initially, an ironic undertone can be detected in the implicit comparison with the poetic manifesto of the *Aetia* prologue (see below); Callimachus engages in a self-challenge, selecting the grandest subject for his iambus and attempting to describe it without composing a bombastic poem. This intriguing challenge showcases his poetic prowess. 2) Secondly, Callimachus engages in a playful exchange with his addressee (and consequently his readers too), who probably anticipated a literary *ekphrasis* of the statue akin to other Hellenistic *ekphraseis*. By subverting this expectation, Callimachus stirs his friend's curiosity (cf. line 45) to see the statue first-hand.<sup>40</sup> 3) At a third level, an ironic mockery is directed towards the aforementioned genre of technical treatises. Callimachus subtly pokes fun at the technical jargon of these treatises, while describing Phidias' masterpiece whose magnificence contrast with Callimachus' own aesthetic and poetical beliefs.

One might object that Callimachus dedicates several verses to Zeus in the eponymous *Hymn*, where he employs a more solemn style. Would it be legitimate, then, to interpret *Iambus* 6 in the light of the aesthetic beliefs declared in the *Aetia* prologue? However, Callimachus frequently declares his aesthetic and poetical credos elsewhere. In the *Iambi* Callimachus shields himself from the criticisms of his quarrelsome colleagues, defending the license of ranging between different literary genres and styles (cf. *Iamb.* 13.30–3 [fr. 203 Pf.]).

Concerning the *Hymns*, we may refer to the closing section the *Hymn to Apollo* (105–13) where the poet defends his poetry against the criticisms of his opponents. This passage exhibits remarkable similarities with the *Aetia* prologue.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the *Hymn to Zeus* represents a distinct case, as it belongs to a different genre, which necessitated a more solemn style. In addition, if the aesthetic beliefs expressed in the

<sup>40</sup> Hutchinson (n. 36), 27: 'The strong word λιχνος "greedy" with obvious but graceful comedy shows the contrast between the friend, actually eager for aesthetic experience, and the speaker, bent on retailing facts.'

<sup>41</sup> See F. Williams, *Callimachus: Hymn to Apollo* (Oxford, 1978), ad loc. for thorough discussion and A. Cameron, *Callimachus and his Critics* (Princeton, 1995), 403–9; also S.A. Stephens, *Callimachus: The Hymns* (Oxford and New York, 2015), 73 and G.B. D'Alessio, *Callimaco: Opere* (Milan, 2007<sup>2</sup>), 94–5.

prologue pertain to the *Aetia*, they should also be valid for the *Iambi*, a humbler genre, as Callimachus himself states at the end of the *Aetia* (fr. 112.9 Pf., *πεζὸν . . . νομόν*).<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, in *Iamb.* 7 and 9 Callimachus provides references to the iconography of the statues; however, both are of a humbler nature compared to the grandeur of Phidias' Zeus, the first being a wooden *xoanon* (*Iamb.* 7) and the second an ithyphallic statue of Hermes (*Iamb.* 9). *Ekphraseis* of divine statues were also included in the *Aetia*; see for instance *Aet.* fr. 114 Pf., where Callimachus describes the iconography of the statue of Delian Apollo.<sup>43</sup> Nothing similar to these *ekphraseis* can be recognized in *Iambus* 6.

Additionally, as seen above, an aura of indescribability surrounded Phidias' Zeus; by choosing this work as subject of his *iambus*, the poet must find a way of providing a description without writing a bombastic poem, respecting his own poetical and aesthetic beliefs. He does so by focussing on the measurements and other technical details. This would align with another Callimachean poetic custom; the special focus the poet reserves to minor or less known details. In the *Hecale*, for example, the poet apparently dedicated little space to Theseus' deeds, instead focussing on the description of Hecale's daily routine.<sup>44</sup> Besides, as he states once again in the prologue of the *Aetia* (fr. 1.25–8 Pf.), Apollo himself invited him to follow paths untrodden by others.<sup>45</sup> And the pedantic focus on details is precisely what leads Lucian to reproach Callimachus, as we have seen earlier (see also *Hist. conscr.* 57).<sup>46</sup>

#### CONCLUSION: A MATTER OF *TECHNĒ*

The *iambus* can be interpreted as a literary game through which the poet exhibits his virtuoso poetic skills by transforming a dry list of data and technical information into verses. The poem begins by emphasizing Phidias' craftsmanship (*τέχνη*), a term that holds significant importance in Callimachus' literary beliefs, being the criterion by which the poet invites his readers to judge poetry (*Aet.* fr. 1.17–18 Pf.). The term aids us to understand Callimachus' *Iambus* 6. The poet indulges in a humorous *divertissement*, taking the occasion of a friend's departure to tantalize readers with a (missed) description of an iconic statue that had become the example of the earthly representation of Zeus. This playful intent operates on multiple levels: through the poetic sleight of hand that upholds the poet's literary principles, the frustration of the audience's literary anticipations and the plausible mockery directed towards the technical jargon of treatises. The poem stands as a testament to Callimachus' poetic prowess; if it is true that 'the poet indulged in a tour de force . . . displaying *τέχνη* rather than *ἐνθουσιασμός*'<sup>47</sup> one cannot help but marvel at his ability to transform such a technical subject into verse.

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<sup>42</sup> On the closing passage of *Aetia* 4 see A. Harder, *Callimachus: Aetia* (Cambridge, 2012), 2.866–70, who defends the idea that fr. 112 Pf. represents an editorial joint between the *Aetia* and the *Iambi*.

<sup>43</sup> See Harder (n. 42), 2 ad loc.

<sup>44</sup> See A. Hollis, *Callimachus. Hecale* (Oxford, 2009<sup>2</sup>), 5–10.

<sup>45</sup> A similar statement is made also in *Epigr.* 28, on which see D'Alessio (n. 41), 241.

<sup>46</sup> On this passage by Lucian see A. Martina, 'Un'allusione di Luciano alla teoria sull'arte di Callimaco', *RCCM* 41 (1999), 49–57.

<sup>47</sup> Dawson (n. 3), 72; see also Trypanis (n. 3), 130.