

Of giraffes and men: a show of hybrid bodies in Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*¹

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Abstract: This article discusses the functions of the giraffe at *Aithiopika* 10.27, which is described by Heliodorus as a hybrid animal. First, I contextualize this description within ancient, late-antique, and Byzantine writings on giraffes, showing Heliodorus' use and transformation of historiographical and scientific sources. From this emerges both his playing at historical realism, and the connection between the wondrous bodies of the giraffe and Charikleia. Second, I analyze the seemingly chaotic ensuing narrative of Theagenes' athletic feats (10.28-32) as a coherent spectacle which continues the hybrid leitmotif initiated by Charikleia and the giraffe. The giraffe's hybridity contributes to the construction of the bodies of both protagonists as spectacular.

Keywords: giraffes; hybridity; Heliodorus; *Aithiopika*; ancient Greek novels.

^{ES} De jirafas y hombres: un espectáculo de cuerpos híbridos en *Etiópicas* de Heliodoro

Resumen: Este artículo examina las funciones de la jirafa en *Etiópicas* 10.27, donde aparece descrita por Heliodoro como un animal híbrido. En primer lugar, se contextualiza esta descripción dentro de los escritos antiguos, tardoantiguos y bizantinos sobre jirafas, y se pone de manifiesto el uso y la manipulación que lleva a cabo Heliodoro de las fuentes historiográficas y científicas. Ello pone de manifiesto la manera en que Heliodoro juega con el realismo histórico, así como la conexión entre los cuerpos maravillosos de la jirafa y Cariclea. Por otra parte, se analiza la aparentemente caótica narración de las proezas atléticas de Teágenes (10.28-32) como un espectáculo coherente que continúa el iniciado con Cariclea y la jirafa. El hibridismo de la jirafa contribuye a la construcción de los cuerpos de ambos protagonistas como espectaculares.

Palabras clave: jirafas; hibridismo; Heliodoro; *Etiópicas*; novela griega antigua.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Giraffes and giraffe-writing in antiquity. 3. A show of hybridity.

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1. Introduction

This article is a study of the tenth and last book of Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*, which is occupied almost entirely by the victory parade of the Ethiopian king Hydaspes, set just outside the capital city of Meroë. In particular, I am concerned with the entrance of a giraffe, amplified by ekphrasis, and with the events triggered by it, which allow the male protagonist Theagenes a display of his athletic skills. The giraffe is a perfect example of the vast range of sources, from historiography to scientific writing, mobilized by Heliodorus in order to build a verisimilar world². But, like the rest of his Ethiopia, it is also beyond exact verisimilitude, a construct built on bookish knowledge and made to reflect and amplify the wider themes of the novel. John Morgan (1994) interprets the ekphrasis, and especially the fact that the name of the animal is revealed only at the end, as a riddle which reflects the readers' hermeneutic activity in several other parts of the novel. On the other hand, from a cultural-historical perspective, Robert Cioffi (2024: 211-222) has recently stressed the connection between the giraffe and the display of Roman imperial power. This, and Theagenes' subsequent gymnastics, which are culturally Greek, are part of the injection of Greco-Roman culture that will hybridize the future of the Ethiopia envisaged by Heliodorus: an empire governed by a Greek-educated white Ethiopian, Charikleia, and her Thessalian husband, Theagenes. Building up on these arguments, my aim is to draw attention to the giraffe's physical hybridity and its narrative function for both protagonists. I consider the giraffe and the events around it a show of hybridity aimed at accompanying the main preoccupation, but also the greatest entertainment, of Book Ten, namely the acknowledgement of Charikleia's miraculous body. In the first part I zoom in on the giraffe and consider its description in the context of ancient accounts of giraffes. This highlights Heliodorus' play at historiography, and I use one particular parallel, the Byzantine *Sylloge Constantini*, to show that the giraffe partakes in the precise paradoxes surrounding Charikleia and her identity. In the second part I zoom out to the wider sequence of which the giraffe is part and show that it too is pervaded by the display of seemingly hybrid bodies, designed to extend the paradoxicality to Theagenes as well. Combining source and literary analysis, I hope to enrich the picture of Heliodorus' compositional strategies and of his place in Byzantine culture³.

2. Giraffes and giraffe-writing in antiquity

Animals are part of the novels' representation of the real world, but it would be wrong to cast them as mere extras⁴. In Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* they are an essential part of the life of the protagonists, and the story would be very different without them⁵. Achilles Tatius gives an important role to a horse (*Leucippe and Clitophon* 1.7; 1.12), with repercussions on both plot and characters. Moreover, he increases the exoticism of the story by describing, among others, the phoenix (3.25), a hippopotamus (4.2), an elephant (4.4-5), and a crocodile (4.19)⁶. The encounters with these animals take place in Egypt, where the action is set in Books Three to Five, and the descriptions, unsurprisingly, follow Herodotus, as well as other sources for natural history⁷. A similar combination of historiographical and natural-historical sources, certainly more than autopsy, lies behind Heliodorus' description of the giraffe at *Aith.* 10.27. Other exotic animals feature the *Aithiopika* (e.g. a crocodile at 6.1 and an elephant at 10.25), but the giraffe is the only

² See Feuillâtre (1966: 136-142) on sources, Morgan (1993: 197-229) on verisimilarity, and Morgan (1982) on Heliodorus' "historiographical pose" (especially 233-234 on ekphrasis and 242-243 on the giraffe).

³ An already rich picture, as seen, most recently, in Repath & Whitmarsh (2022), a collection of book-by-book readings of the *Aithiopika*.

⁴ For a broad discussion on animals in prose narrative, covering the novels and beyond, see Spittler (2008: 51-72).

⁵ See for instance Bowie (2005) and (2019).

⁶ Exoticism is almost never the only purpose: see, for instance Morales (2004: 190-198) for the significance of the phoenix, and Cioffi (2024: 60-90) for a broader discussion on the ethnographical gaze and its limits.

⁷ Herodotus has in quick succession the crocodile (2.68), the hippopotamus (2.71), and the phoenix (2.73). See Rommel (1923: 59-82) for natural-historical digressions in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius, with the relevant sources.

one whose presence is enhanced by an ekphrasis. It is presented as a tribute by the Auxomites to Hydaspes, the king of Ethiopia and father of the heroine Charikleia, in the course of the celebrations for the Ethiopians' victory in war:

τελευταῖοι παρήσαν οἱ Αὐξωμιτῶν πρεσβευταί, φόρου μὲν οὐκ ὄντες ὑποτελεῖς, φίλιοι δὲ ἄλλως καὶ ὑπόσπονδοι, καὶ τὸ ἐπὶ τοῖς κατωρθωμένοις εὐμενὲς ἐνδεικνύμενοι δῶρα καὶ οὗτοι προσήγον ἄλλα τε καὶ δὴ καὶ ζῶου τινὸς εἶδος ἀλλοκότου τε ἅμα καὶ θαυμασίου τὴν φύσιν, μέγεθος μὲν εἰς καμήλου μέτρον ὑφούμενον χροῖαν δὲ καὶ δορὰν παρδάλεως φολίσιν ἀνθηραῖς ἐστιγμένον. (2) Ἦν δὲ αὐτῷ τὰ μὲν ὀπίσθια καὶ μετὰ κενεῶνας χαμαιζηλά τε καὶ λεοντώδη, τὰ δὲ ὠμιαῖα καὶ πόδες πρόσθιοι καὶ στέρνα πέρα τοῦ ἀναλόγου τῶν ἄλλων μελῶν ἐξανιστάμενα· λεπτός ὁ αὐχὴν καὶ ἐκ μεγάλου τοῦ λοιποῦ σώματος εἰς κύκνειον φάρυγγα μηκυνόμενος· ἡ κεφαλὴ τὸ μὲν εἶδος καμηλίζουσα τὸ μέγεθος δὲ στρουθοῦ Λιβύσσης εἰς διπλάσιον ὀλίγου ὑπερφέρουσα καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς ὑπογεγραμμένους βλοσυρῶς σοβοῦσα. (3) Παρήλλακτο καὶ τὸ βάδισμα χερσαίου τε ζώου καὶ ἐνύδρου παντὸς ὑπεναντίως σαλευόμενον, τῶν σκελῶν οὐκ ἐναλλάξ ἐκατέρου καὶ παρὰ μέρος ἐπιβαίνοντος, ἀλλ' ἰδίᾳ μὲν τοῖν δυοῖν καὶ ἅμα τῶν ἐν δεξιᾷ χωρὶς δὲ καὶ ζυγηδὸν τῶν εὐωνύμων σὺν ἐκατέρᾳ τῇ ἐπαιωρουμένη πλευρᾷ μετατιθεμένων. Ὀλκὸν δὲ οὕτω τὴν κίνησιν καὶ τίθασον τὴν ἔξιν ὥστε ὑπὸ λεπτῆς μηρίνου τῇ κορυφῇ περιελιχθείσης ἄγεσθαι πρὸς τοῦ θροκόμου, καθάπερ ἀφύκτω δασμῷ τῷ ἐκείνου βουλήματι ὀδηγούμενον. (4) Τοῦτο φανέν τὸ ζῶον τὸ μὲν πληθὸς ἅπαν ἐξέπληξε, καὶ ὄνομα τὸ εἶδος ἐλάμβανεν ἐκ τῶν ἐπικρατεστέρων τοῦ σώματος, αὐτοσχεδῶς πρὸς τοῦ δήμου καμηλοπάρδαλις κατηγορηθέν· τάραχου γε μὴν τὴν πανήγυριν ἐνέπληξε.

The last envoys to come forward were those of the Auxomitai, who were not subject to tribute but partners in a treaty of friendship. To convey their compliments on his recent successes they too brought various gifts, including a specimen of an unusual and bizarre kind of animal: in size it stood as tall as a camel, but its hide was marked with garish leopard spots. Its hindquarters and rear parts were squat and leonine, but its withers, forelegs, and chest were disproportionately taller than the rest of its anatomy. Notwithstanding the bulk of the rest of its body, its neck was slender and elongated as the crop of a swan. In appearance its head was like a camel's, in size not quite twice that of a Lybian ostrich. Its eyes were rimmed with a black line like mascara and darted hither and thither with an expression of pompous disdain. Even its method of locomotion was unique, since it rolled from side to side like a ship at sea, in a manner quite unlike any other creature, terrestrial or aquatic: it did not advance each of its legs individually, in rotation, but its two right legs moved forward in unison, separately from the two left legs, which also functioned as a distinct pair, thus leaving each side of its body in turn without support. It was so halting in its gait and so docile in its temperament that its keeper could lead it on a slender cord wound around its neck, and it obeyed the directions of his will as if it were a chain that brooked no disobedience. The arrival of this beast produced universal amazement. The people spontaneously invented a name for the creature derived from the most prominent features of its anatomy: camelopard. But it threw the ceremony into total disarray. (10.27)⁸

Although the giraffe is never mentioned again in the rest of the story, the final sentence makes clear that the animal is not purely ornamental but functional in bringing about disruption. I will examine the sequence of events triggered by the giraffe in a domino effect in the next section. Here I want to contextualize Heliodorus' giraffe within ancient accounts of giraffes in order to understand first on which occasions the ancient world encountered these animals, and then how ancient authors attempted to study them⁹.

⁸ The Greek is from the edition of Rattenbury & Lumb (1960). Throughout, I have used Morgan's translation in Reardon (1989), with minor adaptations.

⁹ An overview also in Cioffi (2024: 214–216), though he does not look closely at the other descriptions of giraffes (listed at p. 214 n. 87), which I analyse below.

Consider the giraffe. This animal entered ancient records almost only in relation to power and conquest. Both the earliest representations and, later, the first written accounts show the giraffe as a tribute brought, typically from Ethiopia or Libya, to a ruler¹⁰. We see a giraffe on the reliefs of the Apadana Palace at Persepolis, brought by Ethiopians to the Achaemenid king (6th-5th century B. C. E.), and the same iconography showing giraffes as tributes to Tutankhamen can be found in Egypt at a much earlier time¹¹. They could feature processions for religious festivals, like the grand procession of Ptolemy II in Alexandria in the 3rd century B. C. E., as well as victory parades, like Caesar's triumph in 46 B. C. E., when Rome saw its first giraffe¹². From the Persian Empire to Hellenistic kingdoms and Rome, giraffes gravitated around rulers, and the trend continued in later periods. In the 5th century C. E. giraffes were brought to the emperors Leo, again by Ethiopians, and Anastasius, and in the 11th century C. E. Constantinus IX Monomachos made public displays of the animals¹³. The message provided by giraffes and other exotic animals at victory parades was twofold. Exploiting an analogy between warfare and hunting, the victors paraded the conquered enemies as well as the animals of their country to indicate their control of both the human and the animal world¹⁴. At the same time, rare and strange animals made a major contribution to the procession's spectacle. They were displayed alongside the spoils of war and then became part of private collections, just like treasures and artworks¹⁵. Such is the context in which the ancient world encountered giraffes, and historiography had the exclusive on the subject. With the procession and the display of tributes and of the giraffe, Heliodorus is therefore aligning the events in Meroë with those typically narrated by historiography.

There are also several ways in which Heliodorus elaborates on the sources in order to make the procession in Meroë special. For instance, it is both a military triumph and a religious festival, thus combining the two main occasions seen above. Moreover, tributes are also brought by allies, like the Auxomites, and not subjects, and Hydaspes gives back as much as he receives, if not more¹⁶. When it comes to the giraffe, the most evident variation from the sources consists in the fact that the name of the animal ('camelopard', in Greek) comes after the description and not before, as it usually happens. Agatharchides is one of several examples:

παρὰ τοῖς Τρωγλοδύταις ἐστὶν καὶ ἡ λεγομένη παρ' Ἑλλήσι καμηλοπάρδαλις, σύνθετον τρόπον τινὰ κατὰ τὴν κλησιν καὶ τὴν φύσιν λαχοῦσα. Τὴν μὲν γὰρ ποικιλίαν ἔχει παρδάλεως, τὸ μέγεθος δὲ καμήλου, τὸ πάχος δὲ ὑπερφυῆς, τὸν δὲ αὐχένα τοιοῦτον ὥστε ἀπ' ἄκρων ἀμέλγεσθαι τῶν δένδρων τὴν τροφήν.

There is among the Troglodytes also the one the Greeks call camelopard, who, according to its name, has obtained in a certain compound way also its nature. It has the varied colors of a leopard, the size of a camel, an enormous mass, and such a neck that it can suck nutrients from the top of the trees. (*De mari Erythraeo* 72.2, my translation)

¹⁰ See Gatier (1996: 922): «*pas de giraffe sans empereur*». Laufer (1928: 58-69), and Gatier (1996), are valuable guides on giraffes in literature and art in the ancient world. See also, more succinctly, Lewis & Llewellyn-Jones (2018: 450-455).

¹¹ See Laufer (1928: 21-25) for Egypt. The animal on the Persepolis relief may be an okapi: see Afshar *et al.* (1974), and Lewis & Llewellyn-Jones (2018: 452-453).

¹² Accounts in Athenaeus 5.196a-203b for Ptolemy II, and Cassius Dio 43.23.1 for Caesar. See Erskine (2013) and Östenberg (2014).

¹³ The sources are: for Leo, Damascius, *Isid.* 128 (= *Suda* Φ 703 s.v. φρενοβλαβής); for Anastasios, Timotheus of Gaza, *Sylloge Constantini* 2.270-273; and, for Monomachos, Michael Attaliates, *Historia* 2.48-50. Concerning the latter see Ševčenko (2020), also with an eye to iconography.

¹⁴ Llewellyn Jones (2017) is a rich discussion on tributes of animals in Ancient Persia.

¹⁵ The giraffe at Ptolemy's procession was only one instance of his passion for collecting and displaying wonderful beasts. Also famous is the story of the giant python told by Diodorus Siculus (3.36-37).

¹⁶ For instance, Hydaspes rewards the Blemmyes, who have offered bows and arrowheads, with a ten-year tax exemption (10.26.3). The special status given to the Auxomites may be connected to their power in the 4th century C. E., the alleged time of Heliodorus (Morgan 1978: 444). See Cioffi (2024: 229-230) for further considerations on the anachronism.

The description, whose length may vary (more on this below), is necessitated by the compound name 'camelopard', in order to explain it. The process is reversed in the *Aithiopika*, where we have first a long description and then, at the end, not just the name of the animal but the process itself of naming it («The people spontaneously invented a name for the creature derived from the most prominent features of its anatomy: camelopard», 10.27.4). Morgan (1994) points out that the revelation of the name at the end shows that the passage is constructed as a riddle to be solved by both the Ethiopians and the readers, and compares it to other instances in the novel where characters and readers find themselves in the position of using clues to solve mysteries¹⁷. I would add that the Ethiopian audience's participation in the process of gathering knowledge on the giraffe, moving from wonder to analysis to the acquisition of new information, is broadly similar to what they have experienced a little earlier with the recognition of Charikleia (10.14), herself possibly the greatest mystery of the novel. There too they were given a strange case (Charikleia claiming to be the daughter of the royals), used analysis to address it (comparison of Charikleia with the painting of Andromeda), and gained a new level of knowledge which solved the problem to their satisfaction (Charikleia and Andromeda are identical, therefore her claim can stand). There are differences operating, of course, but the reactions to Charikleia («This occasioned universal cheering and acclaim», 10.15.1)¹⁸ and the giraffe («The arrival of this beast produced universal amazement», 10.27.4)¹⁹ tell us that, from the audience's perspective, the events unfolding form one long spectacle. Later I examine how this spectacle is more unified and coherent than it first may seem, but here I tease out further implications of the naming of the giraffe.

To display the giraffe's name after its description is a conscious variation on a fairly standard formula. But if the only purpose of it had been to present a riddle (guess the animal) and its solution (camelopard), the latter could have been revealed in a number of ways, with no change to plot development. It could have come in the form of a comment by the omniscient narrator, or of an explanation by the Auxomites themselves, to name two options used by Heliodorus in other moments of the procession²⁰. Either way, the giraffe would still have amazed the people and, more importantly, frightened the other animals. However, Heliodorus brought about the revelation of the giraffe's name by devising the unique circumstance of its very invention. Thus, the description of the giraffe is turned into the dramatization of the origin of giraffe-giving. From the point of view of composition, this can be read as Heliodorus' self-conscious play with his sources. From a thematic point of view, it provides an instance of the novel's wider preoccupation with origins.

As said before, a history of paraded giraffes makes the one in Meroë verisimilar. Readers would have found Hydraspes a credibly powerful ruler because the Achaemenids, Ptolemy II, and Caesar, had been in a similar situation. Indeed, in the sources the Ethiopians are often the givers but never the receivers of giraffes²¹, yet it is apparent that at some point they too must have had a first encounter with the animal. Heliodorus, who was the only one in Antiquity to write about the tribute of a giraffe outside the domain of historiography, enjoyed the freedom, granted to him by fiction, to invent that moment. Thus, the event in Meroë is not a giraffe-giving like there had been others in history, but the first of its kind. Readers captivated by the fiction no longer think that Heliodorus is imitating events recorded by historiography, but realize that he is in fact enabling their existence²².

¹⁷ For instance, the mystery of how Charikleia is untouched by fire at 8.9.13-14 (she has a stone, the pantarbe, that saves from fire, which is revealed at 8.11), or of the identity of the old man looking for his daughter at 10.34-35 (he turns out to be Charikles). See Morgan (1994).

¹⁸ ἐκίνησαν παρὰ πάντων κρότον καὶ θόρυβον.

¹⁹ τοῦτο φανὲν τὸ ζῷον τὸ μὲν πλῆθος ἅπαν ἐξέπληξε.

²⁰ For extradiegetic explanation consider the solution to the riddle of the old man («[he] was no other than Charikles», 10.36.1), and for intradiegetic explanations consider Meroebus introducing the giant (10.24.3) and the Blemmyes justifying the simplicity of their tributes (10.26.2).

²¹ The only other case of a king of Ethiopia with a giraffe is in Cosmas Indicopleustes (6th century C. E.), who was admitted to the court of the king in Axum, where he saw giraffes kept for amusement (*Topographia Christiana* 11.4).

²² Gatier (1996: 921-926) suggests that Heliodorus might have been inspired by a "real" event: the tribute of a giraffe to Constantius II in Antioch between 337 and 350, of which Heliodorus, a Syrian, would have

In a way, Ethiopians could take a giraffe to Persepolis as a tribute to the king because they received one from the Auxomites in the *Aithiopia* in the first place. And Posidonius, Pliny, Cassius Dio, and others were able to use the word 'camelopard' because Heliodorus' Ethiopians came up with it. As a result, Heliodorus plays not only with his readers but also with his sources. Strangely for a retro-active insertion in history, or perhaps as an ironic warning precisely of fictionality, realism is what Heliodorus must sacrifice to make things work, for the Greek name 'camelopard' is invented by the non-Greek-speaking Ethiopians²³. Thus, the giraffe of *Aith.* 10.27 is an instance of Heliodorus' use of sources to achieve historical realism, but also one where he overturns his dependence on sources, positioning himself before them and not after. As a result of Heliodorus' manipulation of realism, the account of the giraffe is made to reflect one of the crucial themes of the novel, the search for origins.

The giraffe becomes part of the wider discourse on origins which is central to the *Aithiopia*, and especially to Charikleia. Her whole journey is a quest for origins, because her origin is precisely what prompted it. Famously, Charikleia is born white from black parents because her mother looked at the white body of Andromeda in a painting during conception, and transmitted the skin color to the embryo (*Aith.* 4.8; 10.14). This genetic hybridity is the foundation of the character's complex identity: an estranged white Ethiopian returning home after having lived her entire life first in Egypt and then in Greece²⁴. Heliodorus constructed Charikleia's genetic peculiarity building on a tradition of odd transmissions of resemblance, combining different sources like he did for the giraffe²⁵. It is possible to elaborate further on the connection between the giraffe and Charikleia. I have already pointed out the similarity in the way in which the audience reacts to Charikleia's recognition and to the giraffe. Moreover, given the stress on name-giving, it is worth noting that 'Charikleia' is the only other name in the novel whose origin is narrated. In Kalasiris' flashback, Charikles states: «And now the child lives here with me: she is my daughter, she is named after my name» (2.33.3)²⁶. Of course 'Charikleia' is a patronymic, but it is also, like 'Theagenes', a compound name which contains two characteristics of the person who bears it, as the Delphic oracle makes plain («One who start in grace and ends in glory, another goddess-born», 2.35.5)²⁷. As a further look at accounts of giraffes reveals, the nature of these animals also partook in a genetic hybridity similar to the one which characterizes Charikleia.

After entering the ruling country, the giraffe entered its system of knowledge, as writers endeavored to categorize the animal via a common taxonomic procedure: divide the unknown animal into knowable parts, describe those parts, and put everything back together²⁸. And so the observation of the animal's most evident characteristics produced a name, 'camelopard', which is also an embryonic description: «As its name indicates, [the camelopard] too is a composite animal, having the spots of a leopard but the size of a camel» (Michael Attalates, *Historia* 2.48)²⁹. While this was almost a standard formula, different viewers saw different things in the giraffe. Strabo notes that the fur is more similar to a fawn's than to a leopard's (16.4.16), and Posidonius says, puzzlingly, that the giraffe's neck is in fact shorter than the camel's, and that the similarity to a leopard also pertains to the giraffe's head and eyes (*Fragmenta* 78.55-61). Indeed, the study of the giraffe seems to have revolved for the most part around the accumulation of similarities one could observe about the animal's body³⁰. Strabo adds that the hind-parts are as high as an ox's, and Philostorgius that the body resembles that of a very large stag (*Historia ecclesiastica* 3.11.19). Comparisons to four animals are drawn by Pliny, who sees the neck of a horse, feet and legs of

known. But Gatier conjures up this event on the basis of four words in *Geoponica* (ἐθεασάμην ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ καμηλοπάρδαλιν, 16.22.9), which is a little fanciful.

²³ See Slater (2005) for a discussion on languages and translations in the *Aithiopia*.

²⁴ See discussions in Whitmarsh (1998), Perkins (1999), and Elmer (2008).

²⁵ Sources in Rohde (1876³: 476 n.4), and Morgan (1978: 361-363); discussions in Reeve (1989), Whitmarsh (1998), Hilton (1998), Olsen (2012).

²⁶ Καὶ ἔστι νῦν ἡ παῖς ἐνταῦθα σὺν ἐμοὶ παῖς μὲν οὖσα ἐμὴ καὶ ὄνομα τοῦ μὲν ὀνομαζομένην.

²⁷ Τὴν χάριν ἐν πρώτοις αὐτὰρ κλέος ὕστατ' ἔχουσιν φράζεσθ', ὧ Δελφοί, τὸν τε θεᾶς γενέτην.

²⁸ On the ancient naming of exotic animals see Bodson (2005).

²⁹ Ἔστι δὲ καὶ αὕτη κατὰ τὸ ὄνομα σύνθετος, φολίδας μὲν παρδάλεως ἔχουσα, καμήλου δὲ μέγεθος.

³⁰ For comparisons between sources see Morgan (1978: 448-449) and Gatier (1996: 909-914).

an ox, head of a camel, and the fur of a leopard, though, oddly, with white spots on a reddish base (HN 8.27). On top of the usual camel and leopard, Ps.-Oppian sees the mouth of a stag and the tail of a gazelle (*Cynegetica* 3.477-481)³¹. Five animals for Heliodorus, who, in addition to the usual, sees the hind-parts of a lion, the neck of a swan, and the head size of an ostrich, for Timotheus of Gaza, who adds the tail and horns of a gazelle, the mouth of a deer, and the teeth of a bull (*Sylloge Constantini* 2.271), and for Georgius Pachymeres, who adds the body size of a donkey, the neck of a crane, and the feet of a stag (*Relations historiques* 3.4 = Failler 1984, 239). Thus, different viewers had different perceptions of the whole as well as of the particular. And while it is true that other details enter these descriptions, like the speed (Strabo), the gait (Heliodorus, Timotheus of Gaza, Attaliates), and the docility of the animal (Strabo, Heliodorus), the most evident effect is that of a collage of body parts taken from a variety of animals. This accumulation can be seen as symptomatic of the context in which giraffes were encountered. At victory parades, the more the prisoners, gold, artefacts, artworks, and animals, the stronger the message of empire. If the parade is a microcosm of empire, the giraffe, a walking zoo, is a microcosm of the parade.

The collage of different animals combined ekphrastic and ethological purposes. Authors were interested in making the readers picture these strange animals in their minds, and to that end they employed comparisons to better-known animals. In this sense, the vocabulary of mixture, which is omnipresent in accounts of giraffes, is there to instruct readers on how to make a mental collage in order to “see” the animal³². Thus, the use of a greater number of animals for comparison, as in the *Aithiopika*, aimed at helping readers form a more accurate mental picture. Some authors are clear about the fact that they are engaged in comparisons. Philostorgius, for instance, says that the giraffe’s body *imitates* the height of the camel’s (μιμεῖσθαι, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.11.21), Pliny that the neck is *similar* to a horse’s (*similem*, HN 8.27). For many others, however, mixture was also the closest thing to a definition of the animal’s actual nature: camel and leopard were joint not just on a linguistic level, but even on a physical one³³. Agatharchides, as we have seen, says as much: «There is among the Troglodytes also the one the Greeks call camelopard, who, according to its name, has obtained in a certain compound way also its nature» (*De mari Erythraeo*, 72.2)³⁴. There is reasonable uncertainty as to how the union may have occurred («in a certain compound way [σύνθετον τρόπον τινά]»), and, in general, authors avoided the question altogether, simply opting to say that the giraffe had a mixed nature, whatever that meant. The exceptions are few and entertaining. Posidonius (2nd-1st century B. C. E.) ascribes the giraffe’s quizzical body to the sun, which, as the greatest source of life, generates the most portentous bodies where it shines brightest and hottest, that is, in the countries where giraffes originate (*Fragmenta* 78.65-66)³⁵. Michael Glycas (12th century C. E.), attempting to align the book of Genesis with secular historiography and geography, interpreted the mixture of camel and leopard quite literally. According to him, the aridity of African sunbeaten regions forced different species to share the few sources of water available, and in the encounters thus caused the strangest hybrid creatures were generated (*Annales*, 117-118)³⁶. I will now focus on a third case, that of Timotheus of Gaza, which takes us very close to

³¹ The giraffe is the first of two hybrid animals described towards the end of Book Three (next is the ostrich, union of camel and sparrow). Soon after the start of the description, a reference to the many forms of fishes (ὅσ’ εἰναλίοις νεπόδεσσιν 3.465) can be used as a reminder that Oppian’s *Halieutica* too shows a little interest in imagining hybrid creatures (cf. 2.594-595, with Kneebone 2020: 221). The giraffe and the ostrich are also next to one another, though in reverse order, in Diodorus Siculus, among the animals of Arabia (2.50.3-2.51.1).

³² See, for instance, the use of μίξις and its compounds in Posidonius (μίξις, *Fragmenta* 78.56), Ps.-Oppian (μικτὰ φύσιν, *Cynegetica* 3.462), Timotheus of Gaza (μίξις τις, *Sylloge Constantini* 2.270), and Michael Glycas (ἐπιμίξις, *Annales* 117). Cf. συντίθημι in Agatharchides (σύνθετον τρόπον, *De mari Erythraeo* 72.2) and Michael Attaliates (τὸ ὄνομα σύνθετος, *Historia* 2.48). Cf. also Horace (*diversum genus*, *Epist.* 2.1.195).

³³ See Bodson (2005: 467-472). In general on wondrous animals see Beagon (2014).

³⁴ παρὰ τοῖς Τρωγλοδύταις ἐστὶν καὶ ἡ λεγομένη παρ’ Ἑλλήσι καμηλοπάρδαλις, σύνθετον τρόπον τινὰ κατὰ τὴν κλήσιν καὶ τὴν φύσιν λαχοῦσα.

³⁵ The same explanation for the giraffe can be found in Diod. Sic. 2.51.3.

³⁶ The explanation is borrowed from Aristotle (*Gen. an.* 746b, *Hist. an.* 606b), who, apparently, did not know the giraffe. One might think that such encounters were only necessary in the beginning, and that the first

Heliodorean territories. In particular, it shows that the hybridity of the giraffe is entirely germane to the hybridity at play in the construction of Charikleia.

Timotheus (5th-6th centuries C. E.), a sophist from the so-called school of Gaza, was known in antiquity mainly as a writer of zoology. His work on animals has survived only in excerpted form, but several extended passages entered the so-called *Sylloge Constantini*, a compilation on animals assembled for Constantine VII (10th century C. E.) and containing Aristophanes of Byzantium's epitome of Aristotle's works on animals, Aelian, Timotheus, as well as others³⁷. Indeed, Timotheus himself had gathered the vast majority of his material from other writers (mainly Aristotle, Ps.-Oppian, and Aelian) and seems to have been a compiler rather than an original naturalist³⁸. Giraffes, however, he had seen in person, when two specimens destined to the emperor Anastasius passed through Gaza. Timotheus' description in the *Sylloge* is more similar to Heliodorus' than to any other account of giraffes, specifically with respect to the order of the topics (shape, movement, color -Timotheus has, oddly, black and white-, explanation of the name) and to the detailed description of the animal's gait, to which only Attaliates would also, and much later (11th century), pay attention. To be sure, Heliodorus and Timotheus focus on different body parts and draw comparisons to different animals (five for both), but we have seen that variation on those details was typical³⁹. Moreover, Timotheus believes that the giraffe's biological origin, on which Heliodorus is silent, is the actual union of camel and leopard. About this Timotheus is less than surprised, because other animals are known to interbreed, like lions and dogs, as well as wolves and hyenas (273). However, a strong reminder of Heliodorus in the *Sylloge* comes not directly from Timotheus' words but from the compiler's insertion. After the explanation of the name (end of 271) and before the examples of other mixed animal species (beginning of 273), lies an extract from Aristotle which is at odds with the rest of the passage:

τὰ δ' οὕτως ἐξ ἐτερογενῶν συνελθόντα τῇ μητρὶ μᾶλλον ὁικέναί τι γαίαν. καὶ ἐν μέντοι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πολλάκις ἢ τῶν γειναμένων εἰκὼν ἔσχατον ἀνεγνώσθη καθάπερ δὴ καὶ γυναῖκα παθεῖν ἐν Ἡλιδι λόγος ἀνδρὶ μὲν κατὰ νόμον ἡγμένην, Αἰθίοπι δὲ τὴν εὐνὴν κλέπτουσιν. κόρη μὲν γὰρ ἐκείνῳ τίκεται λευκὴν, αὕτη δὲ, φεῦ, τῇ μητρὶ τὸ μύσος ἀνακαλύπτει, καὶ παῖδα γεννᾷ μέλανα, σαφῶς ὅστις ἦν ὁ πάππος διασαφούντα.

Animals joint in this way happen to resemble the mother more. And often even in humans the image of the parents is recognized in the end, like the story that happened to the woman in Elis who married a man according to custom, but had sex with an Ethiopian in secret. She bore him a white daughter, who, alas, uncovered the mother's defilement and in turn bore a black child, demonstrating clearly who the grandfather was. (272, my translation)⁴⁰

Sex, mixed-origin, and pigmentation seem to be the rationale for the connection, but the jump from animals to humans as well as the stress on maternal impression and recognition are irrelevant to the ongoing examination of the giraffe⁴¹. They may be relevant, however, to the informed readers of the *Aithiopika* who know that the anecdote of the woman of Elis who had sex

giraffes could have done the job themselves afterwards, but Glycas sees his theory through to the end and postulates the union of a camel and a leopard for the birth of each giraffe. According to him, giraffes could not reproduce, because, since they were not in the garden of Eden, they did not heed God's command to go forth and multiply.

³⁷ Edition of the excerpts in Haupt (1869), and translation in Bodenheimer and Rabinowitz (1949). The *Sylloge Constantini*, where we find the full description of the giraffe, is edited by Lambros (1885).

³⁸ Bodenheimer and Rabinowitz (1949: 10) put the total of literary parallels in Timotheus' work at 99.8%. For them, Timotheus was just providing the basic naturalistic information a philosopher might have needed.

³⁹ See Morgan (1988) for a close look at the giraffes in Heliodorus and Timotheus.

⁴⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 722a, and *Hist. an.* 586a.

⁴¹ Cf. the critical apparatus in Lambros (1885: 95). Although Aristotle's works on animals were often on Timotheus' mind (cf. Bodenheimer & Rabinowitz 1949: 7), it is unlikely that the reference to Aristotle belongs to Timotheus: the end of 271 («for this [the black and white skin] it seems that the animal is a combination of a camel and a leopard») segues logically onto the beginning of 273 («Indeed, many other animals enjoy strange loves and intercourse»).

with a black man and gave birth to a white daughter is not just any story but the ur-story behind Charikleia's conception⁴². Heliodorus' (evidently modified) version of it had first been offered at *Aith.* 4.8 and then explained at 10.14⁴³, leading to Charikleia's recognition, only minutes before the scene with the giraffe at 10.27. Now, detailed descriptions of giraffes and their gait are rare in antiquity, and so are anecdotes on odd maternal impressions, but the close concomitance of the two in the same work occurs only in the *Aithiopika* and the *Sylloge*. Moreover, the detail of «the image of the begetters recognized at the end» (ἡ τῶν γειναμένων εἰκὼν ἔσχατον ἀνεγνώσθη), which is absent in Aristotle's version, is tantalizingly reminiscent of Charikleia's recognition at the end of the *Aithiopika* thanks to the literal image of one of her begetters, the painting of Andromeda. Still, it is difficult to suppose that the Byzantine compiler connected Timotheus' giraffe to Heliodorus' and, recognizing the similar genetic oddity of Charikleia's case, appended the anecdote on maternal impressions, but in Aristotle's version and not Heliodorus'. The safest explanation is that this sort of stories belonged in the same miscellaneous scientific sources which were available to Heliodorus, Timotheus, as well as the Byzantine compiler⁴⁴. It is therefore more productive to think about the common denominators which justified the pairing of these stories.

These stories revolve around the wonder of physical hybridity, evidenced by peculiar complexions, and the subsequent search for origins. Moreover, they present paradoxes whose explanation is dispatched more quickly by the observation of similarity than by any other epistemological tool: patent similarity between two specimens (e.g. maculated fur in giraffes and leopards) proves not only correlation but also any potential explanation for it, no matter how fantastical (giraffes come from leopards, who have sex with camels). Similarly, once onlookers see that Charikleia and the painted Andromeda are identical, further explanations lose importance: «Those members of the crowd with the slightest understanding of what was being said and done explained it to their neighbors, and the exactitude of the likeness struck them with delighted astonishment» (*Aith.* 10.15.1)⁴⁵. After the similarity has been witnessed, the real difficulty would be to prove that Charikleia is *not* related to Andromeda. The giraffe is therefore a counterpart for Charikleia⁴⁶. It is not just a realistic presence that increases the historical patina, and not just an allegory for riddles. Giraffes belonged to the real world but were creatures so miraculous that they allowed for incredible explanations. Placed at *Aith.* 10.27, the giraffe reminds readers that creatures as paradoxical as Charikleia did populate the real world, and increases the believability of her hybrid origin.

To summarize my points so far. The ekphrasis of the giraffe at *Aith.* 10.27 was a rich choice for Heliodorus, and a look at ancient sources on giraffes allows us a full appreciation. True to his "historiographical pose", Heliodorus reproduced a realistic context for the display of the giraffe, introducing the animal in the course of a victory parade and therefore projecting onto Meroë the markers of a successful empire⁴⁷. But Heliodorus here played at writing history as well as at making it, inventing the "original" giraffe-giving, complete with the animal's christening. Also thanks to this, the giraffe can be seen as symbolic of Charikleia. In the course of the same event, both of them find their origins and engage the audience in similar cognitive activities. Moreover, Charikleia and the giraffe possess hybrid bodies whose genesis is puzzling, and the ancient literature on the subject seems to have made the connection. In light of all of this, it is remarkable that, at the level of the plot, the giraffe is linked to a series of events aimed to put Theagenes, and not Charikleia, in the spotlight. These events seem to underline Theagenes' heroism, but, as I hope to show, they are also designed to amplify the ongoing hybridity of the spectacle and apply it to him.

⁴² Versions of this story can be found elsewhere. See, for instance: Pliny, *HN* 7.10, Pseudo-Plutarch, *Placita philosophorum* 906e, Galen, *De theriaca ad Pisonem* 11, Elias, *in Cat.* 231.16.

⁴³ On Heliodorus' knowledge and display of ancient theories on conceptions see D'Alconzo (2019).

⁴⁴ That Heliodorus and Timotheus were drawing on the same source is the conclusion in Morgan (1988), where, however, the insertion on maternal impressions is not taken into consideration.

⁴⁵ ὅσοι καὶ κατὰ μικρὸν συνίεσαν τὰ λεγόμενα καὶ πραττόμενα, διαδελούντων καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἀπηκριβωμένον τῆς ὁμοιότητος σὺν περιχαρεῖ ἐκπλαγέντων.

⁴⁶ Cf. Spittler (2008: 64).

⁴⁷ But one eventually destined to end, as Cioffi (2024: 228-230) observes.

3. A show of hybridity

Superior physical beauty is a key quality of all protagonists of the novels, as well as a plot engine. However, even when the protagonists are made to look quasi-divine⁴⁸, the realism of their bodies, that is, the fact that they function like normal bodies do, is never doubted. Not Charikleia's body, which, as we have seen, disobeys normal rules. In what follows I want to make a similar case for the body of Theagenes, which takes center stage in the scenes ensuing from the arrival of the giraffe. Shortly after that, Theagenes starts to be involved in a series of scenes that create the illusion of hybrid bodies. The scenes in question are a sequence of ekphrases. It begins with a giant Ethiopian given to Hydaspes by his nephew Meroebus, and continues with an elephant, the giraffe, the subsequent frenzy of the horses and bull nearby, Theagenes seizing a horse in order to tame the bull, Theagenes wrestling the bull, and, finally, Theagenes wrestling the giant. The giraffe, therefore, is part of a wider display of exceptional humans and animals, which is only apparently driven by chaos and impromptu decisions. In fact, the return of the giant at the end highlights the ring composition of this scene, which encourages looking for coherence within. Before looking closely at these scenes, a point should be made about their overall function.

The clearest purpose of these events is to provide Theagenes with the opportunity to prove himself a hero, much like Chaereas with his victories in war in the last two books of Chariton's *Callirhoe*⁴⁹. The challenges Theagenes faces and the ways in which he overcomes them allow him to demonstrate bravery, strength, and cunning. As has also been pointed out, by doing all of this Theagenes uses his Greekness to assert his place in Ethiopia, which becomes more Hellenized by the end of the novel⁵⁰. Theagenes' own motives are less clear, to the point that even the omniscient narrator confesses ignorance about them⁵¹. Following as they do the scene of the animals trampling the crowd, Theagenes' actions may seem selfless attempts at saving people from harm. By the time he has subdued the bull, however, Theagenes is making a conscious show of himself, with the effect of attracting sympathies⁵². Later, forced to accept the giant's challenge, he hopes that the risk he runs will pressure Charikleia into revealing their relationship⁵³. Whichever the motive (all the above could be concurrent), Theagenes' *aristeia* consists of creating new troubles for himself and showing everyone how brilliantly he overcomes them, but it does nothing to address, least of all solve, his initial problem, that is, the approaching sacrifice. After the end of the fight against the giant he is led back to where he started, tied up near the altar. Ultimately, Theagenes is recognized thanks to external factors entirely independent of his actions: first the arrival of Charikles, and then the interventions by Sisimithres, Charikleia, and, finally, Persinna. Especially if compared to Chaereas' prowess in war, which is directly functional to his reunion with Callirhoe, Theagenes' *aristeia* is an ineffective feat.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, the assimilation of Callirhoe with Aphrodite in *Callirhoe* (2.2.5), and of Leucippe and Selene in *Leucippe and Clitophon* (1.4).

⁴⁹ See (Morgan 1989: 314–318) on Theagenes' exploits in Book Ten. Important discussions on Theagenes are Jones (2012: 119–173) on *andreia* (also beyond Heliodorus), De Temmerman (2014: 277–304), and Bird (2017) on *sophrosyne*.

⁵⁰ Morgan (1998: 75); Whitmarsh (1999: 22–23). See also Whitmarsh (2011: 119–135).

⁵¹ «I cannot say whether what Theagenes did next was the product of his innate courage or the inspiration of some god or other» (εἴτ' οὖν οἰκοθεν ἀνδρείῳ τῷ λήματι κινούμενος εἴτε καὶ ἔκ του θεῶν ὁρμῇ χρησάμενος, 10.28.4). On Theagenes' motives see Jones (2012: 152–153).

⁵² «Theagenes pressed home his victory, and, using only his left hand to pin the bull to the ground, he stretched his right hand heavenwards and waved and waved, beaming at Hydaspes and the assembled multitude. His smile was an invitation to share his joy, and the bellowing of the bull was like a trumpet call to sound his victory» (Ἐπέκειτο δὲ ὁ Θεαγένης, ταῖν χερσίν τὴν λαίαν μόνην εἰς τὸ ἑπηρεῖδειν ἀπασχολῶν, τὴν δεξιὰν δὲ εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνέχων καὶ συνεχῆς ἐπισείων εἰς τε τὸν Ὑδάσπην καὶ τὸ ἄλλο πλῆθος ἰλαρὸν ἀπέβλεπε, τῷ μειδιᾶματι πρὸς τὸ συνῆδεσθαι δεξιούμενος καὶ τῷ μυκηθμῷ τοῦ ταύρου καθάπερ σάλπιγγι τὸ ἐπινίκιον ἀνακηρυττόμενος, 10.30.5). On Theagenes' self-conscious spectacles see Jones (2012: 125–126).

⁵³ «Then I might strike some blow –or receive one– that would jolt Charikleia out of her complacency, for till now she has resisted the temptation to speak the truth about us or else, most probably, has forgotten about me altogether» («Τί δὲ οὐχὶ καὶ ξιφῆρης καὶ ἔνοπλος, ἵνα τι ῥέξας ἢ παθῶν ἐκπλήσω Χαρίκλειαν, τὴν σιωπᾶν εἰς δεῦρο τὰ καθ' ἡμᾶς καρτεροῦσαν, ἢ καὶ εἰς τέλος, ὥς οἰκεν, ἡμῶν ἀπεγνωκυῖαν;», 10.31.1).

The story, on the other hand, needs exactly this sort of events in order to protract the final solution⁵⁴. After the excitement of Charikleia's recognition (10.14-16), Theagenes' immediate rescue by means of her words only would be anticlimactic. Besides, Theagenes has seen little action since his supportive role in Thyamis' chase of Petosiris around the walls of Memphis (7.6), making an occasion for the display of his abilities somehow in order before the conclusion of the novel. Moreover, a public confession by Charikleia would go entirely against her modesty. Heliodorus' solution is neat. The narration of Theagenes' deeds, while already delaying the finale, is interrupted at key moments by the narration of a separate event occurring inside a tent thereby, that is, Charikleia's confession of her chaste relationship with Theagenes to her mother Persinna⁵⁵. In turn, the women's conversation is interrupted, also at key moments, by the noise of the audience outside, and the dangers faced by Theagenes put increasing pressure on Charikleia to confess. What is remarkable is that, ultimately, it is Charikleia's off-scene confession, rather than anything done by Theagenes on scene, that saves the day⁵⁶. From this point of view, Theagenes' deeds are an accumulation of fillers, a series of exciting set pieces that are an end in themselves (Morgan 1978: 512). This view can be amended if we follow Heliodorus' stress on spectacle and audience, which pervades Book Ten, and make full use of his ekphrases⁵⁷. That is, by paying attention to the onlookers' visual experience we can see that what is played out before their eyes is a cohesive show revolving around the display and re-combination of extraordinary bodies.

For a master of detailed and purposeful locations, both indoors and outdoors, Heliodorus made relatively little effort for Meroë, providing mere glimpses of it and setting all the action in an anonymous plot of land outside the city (10.4.1)⁵⁸. This is turned into a theatre space with make-shift stages and capable of accommodating the enormous audience of Ethiopians (10.4.6; 10.6.1). The rollercoasting entertainment is brought to them in waves. One moment of high tension is the virginity test, when Charikleia walks on the gridiron gloriously and unscathed⁵⁹, and another thrill comes from the exhibition of the painting of Andromeda, which proves Charikleia's claim that she is the royals' daughter⁶⁰. The crowd's involvement with the spectacle increases with the sequence of events that leads to Theagenes' *aristeia*. The giant wrestler brought by Meroëbus, Hydaspes' nephew, comes first (10.25). The crowd does not just marvel passively at the giant's body, they are asked to become part of the spectacle when the arrogant giant looks for challenger. Finding no opponent, he is compensated by Hydaspes with the gift of an enormous old elephant, thus pairing the two oversized creatures. Next in an increasingly complex series is the giraffe, whose compound body engages the audience in an activity of recognition. The animal causes amazement among the crowd but chaos among the animals destined to the sacrifice, leading to two horses and one bull running wild (10.28). As a result, the audience's experience becomes immersive to the point of being dangerous, but it never ceases to be understood as an entertaining spectacle⁶¹.

⁵⁴ See Morgan (1989) on Heliodorus' narrative strategies for the protraction of the ending.

⁵⁵ See Morgan (1989: 315-316).

⁵⁶ To be sure, Theagenes does succeed at putting pressure on Charikleia for her to confess to her mother (10.33.4), but this is put to use only after the commotion caused by Charikles' arrival (10.38.2). Ultimately, all the danger to Theagenes' life needed to stir Charikleia was already provided by the approaching sacrifice.

⁵⁷ On spectacles and audiences in Heliodorus see Bartsch (1989: 109-143, especially 132-135 on the scenes in Meroë).

⁵⁸ Consider, for instance, the descriptions of the Bukoloi's village (1.5-6), Delphi (2.26), or Arsake's palace (7.18-19). Of Meroë we are given: geographical coordinates (10.5), a brief insight of the palace (4.8.3), and a quick look at the streets and sanctuaries (10.3; 10.41.3). Note that the novel ends with Charikleia and Theagenes escorted to the city, but the narrator does not follow them inside.

⁵⁹ «A thrill of wonder ran through the crowd, who in unison made the heavens resound with their cry, wordless and unmeaning, but expressive of their astonishment» (Θάμβος γοῦν ἅμα πάντας κατέσχε· καὶ βοῇν μίαν ὄσημον μὲν καὶ ἀναρθρὸν δηλωτικὴν δὲ τοῦ θαύματος ἐπήχησαν, 10.9.4).

⁶⁰ «This occasioned universal cheering and acclaim» (ἐκίνησαν παρὰ πάντων κρότον καὶ θόρυβον, 10.15.1).

⁶¹ «Uproar ensued, screams of fear from the people in the creatures' path mingling with cries of delight from others, who derived much mirth and merriment from seeing them collide with someone else and flatten anyone who got in the way» (ὥστε καὶ βοὴν αἰρῆσθαι συμμιγῆ πρὸς τὸ γινόμενον, τὴν μὲν ὑπὸ δέους οἷς προσπελάσειαν, τὴν δὲ ὑφ' ἡδονῆς οἷς καθ' ἑτέρους ἐναλλόμενοι τέρψιν τε καὶ γέλωτα τὴν τῶν ὑποτιπτόντων συντριβὴν παρείχον, 10.28.3).

This continues when, next, Theagenes seizes one of the horses and rides close to the bull in order to tame it:

ἀντίπλευρος ἤδη παρίππευε χρωτί τε χρωτὸς ἐπιψαύων καὶ ἵππειῳ ταύρειον ἄσθμα καὶ ἰδρώτα κεραννύων καὶ τὸν δρόμον οὕτως ὁμόταχον ῥυθμίζων ὥς καὶ συμφυεῖς εἶναι τὰς κορυφὰς τῶν ζῶων τοὺς πορρωτέρω φαντάζεσθαι καὶ τὸν Θεαγένην λαμπρῶς ἐκθειάζειν ξένην τινὰ ταύτην ἵπποταύρου ξυνωρίδα ζευζάμενον.

So close that flesh touched flesh, that the bull's breath and sweat mingled with the horse's. So precisely did he correlate the speed of the two racing animals that from a distance the spectators were presented with the illusion that the creatures' two heads sprang from a single neck, and they acclaimed Theagenes as a hero who had brought so strange a team, a hippotaur, a creature half bull, half horse, beneath the yoke. (10.29.1)⁶²

The audience registers a very particular aspect of the whole acrobatics, namely Theagenes' hybridization of the two animals. This is made to correspond to the way in which the audience perceived the giraffe as a mixture of animals, to the point that even the naming of the unknown creature with a compound name is replicated⁶³. Theagenes' next feat, the tauromachy, also produces interlocked bodies:

τοῖς κέρασι τὸ ἑαυτοῦ πρόσωπον κατὰ τὸ μεταίχμιον ἐνιδρύσας τοὺς πῆχεις δὲ οἰοῖναι στεφάνην περιθεῖς καὶ εἰς ἄμμα κατὰ τοῦ ταυρείου μετώπου τοὺς δακτύλους ἐπιπλέξας τό τε ὑπόλοιπον ἑαυτοῦ σῶμα παρ' ὤμον τοῦ βοῦς τὸν δεξιὸν μετέωρον καθεῖς, ἐκκρεμῆς ἐφέρετο, πρὸς βραχὺ μὲν τοῖς ταυρείοις ἄλμασιν ἀναπαλλόμενος. (...) παραφέρει μὲν εἰς τοῦμπροσθεν καὶ προβάλλει τῶν ἑκείνου σκελῶν τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ πόδας, ταῖς χηλαῖς δὲ συνεχῶς ἐναράπτων τὴν βάσιν ἐνῆδρευεν.

He planted his own face between its horns and locked his forearms like a crown around the animal's head, with his fingers knotted in a wrestling grip on its forehead, and allowed the rest of his body to hang suspended clear of the ground alongside the bull's right shoulder. For a moment or two he was borne along dangling like this, flung this way and that as the bull bucked and leapt. (...) he swung his feet round to the front so that they hung just ahead of the bull's legs, and kicked and hacked at its hooves until it tripped and stumbled. (10.30.2-3)

The man who made the hippotaur has created new compound figures by interlacing his own body with the bull's, perhaps most notably with the juxtaposition of the heads. In spite of this performance and the subsequent taming of the bull, Theagenes is tied up and brought back to the altar, with everyone (king included) feeling sorry about his sacrifice but not questioning it. The bond he has managed to create with the onlookers is one between performer and audience. Theagenes' agency over the situation is limited to the fights themselves, which he calculates and controls, but he has no real control of the show. Indeed, his third and last feat is not even initiated by him but by the audience: «Let us have a contest between the winner of the elephant and the captor of the bull!» (10.30.7)⁶⁴. The audience takes control of the show's structure, bringing back the first performer, the giant, in a ring composition. The giant's potential threat, glimpsed at 10.25 but immediately defused, is thus finally put to use. As well as this, the audience demonstrates an understanding of what has ended up being the show's leitmotif. Of course they want to pay back

⁶² Unlike the naming of the camelopard, that of the hippotaur is unmarked, perhaps one of the signs that Ethiopia is becoming more Hellenised. From this point of view, the fact that all the mixtures performed by Theagenes in these scenes conform to classical Greek models of hybridity is also noteworthy. I owe both of these observations to Claire Rachel Jackson.

⁶³ Of course a two-headed creature and a hero who controls it evoke Herculean deeds, but the hybrid animal and its compound name (ἵπποταύρου) recall perhaps more closely the paradoxical creatures encountered for instance in Lucian's *True Story* (e.g. Ἰππόγονοι, Ἰππομόρμηκες, Ἰππογόερανοι).

⁶⁴ Ὁ τὸν ἐλέφαντα λαβὼν τῷ τὸν ταύρον ἐλόντι διαγωνιζέσθω.

the giant for his earlier arrogance as well as see more of Theagenes' ability, but their request («the winner of the elephant and the captor of the bull») manifests a specific interest in the kind of human/animal combinations they have been enjoying: they have recognized the connecting theme and want to see one additional fusion. Intertwined bodies are exactly what they get:

παχεῖαν τὴν γαστέρα χαλεπῶς ταῖς χερσὶ διαζώσας τὴν βάσιν τε κατὰ τὰ σφυρὰ καὶ ἀστραγάλους τῇ πτέρνῃ σφοδρῶς τε καὶ ἐπαλλήλως ἐκμοχλεύσας εἰς γόνυ τε ὀκλάσαι βιασάμενος ἀμφιβαίνει τοῖς ποσὶ καὶ τοῖς κατὰ τοὺς βουβῶνας τὰ σκέλη καταπεῖρας τοὺς τε καρπούς οἷς ἐπεριδόμενος ὁ Αἰθίοψ ἀνέιχε τὰ στέρνα ἐκκρουσάμενος καὶ τοῖς κροτάφοις εἰς ἄμμα τοὺς πῆχεις περιαγαγὼν ἐπὶ τε τὰ μετάφρενα καὶ ὤμους ἀνέλκων ἐφαπλώσαι τῇ γῇ τὴν γαστέρα κατηνάγκασε.

With some difficulty he got his arms around the Ethiopian's enormous stomach and with his heels kicked and hacked at its ankles with all his might, not ceasing until he had prized his feet off the grounded forced him to his knees. Then, straddling his opponent, he forced his thighs apart with his legs, knocked away the Ethiopian's wrists, which were taking the weight of his body and holding his torso clear of the ground, knotted his arms around his head, and wrenched them backwards towards his back and shoulders, so sending him sprawling on his belly on the ground. (10.32.2)

The combination of man and giant, the last of the series, virtually exhausts the range of possible anthropo-zoomorphic mixtures. The audience has so far witnessed the giant and the elephant, the giraffe (an animal made of animals), the man on the hippotaur, and the tauromachy. Other than the common theme, the series is strung together by a strong visual component, made stronger by the repetition of certain images. Most evidently, Theagenes' arms locked around the giant's head and his heels kicking the giant's ankles recreate two figures of the earlier tauromachy⁶⁵. But there is also the giant's attitude as he walks around looking arrogantly (ὑπέροπτόν τι καὶ σοβαρὸν; ὀλκά; ὑποσοβῶν, 10.30.8), which recalls that of the giraffe (βλοσυρῶς σοβοῦσα; ὀλκόν, 10.27.2-3) (Morgan 1978: 499). And so, what the plot presents as a disorderly sequence of chaotic events appears before the eyes of the audience almost as a series of connected tableaux depicting variations on the theme of extraordinary body combinations.

Unlike the audience of Ethiopians, the readers can appreciate that the anthropo-zoomorphic combinations undergone by Theagenes started long before the events in Meroë, all the way back to his introduction in Delphi earlier in the novel. As has been noticed, Delphi and Meroë form "narrative doublets" (Morgan 1998: 72-77). They are linked by repetitions which create symmetry between the beginning and the end of the couple's journey. For instance, both in Delphi and Meroë there are public religious ceremonies, as well as athletic competitions. In both instances Theagenes demonstrates perfect control of his body for performance's sake, seen in his deliberate fall into Charikleia's arms at the end of the race and in the deception used in the wrestling match, when he makes the giant careless by pretending to have been badly hurt by his blows (10.31.5-6)⁶⁶. The readers might also notice that Theagenes' deliberate fall in Delphi (τοῦ δρόμου δῆθεν τὴν ῥύμην οὐκ ἐνεγκῶν, 4.4.2) is similar to the bull's fall in Meroë (Ὁ δὲ τὴν ῥύμην τοῦ δρόμου παραποδίζόμενος, 10.30.4). This last example points to a narrative doublet so far unnoticed, which revolves around the illusion of physical hybridity that I have highlighted as the theme of the spectacle in Meroë. Consider, for instance, Calasiris' description of Theagenes upon first meeting him:

ὀρθὸς τὸν αὐχένα καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ μετώπου τὴν κόμην πρὸς τὸ ὄρθιον ἀναχαίτῳ, ἡ ρὶς ἐν ἐπαγγελίᾳ θυμοῦ καὶ οἱ μυκτῆρες ἐλευθέρως τὸν ἀέρα εἰσπνέοντες, ὀφθαλμὸς οὕτω μὲν χαροπὸς χαροπώτερον δὲ μελαινόμενος σοβαρὸν τε ἄμα καὶ οὐκ ἀνέραστον βλέπων, οἶον θαλάσσης ἀπὸ κύματος εἰς γαλήνῃν ἄρτι λεαινομένης.

⁶⁵ See Morgan (1998: 74) for this and further parallels. The Delphi-Meroë doublet has been stressed recently by Grethlein (2022:41).

⁶⁶ On Theagenes' display of rationality in the wrestling match see Jones (2012: 147-149) and De Temmerman (2014: 301-303).

He carried his head erect, and had a mane of hair swept back from his forehead; his nose proclaimed his courage by defiant flaring of his nostrils; his eyes were not quite slate blue but more black tinged with blue, with a gaze that was awesome and yet not unattractive, rather like the sea when its swelling billows subside, and a smooth calm begins to spread across its surface. (2.35.1)

Looking closely at this physiognomic description of Theagenes, Jones (2012: 120-122) points out the connection between appearance and *andreia*, and also observes that Theagenes has something of a horse in him, seen especially in the way his hair is tossed back (ἀναχαιτίζων). This is hardly unintentional, given that Theagenes' traits anticipate precisely the traits of his horse at the parade shortly after, also described by Calasiris:

Εἶπες ἂν καὶ τὸν ἵππον αὐτὸν συνιέναι τῆς ὠραιότητος τοῦ δεσπότης καὶ ὡς καλὸν κάλλιστον φέρειν τὸν ἡνίοχον αἰσθάνεσθαι, οὕτω τὸν αὐχένα κυμαίνων καὶ εἰς ὀρθὸν οὐς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐγείρων καὶ σοβαρὰν τὴν ὄφρυν κατὰ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἐπιδινεύων ἔφερε τε καὶ ἐφέρετο γαυρούμενος, εὐήνιά τε προποδίζων καὶ ἐφ' ἑκάτερον ὦμον ἑαυτὸν ἐν μέρει ταλαντεύων ἄκραν τε τὴν ὀπλήν τῇ γῇ λεπτὸν ἐπικροτῶν εἰς γαλγνὸν κίνημα τὸ βῆμα κατερρύθμιζεν.

The very horse seemed to understand what a fine thing it was to carry such a fine rider on its back, so proudly he flexed his neck and carried his head high with ears aprick; there was arrogance in the way his brows arched over his eyes, and pride in his step as he pranced along with his master on his back; he obeyed the rein's every command, and with each pace he paused for an instant in perfect balance with one leg uplifted, gently clipping the ground with the tip of his hoof so as to give a smooth and gentle rhythm to his gait. (3.3.7)

The horse's majestic attitude makes Calasiris imagine that the animal, with preternatural intelligence, is modelling itself after its rider. Thus, Calasiris projects his first impression of Theagenes onto the horse, highlighting the straight neck, the arrogant eyes, and the calm composure⁶⁷. Even the marine metaphor used for Theagenes's calm eyes (εἰς γαλήνην) reappears for the horse's gait (εἰς γαλγνὸν κίνημα). It is worth stressing the iconic effect of these close-ups. Here as in Meroë, Theagenes is a spectacle conveyed by ekphrasis, and what we read is the perspective of a viewer amazed at, and making connections between, physical appearances. The iconic effect is augmented by a further connection between the figure cut by the man and the horse and the images within it. For, just before the description of the horse, we are showed famous hybrid iconographies: Theagenes' mantle is embroidered with the depiction of the battle of Lapiths and Centaurs, and his clasp shows Athena with the Gorgon on her breastplate (3.3.5). The *mise en abyme* informs the subsequent description. The embedded images of hybrid creatures, the Centaurs in particular, enhance the perception of the outer bodies, the man and the horse in perfect unison, as image. As a result, Theagenes provides a spectacle of hybridity in both his first appearance and his almost last one. His body is a vehicle for amazement not just because of its handsomeness and heroism, but also because of the paradoxical fusions of which it is capable. What remains to be seen is how this informs the readers' understanding of Theagenes.

The varying combinations undergone by Theagenes' body may arguably symbolize his broad journey as a character, from an initial balance, to the perturbation caused by love and the subsequent adventures, to the restoration of balance once all the problems are solved. Accordingly, the viewers in Delphi (only moments before Theagenes falls in love) see the harmonic union of man and horse, and those in Meroë (when the crisis of his situation peaks) see impossible anthropo-zoomorphic transformations, before the release of tension and the achievement of marriage. The development is perhaps best represented by the contrast between the calm gait of the horse in Delphi (εἰς γαλγνὸν κίνημα τὸ βῆμα κατερρύθμιζεν, 3.3.7) and the disorderly gait of the giraffe (τὸ βάδισμα χερσαίου τε ζώου καὶ ἐνύδρου παντὸς ὑπεναντίως σαλευόμενον, 10.27.3), the opposite

⁶⁷ The parallels are noticed by Jones (2012: 122 n.101).

marine metaphors underlining the correlation⁶⁸. Furthermore, if we wish to see in animals symbols of the animal side of the human psyche, it is easy to interpret Theagenes' triumph over the chaos of transformations as his mastering erotic passion. His welcome as lawful husband and priest of the Sun at the end of the novel speaks to this development⁶⁹. While these interpretations are possible, Heliodorus' continuous stress on spectacle points in a different direction. On the occasions considered, Theagenes is always looked at by an audience who is amazed not by what he does as much as by the incredible figures into which his appearance can morph. I suggest that, by doing so, he is made to partake in the kind of natural paradoxes that characterize Charikleia. Book Ten is designed around her recognition, which hinges on the acknowledgment of her strange body. A show of bodies that defy normal rules is then staged, to entertain and appeal to the audience, and also to normalize the strangeness. Theagenes, who is meant to share Charikleia's destiny, entertains the audience by creating with his body the illusion of hybrid creatures, with the result that his body too, like hers, is perceived as capable of miracles. Thus both protagonists are given bodies that are not only wonderful, but also full of wonders.

The giraffe offered to Hydaspes in Meroë is a perfect example of the narrative complexity which accompanies the readers of Heliodorus from the beginning of the story to the end⁷⁰. Previous studies, as I hope to have showed, did not fully do it justice. I have contextualized Heliodorus' account of the giraffe both within ancient, late-antique, and Byzantine writings on this animal, and within the plot. The way in which giraffes were conceptualized served Heliodorus in two seemingly contradictory ways, giving credibility both to the victory parade as a historically plausible event and to Charikleia as a plausible paradox. Moreover, something which previous commentators have overlooked, the giraffe is also functional in extending onto Theagenes the wonders of physical hybridity.

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⁶⁸ Bartsch (1989: 148), notices that an element of conflict is already attached to Theagenes in Delphi, represented by the battle of Lapiths and Centaurs on his mantle.

⁶⁹ From the point of view of abandoning the animal side and entering a religious organisation, Theagenes' finale has some elements in common with Lucius' in Apuleius' novel. Finkelpearl (2017) juxtaposes Apuleius and Heliodorus from the point of view of the collapse of the animal/human divide, but with vegetarianism (of Kalasiris and Sisimithres) in mind when it comes to Heliodorus.

⁷⁰ Down to the very final words of the *sphragis*. Cf. the two final chapters in Repath and Whitmarsh (2022).

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