TEXTUAL PROBLEMS IN
THE POEMS OF THEOCRITUS

Resumen: Explicación de diversos pasajes de Teócrito
Palabras clave: Teócrito. Crítica textual griega.

Abstract: Several passages of Theocritus are explained
Key words: Theocritus. Greek textual criticism

Idyll VII

1. At line 1 ff. Simichidas explains that he once went with Eucritus and Amyntas to take part in a harvest festival to Demeter:

'Ης χρόνος ἀνέκ' ἐγών τε καὶ Εὐκρίτος εἰς τὼν 'Αλειτα
eἰρήμες ἐκ πόλιος, σὺν καὶ τρίτος ἄμμιν 'Αμύντας,
tὰ Δήρα γὰρ έευξε θαλόσια καὶ Φρασίδιαμος
cαντυγένης, δύο τέκνα Δικωπέος, εἰ τι περ εσθάλιν
5 χαῦ ς τῶν ἐπάνωκυ ἀπό Κλυτίας τε καὶ αὐτῶ
Χάλκιαν, Βούριαν ὡς ἐκ πόδος ἀνεκ κράιναν.

In his commentary on line 2, Gow stated that the word πόλιος refers to «the town of Cos on a small harbour near the N.E. corner of the island (Pl. VI)». I would like to point out, however, that there is no evidence that Theocritus is referring here to the town of Cos. Simichidas cannot be walking «from the town» (Gow, line 2), «de la ville» (Legrand), i.e. from Cos, because Lycidas asks him (line 24) whether he is going to «a townsman’s» place (ἀστών) —«quelque citadin» (Legrand). I would therefore like to suggest that we should understand that the adjective ἐκπόλιος1 has been used by the poet to describe Amyntas. We should translate as follows: «Time was when Ecritus and I were going to the Haleis, and greyhaired (ἐκπόλιος) Amyntas2 made a third with us». For the adjective ἐκπόλιος cf. ὀλυγοπόλιος, σπαρτοπόλιος, ἐπιπόλιος («going grey»), and μεσαπόλιος.

2. At line 15 ff. Lycidas is described:

15 ἐκ μὲν γὰρ λαπίσιο δασύτριχος εἶχε τράγου

1 Cf. LSJ s.v. ἐκ G, 2: «to express completion, like our utterly». Cf. also LSJ s.v. ἐκλείσις (‘very white’). Cf. moreover, Odyssey 24, 299 πόλιοι = «greyhaired men».

For the position of καὶ cf. Theocritus, Idyll 25, 44: τοῦ γάρ με καὶ ἤγειον ἐνθάδε χρέω.

2 At line 132 Amyntas is described as καλος 'ΑΜΥΝ-
tιχος. The diminutive 'ΑΜΥΝτιχος is used as a term of endearment. Evidently ἐκπόλιος is equivalent to σφόδρα πολιον (Plato, Parm. 127 B: Παρμενίδην σφόδρα πολιον, καλον κάγοιν τήν ὁμιον): here Amyntas is said to be ἐκ-
pόλιος and καλος in line 132.
On his shoulders he wore the tawny skin of a thick-haired shaggy goat reeking of fresh rennet, and round his breast an aged tunic was girt with a broad belt; in his right hand he grasped a crooked club of wild olive. And with a quiet smile and twinkling eye he spoke to me, and laughter hung about his lip.

According to Gow, Lycidas wore a broad belt. It is, however, also possible to imagine that Theocritus means that Lycidas held a club of wild olive «in his broad right hand» (πλακερό... / δεξιερά).

3. At line 24 ff. Simichidas is described as hastening to a banquet:

«Art hastening unbidden to some banquet or speeding to some townsman’s winepress, for as thou goest each pebble spins singing from thy shoes?»

The reader will note that Gow printed the reading ἀκλητος, in line 24, which he translated as «unbidden». I would like to point out, however, that ἀκλητος may also mean «much-invited». Thus Simichidas is imagined to be speeding to the banquet of somebody who eagerly awaits his arrival. For the employment of ἀ-4 with intensifying force cf. «Arnd Kerkhecker, Callimachus’ Book of Iambi, Oxford, 1999, 334 pp.», Habis 33, 2002, page 665. In other words, I favour the explanation given by the scholiast, who prefers the reading δαίτα κλητος, only I read δαίτα ἀκλητος, taking ἀκλητος to mean «much invited». It is impossible to believe that Simichidas would go to a banquet without having been invited, and would, moreover, confess as much.

4. At line 37 ff. Simichidas states that he is a poet:

καὶ γὰρ ἔγω Μοισάν καπηρὸν στόμα, κήμε λέγοντι πάντες ἀοίδῳ ἀριστών· ἐγὼ δὲ τὶς οὐ ταχυπειθής, οὐ δέν· ὦ γὰρ ποιοι κατ᾽ ἐμὸν τῶν κατ᾽ ἐκθαλὸν

Συκελείδαν νική τὸν ἐκ Σάμω οὔτε Φαιλίταν

αἰείδων, βάτραχος δὲ ποτ᾽ ἀκρίδας ὡς τὶς ἐρείδων, ὦς ἐφάμαν ἐπίπτας· ὁ δ᾽ αἰπόλος ἀδύν γελασὰς, 'τὰν τοι', ἐθα, 'κροφίναν διαρττομαι, ὡς ἐσώτερον

τὰν ἐπ᾽ ἀλαθεία πεπλασμένον ἐκ Δίων ἔρνος.


4 According to the ancient scholia, at Aratus, Phaenomena, line 1121 the adjective ἀχείμερος means «very stormy» (πολυχείμερος).
line 44 *kekasmevno* v.l.

The reader will note that Gow printed the reading *peplasmevnon* in line 44. I would like to suggest, however, that better sense is provided by the variant reading *kekasmevno*. The goatherd states that Simichidas has in truth (ἐπ’ ἀλαθεία) surpassed (ἐσσι, ἔκ *kekasmevno* all saplings (πᾶν ἔρινος) because of Zeus (ἐκ Διός). In other words, Zeus has caused Simichidas to become the best poet.

5. At line 130 ff. Theocritus mentions Pyxa and Prasydamus’s farm:

130 *χι μὲν ἀποκλίνας ἐπ’ ἀριστερά τὰν ἐπὶ Πίξας εἰρθ’ ὤδου’ αὐτὰρ ἐγώ περὶ τὸν Ζεὺς θεοῦ* στραφθέντες ἔχω καλὸς Ἀμινίτιχος ἐν τῇ βαθείᾳ ἀδείᾳ σχοῖνοι χαμηνύσιν εἰκόνιμες ἐν τῇ νεοτμάτωσι γεγαθότες οἰναρέωσι.

The reader will note that Gow translated the participle *strafqet* in line 132, as «turned». I would like to suggest that better sense can be made of this passage if we understand that Theocritus is referring to the fact that Simichidas and his friends lay «tossing and turning» on their couches. The aorist participle *strafqet* has been employed by Theocritus without any sense of anteriority. We should translate as follows: «But I and Eucrius and fair Amyntas at Phrasydamus’s farm, tossing and turning (στραφθέντες) lay down rejoicing on deep couches of sweet rush and in the fresh-striped vine-leaves».

Idyll VIII

1. At line 71 ff. Daphnis sings a song:

1.75 ἂλλα καὶ τῷ βλέψας τὰν ἀμετέραν ὄδον εἴρπων.

Translation by Gow:

«And second Daphnis struck up his clear-voiced song: Da. Me too from out her cave a maid with meeting brows spied yesterday, as I drove past my heifers, and cried, «How fair, how fair he is.» Yet gave I not back even the bitter answer, but bent my eyes upon the ground and went my way».

Daphnis states in this passage that he «drove his heifers». I would like to suggest that the poet has employed obscene puns. The verb ἔλαύνω means both «drive» and βινέω. Moreover, the noun

5 Cf. LSJ s.v. καίνημα. For the employment of the periphrastic construction cf. LSJ εἰρθ B, 2: «periphr. with the participle to represent the finite verb».


7 Cf. *MPhL* 11, 2002, page 133. Cf. also LSJ s.v. *strafw* B: «Pass. and Med., twist or turn oneself… ἐστράφητ’ ἐνθα καὶ ἐνθα, of one tossing in bed (Iliad 24, 5)».

8 Cf. LSJ s.v. ἔλαύνω I, 5.
2. At line 81 ff. the goatherd states that Daphnis is the winner of the singing-contest:

'Ως οἱ παιδεῖς Ἀείσιν, ὁ δ’ αἰπόλος ὤδ’ ἀγόρευεν
ἀδώ τι τὸ στόμα τοι καὶ ἐφιμέρος, ὁ Δάφνης, φωνᾶ·
κρέσσου μελπομενὸν τεν ἄκουομεν ἤ μὲλε λείχειν.
λάσθεν ταῖς σύργγας, εὖκασας γὰρ αἰείδων.
85 οἱ δὲ τὰς λῆς μὲ καὶ αὐτῶν ἀν’ αἰτολοίσταν διδόξαι,
τίμαν τὰς μυτιλίναι δωσώ τὰ διδακτρά τοι αἴγα,
ἂν ὑπὲρ κεφαλᾶς αἰεῖ τὸν ἀμολυγέα πληροῖ.

According to Gow, the goatherd offers to give Daphnis a goat «that always fills the milk-pail over the brim». I would like to suggest, however, that the goatherd says that he is willing to give to Daphnis a goat which always fills the milk-pail on account of its life (ὑπὲρ κεφαλᾶς11). The goat is humorously imagined to fear that if it does not provide milk, and thus satisfy the goatherd, it will be killed12 and eaten.

**Idyll X**

At line 42 ff. Milon sings a song concerning harvesters:

Δάμαστερ πολύκαρπε, πολύσταχι, τούτο τὸ λάον
εὐφηγοῦν τ’ εἰὶ καὶ κάρπησον ὅττι μάλστα.
σφιγγετ’, ἀμαλλοῦσαν, τὰ δράγματα, μὴ παριών
τες
45 εἰπ’ ἄπολετο χοῦτος ὁ μισθός.’

Translation by Gow:

«Demeter, rich in fruit and rich in grain, grant this crop be easy harvested and fruitful exceedingly.
Binders, bind up the sheaves, lest someone pass and say, ‘Here be fig-wood fellows; here’s more wages wasted.’»

Gow noted that scholars have been puzzled by the text of line 45. I would like to suggest that better sense can be made of this passage if we print line 45 as follows:

εἰπ’ ‘ἡ σύκουναι ἂνδρες’ ἀπόλετο χοῦτος ὁ μισθός.’

The binders are told to bind the sheaves of corn, lest somebody passes by and says, «Surely (ἡ13) the men are14 useless (σύκουναι ἂνδρες).»

10 At Theocritus, Idyll 5, 89 the words τοὺς αἰγας παρελάντα mean both «driving the goats», and «having sexual intercourse with female goats»: cf. «Further notes on the Idylls of Theocritus», Veleia 21, 2004, page 152.
11 Cf. LSJ s.v. κεφαλῆ (3): «life».
12 Cf. Idyll I, line 6, where it is stated that the flesh of a kid is sweet.
13 Cf. Idyll 18, 21: ἢ μέγα καὶ τι τέκοιτ’ κτλ.
14 For the ellipse of the verbum substantivum cf. my Studies in the Poetry of Nicander, page 51.
1. Lines 1-3:

"Εν τοι' ἀρα Σπάρτα ἕξεφτιμαί πάρο Μενελάῳ
παρθενικά θάλλοιτα κόμισας ὑάκινθον ἔχουσαι
πρόσθε νεογράττωθα λάμμω χιοῦν ἑστάσαιτο,

According to Gow,15 Theocritus is referring in line 2 to maidens with blooms of hyacinth in their hair. I would like to suggest, however, that the participle ἔχουσαι16 means «holding». The maidens are said to be holding hyacinth, which had been plucked, and which was flourishing with foliage (θάλλοιτα κόμισας).17

2. Lines 32-34:

οὐδὲ τις ἐκ ταλάρῳ πανίσδεται ἔργα τοιαῦτα,
οὐδὲ ἐν δακταλῷ πολυκυρίῳ ἄτριῳ λιτῷ
κεράδι συμπλέξασα μακρῶν ἐταμ' ἐκ κελάντων.

Gow translated the verb πανίσδεται as «winds off». It is, though, possible to obtain good sense from this passage if we understand that πανίσδεται means here «spins». Cf. LSJ s.v. ἐκπηράζομαι: «spin a long thread». Theocritus says that nobody spins due to her wool-basket such yarn as Helen. He then adds that she also excels at weaving. Cf. LSJ s.v. ἐκ ἸΙ, 6: «of Cause, Instrument, or Means by which a thing is done». The wool-basket held the wool before it was spun.

3. Lines 35-37:

ओ μᾶν οὐδὲ λέαν τις ἐπίσταται οὐδὲ κρετῆσαι
"Αρτεμίνα δείδουσα καὶ εὐφράστηρον Ἀθάναν
ὡς Ἔλενα, τὰς πάντες ἐπ' ὀμμασιν ῥομρο ἐντί.

Scholars have been puzzled by the meaning of line 37: cf. Gow’s note ad loc. I would like to suggest that the girls mean that they yearn for Helen. Translate as follows: «Nobody is so skilled to strike the lyre and hymn Artemis as Helen, for whom (τᾶς) all desires are in our eyes». Similarly at line 42 the girls are said to long for (ποθεύομαι) Helen.

4. Lines 43-44:

πράται τοι στέφανον λωτῷ χαμαὶ αὐξομένῳ
πλέξασα σκιερὰν καταβόθομεν ἐς πλατάνστου.

The girls state that they intend to make a garland for Helen. I would like to suggest that the words στέφανον λωτῷ ... αὐξομένῳ18 mean «a wreath of the praised water-lily». Gow pointed out that the

16 Cf. Longus, Book II, 4: πάις μύρτα καὶ μοίας ἔχουν.
17 Cf. LSJ s.v. κόμις II: «metaph., foliage of trees, Od. 23, 195».
18 Cf. LSJ s.v. αὐξάνω (2): «exalt by praise, extol, επαινεῖν καὶ αὐξέων τινά, Pl. Ly 206 a».
water-lily was used for garlands in Egypt. We should translate as follows: «We first will twine for you a wreath of the praised water-lily and set it on a shady plane on earth». In other words, the water-lily will be placed on dry land and removed from its natural habitat.

**Idyll XIX**

To κλέπταινα ποτ’ Ἐρωτα κακά κέιταςε μέλισσα
κηρίοι: εκ σύμβλω διελείμμαν, ἀκρα δὲ χειρῶν
δάκτυλα πάνθ’ ὑπενιξέν. ὁ δ’ ἄλγε καὶ χέρ’ ἐφόση
καὶ τὰν γὰν ἐπάταξε καὶ ἀλατο, τὰ δ’ Ἀφροδίτα
5 δεῖξεν τὰν ὀδύναν, καὶ μέμφετο ὅτι γε τυπθόν
θηρίου εἰσὶ μέλισσα καὶ ἀλίκα τραύματα ποιεῖ.
χὰ μάτηρ γελάσασα: ‘τι δ’ οὐκ ἤσσε ἰσαὶ μελίσσαις,
οὐ τυπθόν μὲν ἕεις τὰ δ’ ἀλίκα τραύματα ἀλίκαι ποιεῖς;’

**Translation by Gow:**

«A cruel bee once stung the thievish Love-god as he was stealing honey from the hives, and pricked all his finger-tips. And he was hurt, and blew upon his hand, and stamped and danced. And to Aphrodite he showed the wound, and made complaint that so small a creature as a bee should deal so cruel a wound. And his mother answered laughing, ‘Art not thou like the bees, that art so small yet dealest wounds so cruel?’».

In this poem Theocritus describes how Eros was stung on his finger when he stole honey from the bees. The critics have been puzzled by the meaning of the words χέρ’ ἐφόση, in line 3. I would like to suggest that, since φυσάω can be used in the sense «blow out», «extinguish» something which is on fire (LSJ, s.v. I, 4), and since the sting of the bee was, as a topos, compared with fire, here the sense is «he blew out» his hand, which was, metaphorically, on fire.

The imperfect of φυσάω / φυσάω (here spelled ἐφόση or ἐφόσει: both variants are attested) is conative. Eros tried to blow out his burning hand. The pointe is felicitous: the θῆμα of the bees, which Eros suffered, is just as πυρίσπαρτον as the θῆμα of Eros himself (A.Plan. 408).

It should, moreover, be noted that Theocritus has employed the poetic plural. The bee is said to have «secretly stung» (ὑπενιξέν) the whole tip of the finger of Eros’ hand (ἀκρα δὲ χειρῶν / δάκτυλα 21 πάνθ’). Eros is said by the poet to have shown this wound to Aphrodite and complained to her.

**Idyll XX**

1. At lines 26-27 an oxherd describes his mouth and his voice:

   τὸ στόμα δ’ αὖ πακταὶς ἀπαλώτερον, ἐκ στομάτων δὲ
   ἐρρεῖ μοι φωνὰ γλυκερωτέρα ἢ μελὶ κηρίο.

   **line 26 ἀπαλώτερον Valckenaer γλυκερωτέρον mss.**

20 Cf. LSJ s.v. ὑπενθέω, ὑπενθεπτεῖο, ὑποκορίζομαι, ὑπόργυμαι.
21 For the poetic plural cf. my Studies in the Poetry of Nicander, page 39. Gow pointed out that «a bee leaves its sting in the wound and can therefore sting only once».
The reader will note that Gow printed the alteration ἀπαλότερον in line 26. Textual alteration is, however, not warranted. Gow, like Legrand, thinks that γλυκερώτερον in line 26 is a scribal error caused by γλυκερωτέρα in line 27, but repetition is common in Theocritus (and in Hellenistic poetry: cf. my note 22). Moreover, the πακτά was decidedly sweet (admixto melle, Thea. s.v. πακτος, 1042, D).

The oxherd states that his mouth is «sweeter» (γλυκερώτερον, i.e. more pleasant) than curds (πακτάς), and that his voice is sweeter (γλυκερωτέρα) than honey. Cf. Ovid, Met. 13, 796 where the words mollior et cyeni plumis et lacte coacto mean «more pleasant (mollior23) than swan’s down and curdled milk».

2. At line 34 ff. the poet refers to the fact that Aphrodite loved Adonis and Selene loved Endymion:

οὐκ ἔγραψε δ’ ὅτι Κύπρις ἐπι’ ἀνέφη μήματο βοῦτα
καὶ Φρεγίος ἐνίσχυσεν ἐν ὀρέσι, καὶ τῶν Ἀδώνων ἐν δραμοίσι φίλασσε καὶ ἐν δραμοίσι δέκασεν.
Ὀθλυμπίδι δὲ τις ἤ; ὅπε βουσκόλος; ὅπε γε Σελήνα
βοσκολείουσα φίλασσε, ἀπ’ Θόλυμπῳ δὲ μιλούσα
Λάτμιον ἂν νάπος ἦθε, καὶ εἰς ὅμα παλί καθεύδε;

line 39 Λάτμιον Iunt. Cal. λάθριον v.l.

Translation by Gow:

«Nor knows she that Cypris lost her wits for a neatherd and tended herds upon the hills of Phrygia, and loved Adonis in the thickets, and in the thickets mourned him. Who was Endymion? was not he a neatherd —whom Selene loved as he tended his kine, and came from Olympus through the glades of Latmus to lie with her darling?»

The reader will note that Gow, following Legrand, printed the reading Λάτμιον in line 39. It should be noted, however, that Λάτμιος is the name of a mountain. According to Theocritus, Selene came from Olympus to a glade (νάπος). I would therefore like to suggest that the correct reading in this passage is λάθριον. Selene is said to have come «secretly» (λάθριον) to a glade (νάπος) in order to make love with Endymion. The adverb24 λάθριον alludes to the fact that Selene wished to keep her illicit union with Endymion secret from the gods. Similarly Aphrodite tried to hide her sexual adventures: cf. MPBL 10, 1996, page 50. Cf. also Odyssey 8, 269 λάθρη.

Idyll XXIX

At line 19 ff. Theocritus advises a youth not to act in a fickle manner:

τάδερα τῶν ὑπερανοφέων δοκέων πιένην
20 φιλή δ’, ἄς κε ζήος, τῶν ὑμοιον ἔχριν ἄει, τ
αὐ γὰρ ὅθε πόση, ἀγαθὸς μὲν ἀκόμα

22 Cf. LSJ s.v. γλυκώ: «mostly metaph., even in Hom., pleasant, delightful». For similar cases of verbal repetition cf. my commentary on Theocritus’ Idyll 24 (Amsterdam 1979), page 106.
23 Cf. Lewis and Short, A Latin Dictionary, s.v. mollis II, B: «Soft, pleasant».
24 For the employment of the neuter singular as an adverb cf. D. Kidd, Aratus, Phaenomena, Cambridge 1997, page 499. The neuter form λάθριον is here adverbial, and is equivalent to λάθριος (like λάθρη: cf. LSJ, s.v. λάθριος).
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Translation by Gow:

«(Thou art too fickle, and shouldst cling ever to thy like). If so thou dost thou shalt be of fair repute in the town and Love shall not deal hardly with thee —Love that lightly tames the hearts of men, and has robbed me, that once was iron, of all my strength».

Gow noted that lines 19-20 «present desperate difficulties». I would like to suggest that perfect sense can be restored to the transmitted text if we place a full stop after φιλ’, in line 20, and translate as follows: «You seem, my dear (φιλ’), to be redolent of arrogant men. But surely (ἡ δ’) always keep (ἐξην) the same person for as long as you live».

For elision followed by a full stop cf. e.g. Idyll 1, 116.

Idyll XXX

At line 16 ff. Theocritus mentions aged lovers and young boys:

καὶ μὰν ἄλλο σε λάθει· τὸ δ’ ἄρ’ ἡ λόων ἐμέναι ἕξινοι τῶν χαλέπων παιδὸς ἐρωτῶν προγενέστερον· τῷ μὲν γὰρ βίως ἔρπει ἵσα γόννος ἐλάφῳ θόας· χαλάζει δ’ ἀτέρα ποταμόπηρν αἵρειν ἄρμενα.

line 18 γόννος Buecheler γόννος Κ θόας Bergk θοᾶς C

Translation by Gow:

«Ay, and this too hast thou forgotten: better it is for him who is older to hold aloof from the painful love of lads. For one, life speeds on the hoof of the swift deer; to-morrow he will cast loose his tackle and set forth to sail another course».

The reader will note that Gow, following Legrand, printed the alterations γόννος and θοᾶς in line 18. Textual alteration is, however, not warranted. Theocritus states that life hastens like «the swift offspring of the deer» (γόννος ἐλάφῳ θοᾶς).

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25 Cf. his commentary ad loc.
26 Cf. Theocritus, Idyll 15, 74 and 24, 40 φιλ’ ἀνδρῶν.
27 The infinitive ἐξην has been employed instead of the imperative. Cf. my commentary on Theocritus’ Idyll 24, page 72.
28 Cf. LSJ, s.v. γόννος: ὁ, and (in signf. 1), ἦ, E. IA 793... that which is begotten, child... offspring.
29 Gow compared AP 15, 27, 13 (Simias) θοᾶς ἵσ’ αἰόλαις νεβραῖς καλ’ ἀλλάσσου, ὀραιτίδας ἐλάφων τέκεσσιν.