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Callimachus 310 B.C.-240 B.C.

The poetry of Menander, and of Herondas (#68) can be taken, with that of Callimachus, to remind us of how deeply different the poetry of Hellenistic Greece was, from those early lyricists, like Archilochos or Sappho, who wrote two hundred years earlier, and in the first flower of Greek personal expression. (The earlier poets were fresh and bold in their emotions; the Hellenistic poets are more sophisticated and more self-conscious.) Callimachus is a good example of this cultural change; a poet of immense culture, a scholar and librarian as well as a poet, he belongs to the post-classical world of classical Greece.

Callimachus was born in the Greek colony of Cyrene, in Libya. He was the scion of the first Greek royal family to have reigned in Africa, his line having been founded and settled in Cyrene for eight generations before him. From youth on he was learned and fastidious, conscious of his fine background, and hating, as he put it, 'all common things.' It was thus appropriate that he should have found his way into the most culturally rich institution of his time, the Library at Alexandria. Having been appointed the second director of the Library, under the patronage of Ptolemy II, the Greek Pharaoh of Egypt, Callimachus composed his lengthiest work, the *Pinakes*, which was a catalogue of the several hundred thousand papyrus scrolls in the Library. (The Library was fully staffed with sub librarians, crammed with international scholars, and a home especially to scientists and inventors.) The actual work of Callimachus himself is left largely in fragments, and although he is said to have written eight hundred 'works,' there remain only six hymns, sixty four epigrams, and bits and pieces on papyri. (You will have been learning, throughout this ebook catalogue, how slender a thread holds us to many of the formative texts of Ancient Greek literature.) The following may be representative of the kind of brief, pithy text Callimachus left us:

But twelve short years you lived, my son,
Just twelve short years, and then you died:
And now your life's brief course is run,
This grave a father's hopes doth hide.