Antiquarian Allusions and Inventions in "Charalampia"

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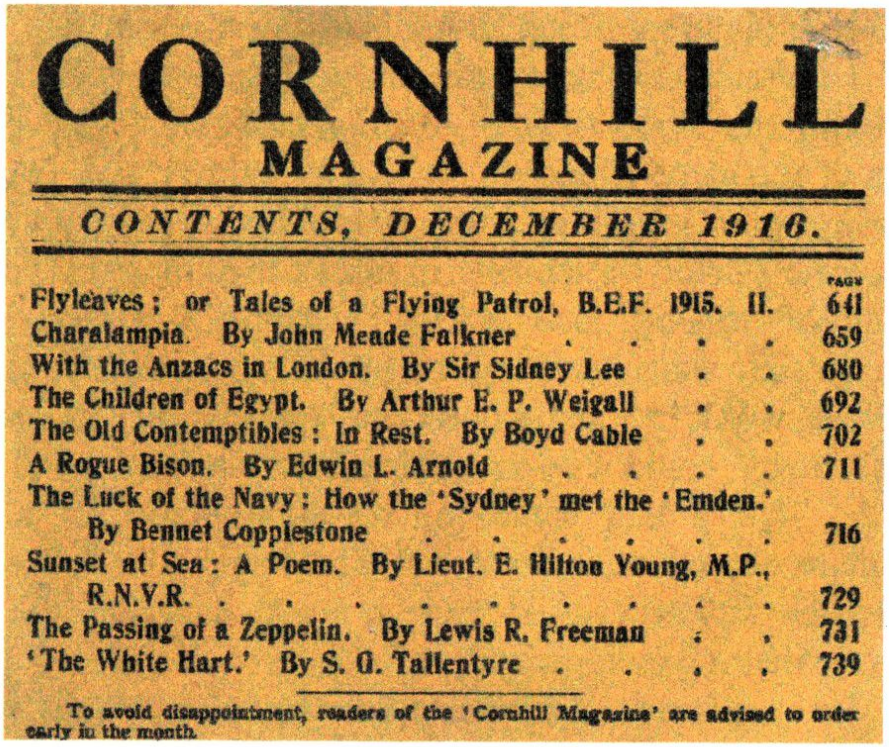
Falkner's "Charalampia" is an uncommonly charming, playfully learned short story. The author inserts into his narrative a number of genuine antiquarian references (e.g. to the Myrelaion, Mount Gargarus [now Turkish Kaz Dai], the Panormium – real places, even if sometimes anachronistic for the story's date; to peltasts, which sound like monsters in a story by Jack Vance, but which indeed were warriors; to Onagers - but an onager is a siege engine, not a tribesman).



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The first publication of *Charalampia* was in the *Cornhill Magazine*

Some of the names of persons and places are readily explicable and make good sense in the context of the story's themes and setting. Sophrosyne, the name of headstrong Charalampia's governess, is a Greek word referring to an excellent, well-balanced, moderate character! Panagia is a common term in Orthodox Christianity for the All-Holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary. Kalodendria, probably an invention of Falkner's, is an appropriate word for a place of beautiful trees, as the Greek roots indicate.

Queen Poliphile bears the name of the (male) hero of an allegorical tale, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, attributed to "an

> "An example, which in modern times would be Considered ludicrous, of the manner in which our ancestors made external nature bear witness to our LORD, occurs in what is called the Prior's Chamber in the small Augustinian house of Shulbrede, in the parish of Linchmere, in Sussex. On the wall is a fresco of the Nativity; and certain animals are made to give their testimony to that Event in words which somewhat resemble, or may be supposed to resemble, their natural sounds. A cock in the act of crowing, stands at the top, and a label, issuing from his mouth, bears the words, *Christus natus est*. A duck inquires, *Quando quando*? A raven hoarsely answers, *In hâc nocte*. A cow asks, *Ubi ubi*? and a lamb bleats out, *Bethlehem*.

Incidently, in Norwegian author Sigrid Undset's superb first novel of Kristin Lavransdatter, *The Wreath* (1920), the young heroine is told the same legend. One could easily imagine Charalampia hearing such a legend on Radix Jesse (Root of Jesse) Day during the Advent season.

• A woodcut from the 1499 edition is reproduced as illustration #102 in *Gombrich on the Renaissance: Volume 2: Symbolic Images* by Ernest Gombrich [Phaidon, 1993]

** The late Lin Carter, American author of "swords and sorcery" tales of pulp fantasy, once named a villainous character Herpes Zoster (the affliction more commonly known as shingles).

*** As, evidently, was T. S. Eliot, in his poem "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," whose entire first line is "Polyphiloprogenitive." This peculiar poem is, like "Charalampia," marked by a learned playfulness, an arcane vocabulary, and a number of Greek-sounding references – Origen, the Paraclete (the Holy Spirit), *to en* (transliteration of Eliot's Greek in line 6), etc.

Italian monk." Perhaps this obscure work* which an internet site says is about "the strife of love and the dark side of the human soul" suggested to Falkner the idea for his own account of a strong-willed young lady; or perhaps he just made up the name on his own. It's amusing that Falkner's tale has a Lake Astyanax, because Astyanax is both a character from mythology (son of Hector and Andromache), and, so, appropriate for the Greek-world milieu of the story, and is also a small, blind fish – an aquatic creature, like the noisy frogs of the tale. Did Falkner know that? Falkner's evident playfulness extends to the point of identifying the story's source as the author Trachylides, which sounds like a good name for such a venerable personage, but which proves to be the scientific name of a class of jellyfish!** (It is possible that Falkner concocted the name on his own; it might mean something like "rough edges.")

I regret that I have been unable to identify Charalampia's lesson-book, the *Aphorisms* of Poliorcetopoulos. However, the elements of the name appear to resolve as follows: *poli* (suggesting *poly*, many; *poli* suggests cities, where many people dwell), *or* (mouth), *ceto* (Ceto is a monster in Greek mythology; cf. cetology, the study of whales), and *poulos*, a common Greek surname. Falkner seems to have been amused by the agglomerative quality of some Greek words*** and names, and perhaps here is making up one of his own – could it be something like "many-mouthed monster Poulos"? – not a bad name for someone noted for a tedious compendium of sayings, a book that Charalampia dislikes so much. (But perhaps Falkner would have a good laugh at the present author's amateur etymologizing.)

On a journey, Charalampia hears of a hermit who has brought conversion to the frogs: "'They used to be a sad heathenish lot who could only repeat a jargon of 'Brek-kek-ke-kex-koax-koax,' which had come down from pagan times; but Paulus has won them to better things, and now they continually cry 'Pax, pax, pax – peace, peace, peace.'" Moreover he has taught the crows to cease from "Caw, caw, caw," so that now they cry "Laus, laus, laus" (*praise* in Latin).

Here, Falkner seems to be playing with the medieval fancy of beasts' speech praising God. The Victorian antiquarian and hymnographer John Mason Neale, in his 1853 book *The Unseen World; Communications with It, Real or Imaginary, including Apparitions, Warnings, Haunted Places, Prophesies, Aerial Visions, Astrology, Etc.*, [second ed., p.20], presents a contemporary symposium in which Sophron says,