



Callistratus

Complete Works

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Ancient Classics Series

The Complete Works of
CALLISTRATUS

(fl. 3rd century AD)



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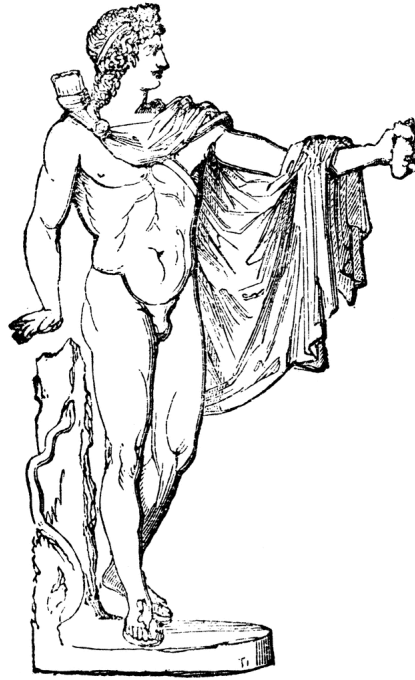
Introduction to Callistratus (1931) by Arthur Fairbanks

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The Complete Works of
CALLISTRATUS THE SOPHIST



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Complete Works of Callistratus



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The Translation



The Theban Necropolis, Egypt — Callistratus claims to have viewed the statue in his first description in Egyptian Thebes.

Descriptions



Translated by Arthur Fairbanks, Loeb Classical Library, 1931

Callistratus was a sophist and rhetorician, who likely flourished in the third century AD. He composed Ἐκφράσεις, offering fourteen descriptions of works of art in stone or brass by distinguished artists. They are written in a dry and affected style, with some artistic knowledge. It remains unknown to what extent the descriptions are of real works of art, but they do reveal how artists treated their subjects. The predominant feature of the text is an interest in rhetorical skill, displaying the writers' powers of description, rather than serving as a work of serious art criticism.

Sadly, we know nothing of the author's life or other works.



Satyr playing a flute, Louvre —believed by some to be based on the subject of Callistratus' first description, this marble sculpture derives from a famous antique model, first recorded in 1638 in the Villa Borghese in Rome. It was purchased by Napoleon and transported to the musée du Louvre by 1815, where it remains today.

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Narcissus, Roman c. second century AD, Rome, Vatican Museums — this work is likely the subject of the 19th description by Callistratus.

1. ON A SATYR ¹



THERE WAS A certain cave near Thebes in Egypt which resembled a shepherd's pipe, since as it followed its winding course in the depths of the earth it formed a natural spiral; for it did not take a straight course at the opening and then branch off into straight-running corridors, but winding about under the mountain it made a huge spiral, ending in a most difficult maze. In it was set up an image of a Satyr wrought in marble. He stood on a base in the attitude of one making ready to dance, and lifting the sole of his right foot backward he not only held a flute in his hand but also was being the first to leap up at its sound; though in reality the flute's note was not reaching the player's ear, nor yet was the flute endowed with voice, but the physical effect which flute-players experience had been transferred to the stone by the skill of the artist. You could have seen the veins standing out as though they were filled with a sort of breath, the Satyr drawing the air from his lungs to bring notes from the flute, the statue eager to be in action, and the stone entering upon strenuous activity – for it persuaded you that the power to blow the flute was actually inherent in it, and that the indication of breathing was the result of its own inner powers² – finding a way to accomplish the impossible.³ The body had no trace of delicacy, but the hardness of the members had stolen away their beauty, making the form rugged with the symmetry of manly limbs. For though soft skin and dainty limbs befit a beautiful girl, the appearance of a Satyr is unkempt, as of a mountain spirit that leaps in honour of Dionysus. The statue was wreathed with ivy, though the sculptor's art did not cull real berries from a meadow, nay, rather, it was the stone which for all its hardness spread out into sprays and encircled the hair, creeping back from the forehead till the ends met at the sinews of the neck. Pan stood beside him, delighting in the music of the flute and embracing Echo, in fear, I suppose, lest the flute set in motion some musical sound and induce the nymph to make an echoing response to the Satyr. When we saw this statue we could well believe that the Ethiopan stone statue of Memnon⁴ also became vocal, the Memnon, who when Day came was filled with joy by her presence, and overcome by distress when she departed, groaned with grief - the only stone figure that has been moved by the presence of joy and sadness to depart from its natural dumbness, so far overcoming its insensibility as to gain the power of speech.

2. ON THE STATUE OF A BACCHANTE



IT IS NOT the art of poets and writers of prose alone that is inspired when divine power from the gods falls on their tongues, nay, the hands of sculptors also, when they are seized by the gift of a more divine inspiration, give utterance⁵ to creations that are possessed and full of madness.⁶ So Scopas,⁷ moved as it were by some inspiration, imparted to the production of this statue the divine frenzy within him.⁸ Why should I not describe to you from the beginning the inspiration of this work of art?

A statue of a Bacchante, wrought from Parian marble, has been transformed into a real Bacchante. For the stone, while retaining its own nature, yet seemed to depart from the law which governs stone; what one saw was really an image, but art carried imitation over into actual reality. You might have seen that, hard though it was, it became soft to the semblance of the feminine, its vigour, however, correcting the femininity, and that, though it had no power to move, it knew how to leap in Bacchic dance and would respond to the god when he entered into its inner being. When we saw the face we stood speechless; so manifest upon it was the evidence of sense perception, though perception was not present; so clear an intimation was given of a Bacchante's divine possession aroused it; and so strikingly there shone from it, fashioned by art in a manner not to be described, all the signs of passion which a soul goaded by madness⁹ displays. The hair fell free to be tossed by the wind and was divided to show the glory of each strand, which thing indeed most transcended reason, seeing that, stone though the material was, it lent itself to the lightness of hair and yielded to imitation of locks of hair, and though void of the faculty of life, it nevertheless had vitality. Indeed you might say that art has brought to its aid the impulses of growing life, so unbelievable is what you see, so visible is what you do not believe. Nay, it actually showed hands in motion – for it was not waving the Bacchic thyrsus, but it carried a victim as if it were uttering the Evian cry, the token of a more poignant madness; and the figure of the kid was livid in colour,¹⁰ for the stone assumed the appearance of dead flesh; and though the material was one and the same it severally imitated life and death, for it made on part instinct with life and as though eager for Cithaeron, and another part brought to death by Bacchic frenzy, its keen senses withered away. Thus Scopas fashioning creatures without life was an artificer of truth and imprinted miracles on bodies made of inanimate matter; while Demosthenes, fashioning images in words, almost made visible a form of words by mingling the pigments of art with the creations of mind and intelligence. You will recognize at once that the image set up to be gazed at has not been deprived of its native power of movement¹¹; nay, that it at the same time is master of and by its outward configuration keeps alive its own creator.¹²

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