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Decision against Abortion in an Ancient Greek Novel (Chariton, *Callirhoe* 2.8–11)¹

Abstract: The article firstly outlines attitudes toward abortion in the Greek pagan world. Against this background, a unique passage from *Callirhoe*, a Greek novel from the first century AD, is presented. It is the longest ancient text on the subject and the only one that presents the opinions of women (and perhaps is also authored by a woman). These women are Callirhoe, who was sold into slavery, and Plangon, another slave. The article includes a translation of *Callirhoe* 2.8–11 and discusses its message. The novel cites some justifications for abortion (the unfortunate fate of the prospective slave and his mother; avoiding an unwanted marriage), but speaks of a child, not a fetus. In the end, the protagonist describes abortion as unlawful and ungodly infanticide and states that both the child and its father would have voted for life. The life of the child is more important than the personal virtue of *sophrosyne*.

Keywords: Chariton, *Callirhoe*, abortion in antiquity, women in antiquity, criticisms of abortion, human embryo, *sophrosyne*

1. Abortion in Antiquity

Modern theological and moral debates about abortion mostly fail to take into account the fact that it is a problem that has been known for a long time. In fact, abortion was already the subject of legislation and judgments in ancient times. The criticism of abortion does not originate from a specifically Christian position, different from the secular one, since the problem was also known in the Greco-Roman world. Knowledge of those points of view can aid today's philosophical and theological reflection.

¹ Translated from Polish by Maciej Górnicki.

The topic of the attitude to abortion in the Greco-Roman world, first pagan and then Christianized, is a broad one and has already been covered extensively,² although this knowledge is not popular. Here it is possible to cite only selected information on the subject, conceived as a background to the text from *Callirhoe*. The general picture is that although the law permitted abortion, we encounter voices critical of it. The same was true of the exposure of infants at birth: it was legally permitted, but by no means praised.

The explanation for this contradiction lies probably in the fact that in the ancient world children were treated as if they were the property of their parents, especially the father. He could refuse to accept a newborn child and decide to abandon it (the mother could do it when the father was missing). This was generally the case in both the Greek and Roman worlds. Sometimes the state stepped in, ordering the killing of crippled children; this was the case in Sparta (Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 16.1–2) and in the Roman Law of the 12 Tablets (4.1).

Abortion was known, both surgical and pharmacological. It involved much greater risks for the woman than today, which was a bit of a deterrent. Nevertheless, as a rule, the fate of the child was decided by the parents, above all the father. This kind of perception of the status of children meant that abortion, although mentioned, did not become an important topic of legal and ethical reflection in the Greco-Roman world. Nevertheless, the statements of the ancients provide the rationale for such reflection.

We know of only one ancient work that was devoted explicitly to abortion (for a later treatise by Pseudo-Galen, see below). This was a court speech by the rhetor Lysias (445–378 BC) known under the title *De abortu*, lost but discussed by later rhetoric textbooks.³ Antigenes the Athenian accused his wife before the Areopagus, claiming that she had committed murder through abortion. Arguing

² Nardi, *Procurato aborto*, and especially Kapparis, *Abortion*. In Polish more: Longosz, “Ojcowie Kościoła”; Starowieyski, “Aborcja i życie nienarodzonych”; Muszala, *Embrion ludzki*. There you can find detailed news on the issues only hinted at in the article. I also use the summary contained in an earlier study of my own: Wojciechowski, “Starożytne głosy.”

³ In detail, Kapparis, *Abortion*, 185–193.

the case, Lysias asked the question of when an embryo is a human being, and was to conclude from the experience of doctors and midwives that abortion is murder and should be punished accordingly. The court, for reasons unknown to us, dismissed the charge.

Equating abortion with murder, however, was not common. It occurs in Latin literature (Ovid, *Amores* 2.13–14; cf. *Heroides* 11.37–44; accompanied by the motif of mortal danger to the woman, e.g., *Amores* 2.14 line 15: *Ilia si tumido geminos in ventre necasset*; Juvenal, *Satires* 6.596: *homines in ventre necandos*; cf. also *Satires* 6.366–368, 592–600; earlier Plautus, *Truculentus* 201–203).

Let us mention a few other critical references to abortion from the Greek world. Euripides' *Andromache* (c. 419 BC) takes a negative view of abortive agents, considering their use to be a criminal act (*Andr.* 355–360; *ei sēn paida pharmakeuomen* – “if I practise on thy child by philtres,” etc.). Perhaps already in the list of atrocities in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (185–190), the destruction of semen/offspring and fertility also alludes to abortion. On the other hand, Socrates in Plato seems to implicitly allow it (*Theaetetus* 149CD), and Plato himself would have abortion or child abandonment mandated when parents were too old or too young (*Respublica* 461A–C).

The so-called Hippocrates' oath, preserved in the collection of the writings of his school, but of uncertain authorship (4th century BC), proclaims:

I will give no deadly medicine to anyone if asked, nor disseminate any such information; and likewise I will not give to a woman a pessary to procure an abortion.⁴

Abortion is thus equated here with the finishing off of the elderly and wounded. In the Hippocratic work on women's diseases, agents procuring abortion are allowed only for the removal of dead foetuses and when the mother's life is in danger.

The author of the treatise *An animal sit quod in utero est*, written in the second century AD and later attributed to the physician Galen, defends the humanity of the unborn and maintains that the classical

⁴ Kapparis, *Abortion*, 67. Longosz, “Ojcowie Kościoła,” 259.

Greek lawmakers, Lycurgus of Sparta and Solon of Athens, criminalized abortion (so point 5).⁵ According to Plutarch (c. 100 BC), Rome's founder Romulus listed abortion among the reasons for divorcing his wife (*Romulus* 22.3).⁶ Justinian's *Digesta* contain several dozens of references to the rights of a child not yet born (*nasciturus*).⁷

All these sources are all rather late, but it is possible that abortion was punished also earlier, namely the kind performed without the consent of the woman's husband. Cicero, in his eulogy *Pro Cluentio* 11.32; 12.34 (66 BC), describes the sentencing to death of a resident of Miletus who, by abortion, deprived her deceased husband of a future heir; she was induced to do so by her husband's relative who was greedy to take the inheritance – this situation, however, seems to be exceptional. Musonius Rufus, a philosopher from the middle of the first century AD (frag. 15.77), mentions bans on abortion motivated by the fact that it reduces the number of citizens.

Although ways of inducing a miscarriage were known, there was a sense that this was an evil act that made one unclean and excluded one from worship. More than a dozen inscriptions on this subject from temples (Cyrene, Delos, Lindos, Smyrna) have been preserved. Here are excerpts from the private shrine of a certain Dionysius in Philae, Lydia (Hellenistic times: *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* 3.985):

Zeus gave Dionysios the ordinances in order to perform the purification, cleansing, and mysteries according to the traditional custom and as ordained here. Men and women, free and slaves, upon entering this sanctuary must swear by all gods that they have not known anything insidious against a man

⁵ Extensively on the views of ancient philosophers and physicians: *Claudii Galeni opera omnia* 19.179. Polish: Pseudo-Galen, "Czy to, co znajduje się w łonie."

⁶ The translation refers to "using poisons" (Plutarch, *Lives*, I, 163), but abortifacients were not distinguished from ordinary poisons and magical decoctions; by which in fact so-called "witches" were originally poisoners.

⁷ For example, *Digesta* 1.5.7: *Qui in utero est, perinde ac si in rebus humanis esset custoditur, quotiens de commodis ipsius partus quaeritur: quamquam alii antequam nascatur nequaquam prosit.*

or a woman, or an evil drug that could be used against people, and that they neither know nor employ evil incantations, or philtres, or abortifacient drugs, or contraceptives, or anything else which could result in the killing of a child, and that they do not employ such items, or give advice, or relate information about them to anyone.⁸

In view of the principle that parents decide about the lives of their children anyway, acquiescence to abortion did not presuppose the negation of the humanity of children before birth. However, certain medical and philosophical concepts may have led in this direction. The observation that at an early stage the embryo does not have the shape of a human body suggested that it was not yet human – without the knowledge of genetics, it was not known that future development was already programmed at the earliest stage. This is probably the origin of Aristotle’s concept of successive animation and the popular distinction between the unformed foetus and the formed foetus until modern times (from Empedocles, frag. 605). The physician Galen (2nd century AD) spoke of the child from the fortieth day onward; somewhere around then the heartbeat begins (cf. *De semine* 1.9–10; cf. earlier Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 735A); today there is also such a tendency in legislation.

Then, the Stoic concept that the soul is of the nature of the universal mind embodied in the element of air led to the opinion that the rational soul enters a person only at birth, with the first breath, although from today’s point of view this is an absurd and archaic view. Such a view is probably behind Seneca’s way of speaking, who, praising his mother, stated:

Never [...] have you attempted to conceal your pregnancy as though it were a burden that brought you dishonour, or ever crushed the hopes of the children conceived within your womb (*Ad Helviam matrem de consolatione* 16.3; *nec intra viscera tua conceptas spes liberorum elisisti*).

⁸ Kapparis, *Abortion*, 214–215; Longosz, “Ojcowie Kościoła,” 258.

Incidentally, the Stoics considered the foetus to be a part of the mother's body, of her womb (Gr. *meros tēs gastros*, Latin *pars viscerum*).

At the same time, in the Jewish⁹ and then Christian world, we encounter thinking strongly opposing abortion and child abandonment. Both were equated with murder. The background to this is the assumption present in the Bible that human life should be counted from conception, and the unborn being dubbed children; abortion itself is not mentioned in the biblical texts.¹⁰ However, this had no apparent reflection in Greek and Roman authors. So I will cite only the earliest testimonies, formulated in Greek, and written by the time the novel about Callirhoe was written.

An anonymous Jewish author from the first century after Christ, claiming to be the poet Phocylides (Pseudo-Phocylides), in his collection of moral thoughts presenting biblical ideas in Greek garb, writes:

Do not let a woman destroy the unborn babe in her belly, nor after its birth throw it before the dogs and the vultures as a prey (184–185).

Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher from the mid-first century AD, states:

For if it is proper to provide for that is not yet brought forth by reasons of the definite periods of time requisite for such a process, so that even that may not suffer any injury by being plotted against, how it can be otherwise than more necessary to take similar care of the child when brought to perfection and born (*De specialibus legibus* 3.111).

He then speaks poignantly about the evil of killing or abandoning newborn babies.

⁹ Freund, "The Ethics of Abortion."

¹⁰ Wojciechowski, "Biblia o dzieciach."

Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian of the late first century AD, presents the principles of the Jewish people as follows:

The Law orders all the offspring to be brought up, and forbids women either to cause abortion or to make away with the foetus; a woman convicted of this is regarded as an infanticide [Gr. *teknoktonos*] (*Contra Apionem* 2.202).

The earliest Christian testimony comes from *Didache*, dated at late first century AD. It weaves the words into the commandments of the Decalogue:

Thou shall not use philtres; thou shalt not procure abortion [*ou phoneuseis teknon en phthora* – “thou shalt not kill a child through abortion”] nor commit infanticide (2.2).

And later:

Murderers of children, corrupters of God’s creatures [*phthoreis plasmatos theou* – from *phthora*, “abortion, destruction”] (5.2).

2. Discussion on Abortion in the Novel about Callirhoe

Against this backdrop appears an exceptional, though little noticed, text, which is a rather extensive discussion of abortion in the Hellenistic novel *Callirhoe* (or *Chaereas and Callirhoe*) by Chariton of Aphrodisia (2.8–11).¹¹ The uniqueness here is twofold. First, the passage expresses the voice of women. Its content is the inner monologue of a woman facing the choice of whether or not to have an abortion, and her conversations on the subject with another woman.

¹¹ Text editions with translation: Chariton Aphrodisiensis, *Chairéas et Callirhoé*; Chariton Aphrodisiensis, *Callirhoe*; Chariton Aphrodisiensis, *Kallirhoe: Griechisch und deutsch*. Polish (inaccurate) translation of book 2 with the analyzed text: Chariton Aphrodisiensis, „Historia Chajreasza i Kallirroe.” About the language and dating, see e.g., Papanikolaou, *Chariton-Studien*.

We cannot find anything similar in ancient literature.¹² Secondly, it is the longest surviving ancient text on the subject, quite a bit longer than all mentions of abortion from earlier literature combined.

This, of course, raises the question of whether a piece written by a man adequately describes women's attitudes toward abortion. Looking from the point of view of the times, historically, would a man be able to reproduce them? Or more generally, psychologically, can men do it at all? However, it is difficult to see anything artificial or peculiarly androcentric in this fragment. On the contrary, as we shall see, women can discover their point of view and dilemmas here. Next, the whole novel focuses more on Callirhoe than on her husband, and her character comes off both morally superior and psychologically deeper. Therefore, like some of the commentators, I prefer the title *Callirhoe* rather than *Chaereas and Callirhoe*. And since the novel, on the whole, represents the feminine rather than the masculine point of view of the time, emphasizing the inner experiences and situation of a woman, then isn't the author's name a pseudonym for the true author, a woman of the era? This issue cannot be resolved, but the possibility should be considered.

The novel about Callirhoe genre-wise belongs to Greek novels with romantic and adventure content, referred to as ancient romances. The two oldest of them preserved in their entirety are the *Ephesian Tales* of Xenophon of Ephesus and *Callirhoe* itself. They are now dated to the first century AD, but the genre itself probably originated earlier.¹³ There have been disputes about the dating, but the dating of *Callirhoe* around the end of the first century AD does not raise significant objections and can be accepted.

Since this work is among the lesser known, a preliminary summary is needed. The plot is spread over eight books, about 150 pages of print in critical editions, and takes place at the end of the fifth century BC. It begins with the marriage of the protagonists in Syracuse. As a result of a vicious plot by rivals, her husband suspected Callirhoe

¹² Even though Greek novels on the whole devote quite a lot of attention to women. Cf., among others, Helms, *Character Portrayal*; Johnne, "Women in the Ancient Novel"; Lalanne, "L'odyssée des héroïnes."

¹³ Against the theory of Chariton's precedence (Tilg, *Chariton of Aphrodisias*).

of infidelity. When he kicked her, she fainted, was declared dead and was buried, but later found by pirates during a tomb robbery. As a slave, she was sold in Miletus, where her new master, Dionysius, fell in love with her, vowing to take her as his lawful wife. Callirhoe agreed to marry him out of fear for the Chaereas' child she was already carrying in the womb. Her husband, however, kept looking for her and reached Miletus, where his ship was captured by the Persians, and he was taken prisoner. After further complications, he finally met Callirhoe in Babylon at the court of the Persian king, who also wanted to get her for himself. Chaereas joined the revolt of the Egyptians, distinguished himself in battle and, despite new obstacles, recovered Callirhoe and returned with her in triumph to Syracuse.

The issue of abortion arises at the end of Book Two, when Dionysius wants to persuade Callirhoe to marry him, but she, through loyalty to her husband, would like to avoid it. Being in the early stages of pregnancy, however, she is in a difficult situation. The novel depicts her deliberations and conversations with the clever Plangon, Dionysius' slave, whom she wants to help in getting Callirhoe to marry him, as her master has promised her reward and liberation for doing so. I will quote these pages in full below.

3. The Text of the Discussion (*Callirhoe* 2.8–11)¹⁴

VIII. [...] 4. Fortune laid her plot against temperance [*sōphrosynē*] of the woman. After Chaereas and Callirhoe were married, their first contact was passionate; they had an equal impulse [*hormē*] to enjoy each other, and matching desire [*epithymia*] had made their union fruitful. 5. So just before her fall Callirhoe became pregnant; but thanks to the subsequent dangers and hardships she did not realize her condition straightaway. But at the beginning of the third month her belly began to grow big. Plangon, with her woman's experience, noticed it in the bath. 6. At the time she said nothing, since there were a lot of servant women there. But in the evening, when she got the chance, she sat beside Callirhoe on the couch and said, "You

¹⁴ I quote the translation of Reardon (*Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 46–49) with some minor modifications and with explanations in square brackets.

should know you are pregnant, my child.” Callirhoe cried aloud, groaned, and tore her hair: “Fortune, you have added this as well to my misfortunes, that I should become a mother too – mother of a slave!” 7. She struck her belly. “Poor creature!” she cried. “Even before birth you have been buried and handed over to pirates! What sort of life are you coming to? With what hopes shall I give birth [*kyophorein*] to you – without father or country, a slave! Taste death – before you are born!” Plangon restrained her hands, with a promise that the next day she would find her an easier way to procure a miscarriage [*ektrōsis* = abortion].

IX. 1. Left alone, each of the women followed her own line of reasoning. Plangon thought, “Here is the chance to satisfy your master’s passion. Her [child] in the womb [*to kata gastros*] will help your cause. You have found a sure way of convincing her: her maternal love will be stronger than her female temperance.” And she planned a convincing course of action.

2. Callirhoe, however, planned to destroy [*phtheirai*] the child [*teknon*]. “Am I,” she said to herself, “to bring Hermocrates’ descendant into the world to serve a master? Am I to bear a child [*paidion*] whose father no one knows? Perhaps some envious person will say, ‘Callirhoe became pregnant among the pirates!’ 3. It is enough for me alone to suffer misfortune. It is not in your interest to come into a life of misery, my child – a life you should escape from even if you are born. Depart in freedom, while no harm has befallen you, without hearing what they say about your mother!”

And then again she changed her mind, and pity came over her for [the child] in her womb [*tou kata gastros*]. “Are you planning to kill your child? Was ever woman so wicked! Are you mad? Are you reasoning like Medea? 4. Why, people will think you yet more savage than that Scythian woman! She at any rate did hate her husband – but you want to kill Chaereas’ child and not even leave behind any memorial of that celebrated marriage! What if it is a son? What if he is like his father? What if he is luckier than me? He has escaped from the tomb, from pirates – shall his mother kill him? 5. How many stories are there of sons of gods and kings born in slavery, then coming into their rightful ancestral rank – Zethus, Amphion, Cyrus? You too, my child – you will sail to Sicily, I am sure! You will go and

find your father and your grandfather and tell them your mother's story! A fleet will sail from Sicily to rescue me! O my child, you will restore your parents to each other!"

6. All night long she pursued these thoughts; and as she did so, sleep stole over her momentarily, and a vision of Chaereas stood over her, like him in every way, "like to him in stature and fair looks and voice, and wearing just such clothes" [*Iliad* 23.66–67]. As he stood there, he said, "I entrust our son to you, my wife." He wanted to say yet more, but Callirhoe jumped up and tried to embrace him. So, on her husband's advice, as she thought, she decided to rear her child.

X. 1. The next day, when Plangon came, Callirhoe told her what she intended to do. Plangon did not fail to point out how ill-judged her proposal was. "My lady," she said, "you cannot bring up a child in our house. Our master loves you; now, he will not force himself on you – he has more self-respect and self-control [*sōphrosynē*] than that – but he will be too jealous to let you bring up a child. He will take it as an insult that you should think so much of a man who is not here and disregard himself, when he *is* here. 2. So I think it would be better for the child to die before it is born, rather than after [because of exposure]; that will save you pointless labor pains and a futile pregnancy. I am giving you honest advice because I love you."

Callirhoe was distressed at what she said; she fell at Plangon's feet and begged her to help her think of some way she could bring up her child. 3. But Plangon refused repeatedly and put off answering her for two or three days. When she had inflamed Callirhoe to more impassioned entreaties, and so acquired more authority over her, first she made her swear not to reveal her stratagem to anyone; then, knitting her brow and wringing her hands, she said: "My lady, big enterprises can only be brought off by big ideas. Out of sympathy for you I am going to betray my master. 4. Now one of two things must happen: either your child dies one way or another, or he is born the wealthiest person in Ionia, the heir of its most illustrious family – and he will make you, his mother, happy. Which is it to be? Choose!" "Who would be foolish enough," said Callirhoe, to choose death for her child [*teknoktonian*] rather than good fortune for herself? I cannot believe that what you are suggesting is possible – tell me more clearly what you mean."

5. Plangon responded with a question. “How long do you think you have been pregnant?” [= from conception, *tēs syllēpseōs*] “Two months,” said Callirhoe. “Time is on our side, then. You can make it look as if it were Dionysius’ child, born at seven months.”

Callirhoe cried out in protest, “Better for it to die!” 6. Plangon pretended to agree with her. “You are quite right, my dear,” she said “to prefer an abortion [*ektrōsai*]. Let’s do that – it’s less dangerous than trying to deceive the master. Remove all trace of your noble birth; give up hope of returning home. 7. Adapt yourself to the condition you are in – really become a slave.”

Plangon’s advice aroused no suspicion in Callirhoe; she was a young lady of quality and knew nothing of slaves’ tricks. But the more Plangon urged abortion [*phthoran* = destruction] on her, the more pity Callirhoe felt for her [child] in the womb [*to kata gastros*]. “Give me time to think,” she said. “The choice is capital – my chastity [*sōphrosynē*] or my child!”

8. And this too Plangon approved – not deciding hastily, one way or the other. “There are good reasons for coming down either way: a wife’s loyalty [*pistis*] on one side, a mother’s love [*philostorgia*] on the other. All the same, there isn’t time to put off the decision long. You absolutely must choose tomorrow, before it becomes known that you are pregnant.” They agreed on this and separated.

XI. 1. Callirhoe went up to her room upstairs and shut the door. She held Chaereas’ picture [on a cameo on her ring] to her womb. “Here are the three of us,” she said, “husband, wife, and child; let us decide what is best for us all. I shall give my view first: I want to die Chaereas’ wife and his alone. To know no other husband – that is dearer to me than parents or country or child. 2. And you, my child – what is your choice for yourself? To die by poison [*pharmakō*] before seeing the light of day? To be cast out with your mother, and perhaps not even thought worthy of burial? [after a suicide]. Or to live, and have two fathers – one the first man in Sicily, the other in Ionia? When you grow up, you will easily be recognized by your family – I am sure I shall bring you into the world in the likeness of your father; and you will sail home in triumph, in a Milesian warship, and Hermocrates will welcome a grandson already fit for command. 3. Your vote is cast against mine, my child [*teknon*]; you will not sanction our death. Let

us ask your father too. No, he has spoken; he came to me in person in my dreams and said, ‘I entrust our son to you.’ I call you to witness, Chaereas – it is you who are giving me to Dionysius as his bride.”

4. And so she spent that day and night reasoning to herself like this; and she let herself be persuaded to live, not for herself, but for her baby [*dia to brephos*]. The next day, when Plangon came, at first she sat there looking sad, with sympathy in her countenance; and neither spoke. 5. After a long time Plangon asked: “What have you decided? What are we going to do? We cannot put off decision.”

Callirhoe, weeping in her distress, could not answer immediately; but at last she managed to say: “The child is betraying me; it is not what I want. You do what is best. But I am afraid that even if I put up with his lust, Dionysius will treat me contemptuously, in my misfortune; he may treat me as a concubine rather than as his wife and refuse to bring up another man’s child; and I shall lose my chastity [*sōphrosynē*] for nothing.” 6. Plangon replied even before she had finished. “I have thought about this, before you did,” she said, “because by now I love you better than my master. Now, I have confidence in Dionysius’ character – he is a good man. All the same, I shall make him swear an oath, master though he is; we must act with complete security. And when he has sworn, you must trust him, my child. I am going, to carry out my mission.”

4. Moral Evaluations

At the beginning, let us note that the medical side of pregnancy and abortion has received little attention. The difference between a baby born on time and a premature baby has been overlooked. Overlooked is the fact that Callirhoe could guess early pregnancy from the absence of menstruation, as well as the fact that after two months the enlargement of the abdomen should not yet be visible. We do not learn whether surgical abortion or abortifacient agents were involved, and of what kind (decoction or tampon), although the lack of mention of a doctor and the early stage of pregnancy suggest the latter.

The issue of attitude to abortion is woven into the plot, that is, it is not theoretical. Nor is it presented one-sidedly but split between

different voices to show the difficulty of the choice facing a woman. The level of discussion is high (which is especially evident when juxtaposed with the jarring judgments of today). It is first the dual voice of Callirhoe herself, who in fear thinks about abortion, and on the other hand, she shies away from killing the child. Similarly, Plangon, the slave woman allows abortion, but ultimately advises against it – though more for the reason that she has a vested interest in it. The narrator himself does not speak out explicitly, although it is clear that he disapproves of Plangon's manipulation, while approving of Callirhoe's final decision and saving the child. The rhetoric of the discussion is meant to lead the heroine and the readers to the right solution.

There is a certain clue in the way it is spoken about. A conceived child is systematically referred to as just a child (Gr. *teknon*, *paidion*), rather than terms for an embryo or foetus (such as *embryon* or *kyēma*). Such vocabulary is attributed to the mother, while Plangon and the narrator do not say so, mentioning pregnancy, carrying in the womb and conception.¹⁵ Thus, the novel's way of speaking does not distinguish between a child conceived and one already born, although both can be subjected to death: whether by abortion or by exposure after birth.

At the same time, the language that concerns abortion has a negative mark. It speaks of miscarriage, abortion, killing, destroying, getting rid of the child. There are no euphemisms here.

So, what is the argument for abortion? With it the discussion begins. The protagonist's first thought is that a child born in slavery will face the vile fate of a slave. It will pass off as the child of some pirate who kidnapped the mother. From the point of view of a free Greek, this was a terrible and disgraceful situation, which is difficult for today's readers to realize. Better death than such a life, thinks the desperate mother. In addition, there is the possibility that the master orders the newborn to be abandoned to a miserable death.

Generally speaking, the argument here is, in a way, the welfare of the child, understood, however, not as life itself, but as its quality.

¹⁵ One can see here a parallel with the current colloquial way of speaking of mothers who refer to the conceived child as just a child and not a foetus.

Therefore, in view of the chance to regain a high position in the future, the thought of abortion is dismissed. What turns out to be better is the possibility of the child being born as the offspring of a great lord who wants to marry his mother, which will ensure him a bright fate in Ionian Miletus. In the future, he may be recognized as the son of Chaereas, which will also give him an honourable position in Sicily. Even viewed from the utilitarian perspective, an abortion would be a surrender of opportunity and a capitulation. In addition, there is a good chance that the future son will be a living image of his father, an object of his mother's pride and admiration. Callirhoe overcame her panic, changed her mind, and began to seek help to save the child.

The second argument in favour of abortion would be that Callirhoe's consent to marry her master, Dionysius, and thus save the conceived child, means betrayal to her husband, Chaereas, whom Callirhoe loves ardently. Marriage to Dionysius would at the same time mean abandoning the cardinal virtue of moderation (temperance, Gr. *sōphrosynē*, in Callirhoe's context it means restraint and being virtuous). It is repeatedly mentioned and apparently recognized as a fundamental moral virtue for women. In addition, Plangon suggests as a motive the desire to avoid the nuisance of pregnancy and childbirth, a nuisance that is futile in the prospect of the child's death at the will of the master.

The whole situation is, of course, highly artificial, but within the framework of the novel's plot, abortion would make it possible to avoid that danger, that is, choosing a life of convenience at the expense of giving up principles, as well as insincere and forced sexual intercourse, pretending to love an imposed husband and hiding the truth. Looking from the woman's own point of view, there is a conflict here between marital fidelity and her own virtue, and concern for the conceived child. The latter, the desire to save the child's life and ensure its well-being, ultimately proves more important.

In other words, the arguments for abortion, whether of the social type or from the realm of individual ethics, are insufficient. And there are still clear arguments against abortion, which Callirhoe considers and articulates poignantly.

Since she already has a child, getting rid of it would be infanticide. Killing one's own child is a criminal, barbaric, ungodly act. The infamous Medea mentioned in this context is known as a heroine of myth, perpetuated in ancient dramas (Euripides, Seneca). She killed her own children after her husband's infidelity, but geographically her homeland was, in the Greek perspective, a country of savage and cruel Scythians from across the Black Sea.

Positive argumentation is equally important. Whose benefit and welfare should count? From Callirhoe's personal point of view, infidelity and forced marriage are as grave as the alternative, aborting the child. However, Callirhoe also considers the welfare of others. First of all, the child, who has a right to life and the opportunities it brings. The child itself, according to the heroine, will certainly vote to stay alive.

Then there is the child's father. Both in the dream vision and in Callirhoe's imagination, she consults him. She recognizes that her husband cares about saving his future son, that he votes for life, and that she is obliged to accept the child because of this. With some irony, she finds that such a will of her husband pushes her into the arms of another man. All in all, however, she acts for the good of others.

Despite the limited number of references to abortion from the pre-Christian era, the pages from *Callirhoe* testify that the topic must have been known and taken into consideration. Indeed, it found mature expression in popular literature, as we can see. They are also proof that, even if legal norms did not protect the life of the unborn, natural moral feeling could preclude abortion.

Decyzja przeciw aborcji w starożytnej powieści greckiej (Chariton, *Kallirhoe* 2,8–11)

Abstrakt: Artykuł najpierw szkicuje postawy wobec aborcji w greckim świecie pogańskim. Na tym tle przedstawiony zostaje wyjątkowy fragment z *Kallirhoe*, powieści greckiej z I wieku po Chr. Jest to najdłuższy tekst antyczny na ten temat i jedyny, który przedstawia opinie kobiet (a może jest też kobiecego autorstwa). Są to mianowicie Callirhoe, sprzedana do niewoli, i Plangona, inna niewolnica. Artykuł zawiera przekład *Kallirhoe* 2,8–11 i omawia jego przesłanie. Powieść przytacza pewne usprawiedliwienia aborcji (nieszczęśliwy los przyszłego niewolnika oraz jego matki; uniknięcie niechcianego małżeństwa), ale mówi o dziecku, a nie o płodzie. Ostatecznie bohaterka opisuje aborcję jako nieprawę i bezbożne dzieciobójstwo oraz stwierdza, że zarówno

dziecko, jak jego ojciec zagłosowałoby za życiem. Życie dziecka jest ważniejsze od osobistej cnoty *sophrosyne*.

Słowa kluczowe: Chariton, Kallirhoe, aborcja w starożytności, kobiety w starożytności, krytyka aborcji, embrion ludzki, *sophrosyne*

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