

CAVAFY'S THEMATIC CLASSIFICATIONS: A PRELIMINARY RESEARCH REPORT^{*}

Sarah Ekdawi

The aim of this brief communication is to report a major archival discovery: that Cavafy classified his entire poetic output for the period 1891–1923 thematically. The significance of this is that it provides detailed evidence for which thematic area (Philosophical, Historical, Sensual) each of the poems from this period belongs to. Earlier sub-divisions of the “Philosophical” category, most notably a very extensive section labelled “Our Art”, shed light on how Cavafy viewed the thematic content of these poems. Surprising classifications of poems with mythological subjects as “Historical” and poems with historical subjects as “Philosophical” suggest new, more Cavafian, ways of reading Cavafy.

The research that led to this discovery has been made possible by the digitization of the Cavafy Archive and the unrestricted public access to it provided by the Onassis Foundation, and I hereby gratefully acknowledge that all the archival material cited is © 2016–2018 Cavafy Archive, Onassis Foundation.

The following archival documents will be referred to:

1. The Chronological Catalogue 1891–1912 (<https://cavafy.onassis.org/object/1891-1912/>)
2. The Chronological Catalogue 1891–1925 (<https://cavafy.onassis.org/object/u-1891-1905/>)
3. The Thematic Catalogue (<https://cavafy.onassis.org/object/u-207/>)
4. The “Ancient Days” List (<https://cavafy.onassis.org/object/u-uu-2/>)
5. The “Passions” List (<https://cavafy.onassis.org/object/uu-3/>)
6. The “Various Poems” List (<https://cavafy.onassis.org/object/u-81/>)

^{*} I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Anthony Hirst and Rowena Fowler for their comments on an earlier draft of this report.

For ease of reference, I have adopted the terminology used by Savides for the first three items, which do not have titles, and used Cavafy's own titles, followed by the descriptor "list", for the remaining three (the convention also used in the Digital Archive). By clicking on the links, the reader can see the evidence cited at every stage of this report, with the caveat that Item 1 and (more especially) Item 3 are difficult to read without prior experience in deciphering Cavafy's manuscripts.

It was already known that Cavafy kept records of the composition dates of his poems for the period 1891–1925. These records, the two Chronological Catalogues (Items 1 and 2), were transcribed and published by G. P. Savides (1987: 49–85) and formed the object of an earlier investigation (Ekdawi & Hirst 1999), which explains the relationship between them and their significance for Cavafy's working practice. The earlier of the two (covering 1891–1912) is a rougher version, scribbled on miscellaneous scraps of paper and heavily abbreviated, whereas the later one (1891–1925) is a carefully written and emended fair copy, without abbreviations.

Cavafy's Thematic Catalogue (Item 3) formed the object of a separate investigation (Ekdawi & Hirst 1996) As this document was unpublished and unavailable for inspection at the time, we attempted a reconstruction, based on all the evidence then in the public domain. Although we were unaware of this, the document we were attempting to reconstruct resembled the earlier (much rougher) of the two Chronological Catalogues in appearance; nor were we aware that there were also elaborated fair copies of it among Cavafy's papers (Items 4, 5, and 6) in a direct parallel to the second Chronological Catalogue. Two of these elaborated thematic lists (Items 4 and 5) were partially revealed by Savides and his wife in the 1980s. The list headed "Πάθη" ("Passions", Item 5) appears in an uncaptioned photograph (Lena Savides 1983: 295), and the list headed "Αρχαία Ημέραι" ("Ancient Days", Item 4) is described in an article on "Η κηδεία του Σαρπηδόνοϋς" (Savides 1985: 263–4). Savides clearly believed these two lists to be significant, but he never explicitly related them to the Thematic Catalogue. A passing reference by Savides to a third list (Item 6), with no mention of its heading, indicates that he simply did not recognize it for what it was, because he erroneously describes it as "a list of titles in chronological order" (Savides 1968: 231). It is clear that Savides used this list as a source of information for earlier titles of well-known poems, as several such titles appear in it (e.g. "Βίος", corrected to "Όσο μπορείς"), but he does not seem to have investigated it further.

Savides refers to the rough version of the thematic lists (Item 3) as “an early thematic catalogue” (Savides 1975: 212). He appears not to have noticed the date-range (1891–1917) when he first examined the document. Subsequently, rather than correcting this initial oversight, he took the decision to avoid mentioning any poems included in it that could not be regarded as “early” in his editions of Cavafy’s canonical poems.

A telling indication of Savides’s omissions can be seen in his 1991 notes to the poems included in Cavafy’s earliest printed (thematic) collection, *Poems 1904*. (Savides’s 1963 edition does not mention the Thematic Catalogue at all). Of the 14 poems in *Poems 1904*, only 5 are listed by Savides as entries in the Thematic Catalogue. These five poems have a date range of 1894–1897 (i.e. comparatively early in Cavafy’s poetic career). In fact, all but one of the poems of *Poems 1904* can be found in the Thematic Catalogue. The single exception is “Επιθυμίες”, which is the only poem in the collection written after 1903. “Επιθυμίες” dates from September 1904, and may well have been written specifically for *Poems 1904*. If so, it did not need to be added to the Thematic Catalogue or Lists because the function of these was to help determine the thematic ordering of (future) collections. It is also conceivable that “Επιθυμίες” figures in the Thematic Catalogue under an earlier (unidentified) title.

Cavafy’s second printed thematic collection, *Poems 1910*, is a reissue of *Poems 1904*, with seven additional poems, all of which are found in the Thematic Catalogue and/or Lists. Savides only mentions two of these entries.

Savides’s notes to *Poems 1905–1915* and *Poems 1916–1918* follow the same pattern. A handful of Cavafy’s earlier poems are listed as entered in the Thematic Catalogue, with the relevant thematic headings supplied, but no information is provided about the thematic classification of later poems. Thus, six poems from *Poems 1905–1915* (including the two from *Poems 1910* referred to above) are listed by Savides as entries in the Thematic Catalogue, whereas Cavafy actually classified all 40 poems thematically. The same obtains for *Poems 1916–1918*: Cavafy classified all 28 of these poems thematically but Savides does not mention this at all.

Most of the poems in Cavafy’s last collection, *Poems 1919–193[3]* are later than 1923, the *terminus ante quem* of Cavafy’s thematic classifications, but 23 of them predate 1924 and are thematically classified by Cavafy. Savides only mentions a single instance of this: “Μεγάλη συνοδεία εξ ιερών και λαϊκών”, which he identifies with the much earlier poem title “Ο σταυρός” (1892).

With a single exception, all of the *Unpublished Poems* that post-date 1890 appear in Cavafy's Thematic records, a total of 65 poems, but Savides only notes 18 of them. The exception is "Γνωρίσματα" (1895), the manuscript of which Cavafy has marked "Suppressed". It seems highly likely that this is among the titles in the Thematic Catalogue that are too heavily deleted to be decipherable.

Savides does not note that all eleven unpublished poems found in a file or folder that he calls the "Passions File" (date range: 1904–1923) were also recorded in the Thematic Catalogue and/or the "Passions" List, though in a note to the poem "Δυνάμωσις" (which was not found in the "Passions File"), he states that this poem was "classified under the heading "Πάθη" in the Thematic Catalogue, together with "Ερωτος άκουσμα" [1911], "Ετσι" [1913], "Μακρυά" [1914], "Ετσι πολύ ατένισα" [1911] "and others" (Savides 1968: 236–7). This information is not repeated in the notes to "Ερωτος άκουσμα" or "Ετσι" in *Unpublished Poems* or in the notes to "Μακρυά" and "Ετσι πολύ ατένισα" in the canon. Similarly, the note to "Σύγχησις" states that this poem was placed by Cavafy under the heading "Prisons" in the thematic catalogue, together with "Πάλι στην ίδια πόλη" [the earlier title of "Η πόλις"], "Τείχη", "Τα παράθυρα", "Σαν πεθαμένο" [a non-extant poem or the unidentified earlier title of a known poem] and "Η ψυχές των γερόντων" (Savides 1968: 225) but this information does not appear in the relevant notes to the poems in question in his edition of the canon. One unpublished poem from before 1891, "Το Νιχώρι" (1885), is also included by Cavafy in his Thematic Catalogue. It is possible that this poem is among the ones that Cavafy attempted to rework in 1891, recorded in the earlier of the two Chronological Catalogues (Item 1) simply as: Διόρθωσις διαφόρων ποιημάτων (Savides 1987: 73).

Two of the eight additional unpublished texts that Savides placed in his later edition of Cavafy's unpublished poems, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα* (1993), date from before 1891 and a further three are of uncertain date (and do not figure in the chronological catalogues, indicating that they were most probably written before 1891. The remaining three are in the Thematic Catalogue but Savides only mentions this in the case of one of them, "Προ της Ιεροσαλήμ" (c. 1893).

All but two of the 25 post-1890 *Disowned Poems* (*Τα Αποκηρυγμένα*) are thematically classified by Cavafy, together with one published in 1886: "Βαχκιχόν". The exceptions are "Ενας έρως" (published in 1896) and "Vulnerant omnes, ultima necat" (published in 1893) Since these two poems are not in the chronological lists either, it is possible that they were written

before 1891 or else appear under as yet unidentified earlier titles, for example, “Ενός έρωτος κηδεία” for “Ενας έρως”. Savides does not mention that any of the *Disowned Poems* (which have a date range of 1886–1898) figure in Cavafy’s Thematic Catalogue”.

The document first referred to by Savides as “an early thematic catalogue” and thereafter as “the thematic catalogue” (Item 3 above) is closely written on 4 sides of 2 sheets of paper, with abbreviations, standard end marks (hanging dashes), idiosyncratic but unmistakable continuation marks, multiple deletions (including the deletion of 4 out of 9 thematic headings) and one small pasted over scrap of paper. The date range of this document is c. 1891–1917. It can be accessed here: <https://cavafy.onassis.org/object/u-207/>. The reader should be aware that the order in which the pages have been photographed is not the order in which they were composed, as the later poems and last (partially unwritten) pages with the latest additions appear first.

Cavafy’s original nine thematic headings are: Ο Αρχον της Ηπειρου, Αι Αρχαί του Χριστιανισμού, Βυζαντινά Ημέραι, Η Τέχνη μας, Αρχαίαι Ημέραι, Έτη Πτερόεντα, Φυλακαί, Τρεις Εικόνες, Πάθη (in this order). Two have been deleted along with all the poem titles under them: Τρεις Εικόνες and Ο Αρχον της Ηπειρου. The three poems that form the Τρεις Εικόνες group can be found in *Unpublished Poems*. There are no extant poems from Ο Αρχον της Ηπειρου. Two more headings, Έτη Πτερόεντα and Φυλακαί, have been deleted and some of the poem titles under them have been deleted and transferred to other headings.

The three neater thematic lists (Items 4, 5 and 6) are separate entities and are all longer than their counterparts in the Thematic Catalogue, of which they are quite clearly elaborated and emended fair copies. These three lists are labelled “Πάθη”, “Αρχαίαι Ημέραι” and “Διάφορα Ποιήματα”, and correspond to the three thematic areas of his work identified by Cavafy himself: ηθονική, ιστορική and φιλοσοφική (Savides 1966, 209–10). The date range of these lists is c.1891–1923. The heading “Διάφορα Ποιήματα” (“Various” [or “Different”] Poems”) can be understood to mean “Poems from various of the original nine thematic headings”. However, all the canonical poems listed under the deleted headings in the Thematic Catalogue have been transferred by Cavafy to Η Τέχνη μας; thus we can now confidently gloss Cavafy’s own “Philosophical” category as “Pertaining to Art”, i.e. “Poetics”.

There is a tenth heading that belongs physically to the Thematic Catalogue, in the sense that it was written on the back of one of the same sheets of paper. This heading is "Poems Written in Katharevousa", and also has a corresponding separate fair copy. The heading is self-explanatory; it is obviously not a part of Cavafy's thematic classification of his work. All the poems in it, without exception, are also included under thematic headings. The details of this list are not relevant to the present report, but the fair copy can be accessed here by interested readers: <https://cavafy.onassis.org/object/u-uu-3/>

The "Διάφορα" list subsumes five thematic headings from the original rough version (the Thematic Catalogue), the most extensive of which is Η Τέχνη μας. The other headings represented are: Έτη Πτερόεντα, Φυλακαί, Βυζαντιναί Ημέραι and Αι Αρχαί του Χριστιανισμού. This last heading is represented by only two poems, placed together: "Ο Ιουλιανός εν Ελευσίη" and "Ο Άγιος Στέφανος". The list closes with a sequence of "Byzantine" poems: "Μαχαίρι" [= "Μελαχκολία του Ίασονος Κλεάνδρου, ποιητού εν Κομμαγηνή, 595 μ.Χ."] (1918), "Πάρθεν" (1921), "Προ της Ιεροσαλήμ" (c.1893), "Μανουήλ Κομνηνός" (1905), "Θέλω θανείν μάλλον η ζειν" [= "Θεόφιλος Παλαιολόγος"] (1903) and "Βυζαντινός Αρχων, εξόριστος, στιχουργών" (1921). As the reader can see, this is not a "chronological list of titles". In fact, it is clear that Cavafy used the "Διάφορα" list to try out alternative thematic sequences, like the Byzantine one, and pairings, for example "Του μαγαζιού" with "Τεχνητά άνθη" and "Στην εκκλησία" with "Δέησις" (rather than with "Μανουήλ Κομνηνός", as in *Poems 1905-1915*). It is also worthy of note that "Μανουήλ Κομνηνός" appears in the original thematic catalogue under "Our Art" and not under "Byzantine Days", as one might have expected.

The significance of these discoveries for Cavafy Studies is further confirmation of the poet's own statement about his work: "the correct classification [is] the thematic one". (Savides 1966: 63) and further evidence for the overall division of his work into the three thematic categories he himself defined. In arranging his carefully elaborated thematic collections, Cavafy clearly made use of the comprehensive thematic classification he had developed between 1891 and 1923, originally under nine headings, later reduced to three.

In or around 1923, Cavafy began to record his poems in a different sort of list. This list has been published by Renata Lavagnini (1994: 325-8) but unfortunately the pages were assembled in the wrong order prior to being photographed and numbered, i.e. before they were entrusted to her by

Savides. I am indebted to Anthony Hirst for reassembling the pages in the right order and shedding light on the nature of the list (in a private communication, outlining unpublished research, also shared by Hirst with Lavagnini). It is essentially a running list of poems in progress, in which poem titles are crossed out upon completion and printing. The reasons for Cavafy's change of working practice in his last decade are beyond the scope of the present report, but we should remember that he did not begin circulating his last thematic collections, *Poems 1905-1915* and *Poems 1916-1918*, until 1930 and 1929 respectively (Savides 1966: 87-9). Sadly, he did not live to complete another one, based on the poems written from 1919 onwards.

REFERENCES CITED

- Ekdawi, S. & A. Hirst (1996), "Hidden Things: Cavafy's Thematic Catalogues", *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)*, 4: 1-34
- (1999), "Left out, crossed out and pasted over: the editorial implications of Cavafy's own evaluations of his uncollected and unpublished Poems", *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)*, 5/7: 79-132.
- Lavagnini, R. (ed.) (1994), *Κ. Π. Καβάφης, ατελή ποιήματα (1918-1932)*, Athens: Ikaros.
- Savides, G. P. (1963), *Κ. Π. Καβάφης, ποιήματα*, Athens: Ikaros.
- (1966), *Οι καθαφικές εκδόσεις*, Athens: Ikaros
- (1968), *Κ. Π. Καβάφης, ανέκδοτα ποιήματα*, Athens: Ikaros
- (1975), Editor's Introduction, in: E. Keeley and P. Sherrard (tr.), *C. P. Cavafy, Collected Poems*, London: The Hogarth Press, 155-8.
- (1983) (ed), *Κ. Π. Καβάφης, τα αποκηρυγμένα*, Athens: Ikaros.
- (1985), *Μικρά καθαφικά Α*, Athens: Ikaros.
- (1987), *Μικρά καθαφικά Β*, Athens: Ikaros.
- (1991) (ed.), *Κ. Π. Καβάφης: τα ποιήματα*, Athens: Ikaros.
- (1993) (ed.), *Κ. Π. Καβάφης, κρυμμένα ποιήματα*, Athens: Ikaros.
- Savides, Lena (1983) (ed), *Λεύκωμα Καβάφη 1863-1910*, Athens: Ermis.