

TWO NOTES ON Q. CICERO'S *DE DUODECIM SIGNIS*  
(FPL P. 79 MOREL; P. 101 BÜCHNER)

post modium quatiens Virgo fugat orta uaporem  
autumni *reserans* portas, aequatque diurna  
tempora nocturnis dispenso sidere Libra.

8

8. *reserans scripsi reserat cod. | reserat portas: sic dist. Jonin*

Editors print a full stop after 7, reading *reserat* in 8 with *Libra* as subject. This is wrong, as M.-R. Jonin has pointed out.<sup>1</sup> According to the traditional arrangement the seasons are divided into three stages (beginning, middle, end) and each stage is in turn associated with a zodiacal constellation. Q. Cicero employs the following scheme: spring—Pisces, Aries, Taurus; summer—Gemini, Cancer, Leo; autumn—Virgo, Libra, Scorpio; winter—Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius. Virgo, not Libra, marks the commencement of autumn.<sup>2</sup> Therefore delete the full stop after 7 and in 8 read *reserans*.<sup>3</sup> Virgo is said to open the gates of autumn because it marks the sun's crossing over from the northern to the southern hemisphere. When the sun has passed through Virgo, it begins its southern sojourn, culminating in the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. A passage from Claudian provides decisive confirmation: "continuo frontem limbo uelata pudicam/deserit [Iustitia = Virgo] autumnus portas, qua uergit in Austrum / Signifer et noctis reparant dispendia Chelae" (17.118–20).<sup>4</sup>

Two pieces of evidence may help to establish an approximate date of composition for lines 1–16. First, Q. Cicero died in 43, our terminus ante quem. Second, he uses the name *Libra* for the constellation between Virgo and Scorpio. This is significant because Aratus uses *Chelae* exclusively and that is the name that occurs most often in Greek. Since the Latin zodiac was merely an adaptation of the Greek, Latin writers either borrowed *Chelae* directly from the Greek or translated it with *Brachia*. *Libra*, like the Greek Ζυγός, which was the alternate name for Χηλαί, was a latecomer to the zodiacal constellations. Quintus' choice of *Libra*, especially in a type of poetry in which stellar nomenclature was determined largely by the precedent of the *Phaenomena*, suggests that he was writing at a time when *Libra* had supplanted *Chelae* or *Brachia Scorpionis* as the name of the constellation. When did *Libra* become established as the recognized Latin name for *Chelae*? The answer to this question will lead us to a terminus post quem.

The Romans did not invent the constellation *Libra*. It appears to be Babylonian in origin and became known to the Greeks as Ζυγός probably sometime between the

1. M.-R. Jonin, "Cicéron et les Aratea" in *Hommage à Pierre Fargues*, AFL Nice 21 (Paris, 1974), p. 257.

2. Manilius, 2.176–77, "nam desinit aestas, incipit autumnus media sub Virgine utrimque" (our poet, however, puts the beginning of autumn at the entry [*orta*] of the sun into Virgo); and 2.266, *autumnus Virgine surgit*.

3. For the asyndetic accumulation of participles, see Cic. *Aratea* 192–94 and 237–39. It is also possible, with Jonin, to retain *reserat* and punctuate with a colon after *portas*. But that strikes me as less attractive. Since each constellation is paired with only one verb, the participial construction is, in my view, preferable.

4. W. Hübner's interpretation, "Das Sternbild der Waage bei den römischen Dichtern," *A&A* 23 (1977): 50–63, p. 62: "Der Platz, den die Jungfrau verlässt, ist der Skorpionscheren," is untenable. The place which Virgo leaves is of course the place she formerly occupied between Leo and Libra, as the close parallel at 3.363–66 shows: "pete [Iustitia = Virgo] sidera, notis / autumnus te redde plagis, qua uergit in Austrum / Signifer: aestiuo sedes uicina Leoni / iam pridem gelidaeque uacant confinia Librae."

late fourth and the early third century B.C.<sup>5</sup> The Romans did, however, popularize *Libra* and regarded it as their own. This development has been assigned to the second half of the first century B.C., the period in which Julius Caesar reformed the calendar and in which we find the earliest references to *Libra* in Latin literature.<sup>6</sup>

In the extant fragments of M. Cicero's *Aratea*, written in the early 80s B.C., six of the total nine references to *Χηλαί* in the *Phaenomena* are preserved: of the three missing references two were deliberately omitted by Cicero; only one belongs to a lost portion of text.<sup>7</sup> In all six places Cicero writes *Chelae* and it is a certainty that he wrote it in the missing passage as well. We can be sure of this because Cicero regularly glosses Greek names with their Latin equivalents and prefers the native to the foreign name.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly when Cicero was writing his *Aratea* *Libra* had not yet established itself in the nomenclature of the Latin zodiac. Furthermore, since Quintus was only four years younger than Marcus, it is unlikely that his poem can be considered a *Jugendgedicht* like his elder brother's, because if it were, there would be no way to account for the sudden change from the canonical *Chelae* to *Libra*.

In *De lingua latina* 7.14 Varro gives us the earliest datable mention of *Libra* (ca. 45–43 B.C.): “signa quod aliquid significant ut *Libra* aequinoctium.” The constellation figure is thought to be an emblem of the autumnal equinox, an interpretation much favored by Latin poets but apparently foreign to the Greeks.<sup>9</sup> And it is more than coincidence that two of Varro's contemporaries and friends of M. Cicero, L. Tarutius Firmanus, the astrologer who cast Rome's horoscope, and Nigidius Figulus, Varro's more abstruse twin in polymathy, both helped to promote *Libra* as a zodiacal constellation.<sup>10</sup> According to Cicero's report of Rome's horoscope (*Div.* 2.98) Tarutius said that the moon was *in Iugo*, the Latin calque for *Ζυγός*.<sup>11</sup> And Nigidius in his *Sphaera* preserves a catasterism myth for *Libra*, the one zodiacal

5. In Greece the twelve signs of the zodiac, whether they were borrowed directly from Babylonian astronomy or were an independent invention, are a post-Eudoxian development, i.e., after ca. 355 B.C. (D. R. Dicks, *Early Greek Astronomy to Aristotle* [Ithaca, 1970], pp. 156–57); hence the absence of *Ζυγός* in Eudoxus and Aratus. In Roman astronomical literature the influence of Eudoxus, Aratus, and Hipparchus, all of whom used *Χηλαί* exclusively (with one exception, Hipparchus, *Commentariolum Libri Tres*, ed. C. Manitius [Leipzig, 1894], 3.1.5, suspected by the editor), was decisive in fixing the nomenclature of the zodiac. Growing interest in astrology and increased contact with Egypt in the first century B.C. stimulated the Romans to realize the value of a distinct identity for the seventh sign of the zodiac. Other factors came into play which I will mention shortly. On the problematic history of *Ζυγός* = *Libra*, see A. Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie grecque* (Paris, 1899; reprinted Brussels, 1963), pp. 141–42; W. Gundel, “*Libra*,” *RE* 13.1 (1926): 116–20; A. Florisoone, “Les origines chaldéennes du Zodiaque,” *Ciel et terre* 66 (1950): 267; and “Astres et constellations des Babyloniens,” *Ciel et terre* 67 (1951): 158; H. Stern, *Le calendrier de 354* (Paris, 1953), pp. 194–97; H. G. Gundel and R. Böker, “*Zodiakos*,” *RE* 10A (1972): 473–74, 487–94; A. Le Boeuffe, *Les noms latins d'astres et de constellations* (Paris, 1977), pp. 170–73.

6. So it is dated by Le Boeuffe, *Les noms*, p. 172, without sufficient argumentation. Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie*, p. 141, puts it less specifically in the first century B.C.

7. *A(ratea)* 3 = *P(haenomena)* 232, A210 = P438, A293 = P521, A323 = P546, A393 = P607, A403 = P619; *Χηλαί* in P612 and 626 omitted by Cicero; translation of P89 not preserved.

8. See A. Traglia, “Il linguaggio poetico-astronomico di Germanico,” *Helikon* 20–21 (1980–81): 44–47; or his *La lingua di Cicerone poeta* (Bari, 1950), pp. 141ff. In using Latin names Cicero was following the precedent set by Livius Andronicus (F. Leo, *Plautinische Forschungen*? [Berlin, 1912; reprinted Dublin/Zurich, 1973]: 90).

9. Hübner, “Das Sternbild.”

10. On the astrological activities of Varro, Tarutius, and Nigidius, see F. H. Kramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (Philadelphia, 1954), pp. 63–69; and E. Rawson, *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic* (Baltimore, 1985), pp. 306–12.

11. Tarutius wrote in Greek (“L. Tarutio qui Graece de astris scripsit”; Pliny *HN* 1, sources for book 18); Cicero's *in Iugo*, a name which never became popular, represents the original ἐν Ζυγῷ. See further the commentary of A. S. Pease (Urbana, 1920–23; reprinted Darmstadt, 1963); and on the horoscope, A. T. Grafton and N. M. Swerdlow, “The Horoscope of the Foundation of Rome” *CP* 81 (1986): 148–53.

constellation that is an inanimate object, though it is often represented as held by a male figure: Libra is the inventor of the balance who was translated to the heavens along with his invention as a reward for his benefiting mankind.<sup>12</sup> It is a highly artificial *aition* designed to give Libra the dignity requisite to a bona fide asterism. In addition Libra's proximity to Virgo-Iustitia would suggest that it represented the scales of Iustitia. Emblem of the equinox, natal sign of Rome, catasterism and symbol of justice; Libra now had the credentials to supplant *Chelae* and to stand beside the other zodiacal constellations. Nationalistic as well as astronomical considerations made it the natural choice.<sup>13</sup>

In all probability it was Caesar's reformation of the calendar, which took effect in 46 B.C., and his work *De astris* that firmly established Libra as the name of the zodiacal constellation. These would have provided an authoritative source for the change as well as a most effective vehicle for its rapid dissemination.<sup>14</sup> If painted and inscribed calendars bore the legend *sol in Libra* to mark the day when the sun entered that constellation, then Libra thus became the "official" Latin counterpart to *Chelae*.<sup>15</sup> And that sanction would have helped it to emerge even into the conservative traditions of astronomical poetry. *Chelae* will continue to appear in Latin poetry down to the time of Claudian, but it must coexist with Libra.

Now we have fixed points to guide us: Caesar's reformation of the calendar in 46 B.C. and Varro's *De lingua latina* 7.14, ca. 45–43 B.C. Nigidius' *Sphaera* cannot be dated but we will not be greatly in error if we place it in the traditional period of an author's floruit, between ca. 58 and 45, the year of his death.<sup>16</sup> And perhaps Tarutius' horoscope can be dated to the same period. From these scraps of evidence and the scholarly interest in Libra which they attest, there emerges the reasonable hypothesis that between 58 and 46 B.C. Libra became established as the Latin counterpart to *Chelae*, with 46 B.C. being the decisive date for "official" recognition in Caesar's civil and astronomical calendars. Therefore our fragment should be dated to the same period, though there is the good possibility that the would-be panegyrist of Caesar's failed invasion of Britain,<sup>17</sup> inspired by Caesar's *clementia* and his greater success in subduing calendric confusion, composed his work on the stars between 46 and 43 B.C.

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12. The catasterism is preserved in Ampelius' *Liber Memorialis* 2.7 = *P. Nigidii Figuli Reliquiae*, ed. A. Swoboda (Prague/Vienna/Leipzig, 1889), fr. 95 (p. 118). See also F. Boll, *Sphaera* (Leipzig, 1903), pp. 187–88.

13. Manilius exploited the nationalistic value of Libra (4.773–77).

14. Writers who produced literary versions of the agricultural and civil calendar followed Caesar in using Libra: Verg. *G.* 1.208; Columella, book 11; Pliny *HN* 18; and Ov. *Fast.* 4.386. Pliny's statement *nos sequimur observationem Caesaris maxime* (18.247) confirms Caesar's use of Libra in the *De astris*. Le Boeuffe, *Les noms*, p. 171 n. 6, assembles some statistics on the use of *Chelae* and Libra in Latin literature.

15. Cf. A. Degrassi, *Inscriptiones Italiae* 13.2 (Rome, 1963), *Fasti Venusini*: p. 57 [18 May], SOL IN GEMIN; p. 58 [19 June], SOL IN CANCRO.

16. Praetor in 58 (*ad Q. fr.* 1.2.16), he was born no later than 98: see W. Kroll, "P. Nigidius Figulus" (3) *RE* 17.1 (1936): 200–201.

17. W. Allen, "The British Epics of Quintus and Marcus Cicero," *TAPA* 36 (1955): 143–59.