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Eratosthenes and the Women: Reversal in Literature and Ritual

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## NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

### ERATOSTHENES AND THE WOMEN: REVERSAL IN LITERATURE AND RITUAL

This note focuses on a passage of Eratosthenes' *Catasterisms* (from the chapter on Virgo) that has not attracted the attention of scholars thus far. The fragment is not preserved in the so-called *Epitome* of the *Catasterisms*, but only in the *recensio* known as *Fragmenta Vaticana*. Alessandro Olivieri, Ernst Maass, and Albert Rehm edited some sections of this *recensio* in the late nineteenth century,<sup>1</sup> but a good number of them were unknown until Jean Martin published his *Scholia in Aratum Vetera* in 1974. Some catasterismic myths were identified scattered among the scholia on the *Phaenomena* that turned out to belong to the *Fragmenta Vaticana* (as comparison with *Aratus Latinus* shows).<sup>2</sup> These catasterismic sections usually offer a shorter text than the *Epitome*, but sometimes fill in the lacunae of the *textus receptus* or even provide a better text. After quoting Hesiod at the beginning of section 9, the text of the *Fragmenta Vaticana* continues as follows (*Fragmenta Vaticana Catasterismorum*, chap. 9 Pàmias; cf. 126 Martin):<sup>3</sup>

λέγει δὲ Ἄρατος παρὰ τοῦ αὐτοῦ λαβὼν τὴν ἱστορίαν ὡς οὕσα [αὐτὴν] τὸ πρότερον ἀθάνατος καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς σὺν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἦν· καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἀνδράσιν οὐκ ὀπτάνετο, μετὰ δὲ τῶν γυναικῶν ἦν, καὶ ὅτι Δίκην ἐκάλουν αὐτὴν αἱ γυναῖκες.

Aratus, who takes the story from Hesiod, says that she was immortal and formerly dwelt on the earth among humans. She kept out of the view of men, and remained among women. The women called her Dike. (My translation)

Certainly, the verb form ὀπτάνετο used in this context is striking and may arouse suspicion: the verb ὀπτάνομαι appears mainly in late literature (Old Testament, Hellenistic papyri, New Testament, Hermes Trismegistos; cf. LSJ<sup>9</sup>, s.v.), the earliest attestation being provided by Aristophanes *Grammaticus*.<sup>4</sup> Be that as it may, the fact that this passage appears in the *Scholia in Germanicum*, a Latin catasterismic document, provides a *terminus ante quem* and proves that the passage cannot be dismissed as a recent innovation.

1. Olivieri 1897; Maass 1898; Rehm 1899.

2. The *Aratus Latinus* is a 7th-century C.E. translation of Aratus' *Phaenomena* provided with scholia. Since the edition of Maass (1898, xxxvi–xxxviii; cf. Rehm 1899), it is accepted that the *Aratus Latinus* is the Latin counterpart to the Greek branch of the *Fragmenta Vaticana*.

3. Compare the text preserved in the other *recensio*, the *Epitome* of the *Catasterisms* (chap. 9 Pàmias; cf. 11–12 Olivieri; 86 Pàmias and Geus): λέγει δὲ καὶ Ἄρατος παρὰ τούτου λαβὼν τὴν ἱστορίαν ὡς οὕσα πρότερον ἀθάνατος καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς σὺν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἦν καὶ ὅτι Δίκην αὐτὴν ἐκάλουν· μεταστάντων δὲ αὐτῶν καὶ μηκέτι τὸ δίκαιον συντηρούντων, οὐκέτι σὺν αὐτοῖς ἦν, ἀλλ' εἰς τὰ ὄρη ὑπεχώρει· εἴτα στάσεων καὶ πολέμων αὐτοῖς ὄντων [διὰ] τὴν παντελὴ αὐτῶν ἀδικίαν ἀπομίσθησαν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνελθεῖν.

4. *Argumentum* of Ar. *Plut.* 4 Chantry: μαντεύεται δίκαιος ὧν τις καὶ πένης εἰ μεταβαλὼν πλούτου τυχεῖν δυνήσεται· ἔχρησεν ὁ θεὸς συνακολουθεῖν ὅπερ ἂν πρώτῃ περιτύχη· Πλούτος [δ'] ὀπτάνεται τυφλός.

Before Martin's edition, this puzzling "feminist" Eratosthenic interpretation of Aratus was known solely through its Latin translations. The *Aratus Latinus* renders the Greek original clumsily but very faithfully, as it often does (201 Maass):

Dicit autem et Aratus ab ipso sumere historiam, quod cum esset prius immortalis super terram cum hominibus conversabatur et a quibusdam [sc. hominibus] non videbatur. cum mulieribus autem erat et quia Iustam semper vocabant eam mulieres.

The *Scholia in Germanicum* provide the following translation (65 Breysig = 326 Dell'Era):

quae cum mortalibus in terris morabatur. virorum aspectu se abstinere solitam, cum feminis consuetam ludere.

According to Carl Robert, the words of the scholiast are a free interpretation of lines 102–3 of the Aratean *Phaenomena*, and they may in fact have arisen from a misreading of the Greek original.<sup>5</sup> Lines 102–3 of Aratus say:

ἦρχετο δ' ἀνθρώπων κατεναντίη, οὐδέ ποτ' ἀνδρῶν  
οὐδέ ποτ' ἀρχαίων ἠνέγνωτο φύλα γυναικῶν.

And [Justice] used to come face to face with humans, and did not ever spurn the tribes of ancient men and women.<sup>6</sup>

In his version of the myth of the Ages, Aratus (lines 96–136) turns the five Hesiodic ages into three, by removing the last two.<sup>7</sup> The moral degradation of mankind is described, from the Golden Age to the Bronze, until Dike rejects the company of mortals and establishes herself in the sky (lines 134–36). The Golden Age, as it appears in the *Phaenomena*, is a time of peace, justice, and prosperity in which gods consort with mortals. Such topics on the *Saturnia regna* have a long tradition in Greek literature.<sup>8</sup> Yet Aratus introduces an important innovation—namely, the practice of agriculture. In sharp contrast with Hesiod's Golden Age, in which the earth yielded fruit on its own (*Op.* 116–17), Aratus' golden race has to cultivate the soil (lines 112–14).

Accordingly, Aratus conflates Dike with Demeter, notably by placing an ear of grain in her hand. As a matter of fact, the whole constellation of Virgo was formed around its brightest star, Spica,<sup>9</sup> whose name probably originated in the observation of either its rising or its setting as an indication for agricultural activities.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, both Dike and Demeter (as θεσμοφόρος) perform a law-giving activity (see Aratus 107: ἤειδεν . . . θέμιστας; cf. 113: δώτειρα δικαίων). In the Hellenistic age, Demeter Thesmophoros has become the goddess who presides over civilization and introduces law (cf. Callim. *Hymn* 6.17–20). Her worship was intensively fostered in

5. See Robert 1878, 82, app. crit.: *perperam intellecti sunt, fortasse quod prave . . . legebantur*. Robert's edition comprises the following testimonia derived from Eratosthenes' *Catasterisms*: the *Epitome* of the *Catasterisms*, the *Scholia in Aratum*, the *Scholia in Germanicum BP* and *G*, and Hyginus' *De Astronomia*. He did not know of the existence of either the *Aratus Latinus* or the *Fragmenta Vaticana*.

6. Translation by Kidd (1997), slightly adapted.

7. Solmsen 1966, 125.

8. See Versnel 1987, 124–26.

9. Scherer 1953, 168. See Eratosth. *Cat.* 9: ὁ δ' ἐπὶ τῆς εὐωνόμου [sc. χειρὸς] λαμπρὸς καλεῖται Στάχυς.

10. Harvesting, plowing, or sowing (Bouché-Leclercq 1899, 58; cf. Kidd 1997, 215).

Ptolemaic Alexandria. She appears closely connected to Dikaioisynē in a dedication of the third century B.C.E.<sup>11</sup> The transference of motifs from one goddess to another gave rise to the identification of the constellation of Virgo with Demeter herself (Eratosth. *Cat.* 9): οἱ μὲν γὰρ αὐτὴν φασιν εἶναι Δήμητρα διὰ τὸ ἔχειν στάχυν. As Georg Kaibel puts it, “[D]ass ihm [sc. Aratus] die natürlichere Benennung des Sternbildes als Δημήτηρ bekannt war, geht aus dem Bestreben hervor, die Züge der Demeter mit denen der Δίκη zu verschmelzen.”<sup>12</sup>

However, the most unexpected detail in the Aratean description, which is unparalleled elsewhere in such contexts, is the explicit statement that Dike used to come face-to-face with both men and women (lines 101–4). I agree with Alessandro Schiesaro that philosophical rather than literary issues may provide a clue for interpreting this passage: “Stoic thinkers, and especially Zeno, stressed—apparently for the first time—the idea that men and women should be equal members of the political community.”<sup>13</sup> Closer to the Aratean account, however, is the notion, supported by some Stoic philosophers, that women’s virtue was by nature the same as that of men (cf. Chrysippus *SVF* 3.253–54).<sup>14</sup> With this notion the Stoics went a step beyond Aristotle (*Pol.* 1259b–1260a), who maintained that women possessed virtues such as justice, but that these virtues were different for the sexes in that it was men’s nature to rule and women’s to be ruled.<sup>15</sup>

Returning to Eratosthenes, one may recall that Stoicism was prominent during his years in Athens.<sup>16</sup> According to Strabo (1.2.2), he was a disciple of Zeno (τοῦ Ζήνωνος τοῦ Κιτιέως γνώριμος γενόμενος). Even if he was not an orthodox one,<sup>17</sup> Zeno’s teachings about men’s and women’s civic rights may have influenced him in writing his *Catasterisms*.

However, the striking detail in the variant of the *Fragmenta Vaticana*, which cannot be explained by Stoic influence, is that Eratosthenes does not put men and women at the same level but says unambiguously that Dike “was invisible to men and remained among women” (καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἀνδράσιν οὐκ ὀπτανέτο, μετὰ δὲ τῶν γυναικῶν ἦν).

The question arises how to explain that Dike remained among women and kept out of the view of men during the Golden Age. As I have said, nonliterary issues may contribute to this task. However, it is not philosophical influence but religious context that offers the best clue. Indeed, the sole context in which women could lay aside the burden of male dominance, leave family and home, and constitute their own society was religious ritual. For instance, during the Kronia and the Saturnalia-like festivals,

11. “[Dikaioisynē] is presumably a personification of one of the chief characteristics of Demeter herself . . . as creator of Law” (Fraser 1972, 1: 199; see also 1: 241, 2: 335).

12. Kaibel 1894, 85–86. According to Kaibel (1894, 85), the identification of the constellation Virgo with Dike may be an invention of Aratus himself. Indeed, the words λόγος γε μὲν ἐντρέχει ἄλλος ἀνθρώποις (lines 100–101) suggest that the poet is producing a new version (see Martin 1998, 2: 201–2).

13. Schiesaro 1996, 20.

14. Cf. Chrysippus *SVF* 3.254 = Clem. Al. *Strom.* 4.8: ὁμολόγηται δ’ ἡμῖν τὴν αὐτὴν φύσιν κατὰ γένος ἕκαστον τὴν αὐτὴν καὶ ἴσχειν ἀρετὴν: οὐκ ἄλλην τοίνυν πρὸς τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα φύσιν ἔχειν ἢ γυνή, ἄλλην δὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ φαίνεται, ἀλλὰ τὴν αὐτὴν: ὥστε καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴν (“We agree that the same nature exists in every race, and the same virtue. As far as concerns human nature, a woman does not possess one nature, and a man another, but the same: so also with virtue” [my translation]).

15. I am grateful to the anonymous referee for the reference to Aristotle.

16. Fuentes 2000, 194.

17. See Dragani 1975, 50–54; Geus 2002, 24.

an interstitial period of disorder was institutionally established that was marked by the suspension of normal law and the status quo: women played men's roles, and children commanded their teachers and slaves their masters. (Significantly, the Kronia had their mythical prototype in the Golden Age under Kronos' rule.)<sup>18</sup> Much more important for women were the Thesmophoria festivals, which belong to the category of rituals of reversal, too.<sup>19</sup> Women had the privilege of organizing their community with their ἄρχουσαι (cf. Isae. 8.19: ἄρχειν εἰς τὰ Θεσμοφóρια) and of convening at a central place in the polis.<sup>20</sup> In Athens, they met close to the men's site of the assembly on the Pnyx;<sup>21</sup> in Thebes, they occupied the place where the *boule* used to meet. Furthermore, men were not allowed to take part in this ritual (a motif that is exploited by Aristophanes in the *Thesmophoriazusae*)—not only husbands but every male. (In another women's festival for Demeter, at Pellene, even male dogs were removed: Paus. 7.27.10.) This exclusion gave rise to an atmosphere of secrecy and mystery surrounding the ritual. As Walter Burkert remarks, "When Aristophanes presents his comedy *The Women at the Festival of the Thesmophoria*, he is unable to give many particulars about the festival."<sup>22</sup> One myth (incidentally set in Cyrene, the native land of Eratosthenes) exaggerates the hostility to men during the Thesmophoria. According to this story, King Battus came to spy on the women at the festival. Although the priestesses tried to keep him out, he insisted on watching what was not to be seen (τῶν μὲν ἀπορρήτων καὶ ἃ μὴ ἰδεῖν λῶον ἦν) and therefore was attacked and castrated.<sup>23</sup>

The politically and socially central role of women and their rejection of men at the cult of Demeter Thesmophoros correspond to what we find in Eratosthenes' peculiar interpretation of Aratus. The fact that Dike remained among women (μετὰ δὲ τῶν γυναικῶν ἦν [sc. Δίκη]) and her concealment from men (καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἀνδράσιν οὐκ ὀπτάνετο) point to a disruption of normality that, *e contrario*, serves to reinforce the existing sexual hierarchy and the customary submission of women to men. At the ritual level, this "otherness" is found in reversal festivals like the Thesmophoria. On the other hand, at the mythical level it is only conceivable if projected backwards onto a Golden Age that is inhabited by a recently conflated Dike-Demeter (see above). Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that the main concern of the cult of Demeter Thesmophoros was the promotion of agriculture, which constitutes another link to the Golden Age of Eratosthenes (as Aratus' interpreter).<sup>24</sup>

If the conclusion that I have reached is correct, chapter 9 of the *Catasterisms* should not be seen as a mere collection of literary variants and mythical *interpretationes* of the constellation Virgo. Ritual must be taken into account, as is clear in other *loci*. As the remains of his *Erigone* show, for example, Eratosthenes combined mythical traditions with archaic religious practices in order to account for the etiology of the

18. See Versnel 1987, 126, 134, 142–45.

19. As Versnel (1994, 235–45) has emphasized.

20. Paradoxically, the usually "eccentric" location of the sanctuaries of Demeter has been underlined (see Cole 2000; Bremmer 1994, 76).

21. But see Clinton 1996, 119.

22. Burkert 1985, 242.

23. Our main witness is Aelian (frag. 47 Domingo-Forasté). Cf. *Suda* α 4329, θ 272, σ 1590, 1714; Paus. 4.17.1.

24. For traditional and modern interpretations on the Thesmophoria, see Versnel 1994, 228–88.

latter (namely, in the case of *Erigone*, the origins of tragedy and of the rites of the ἀσכולιασμός and of the αἰώρα).<sup>25</sup> As for the *Catasterisms*, as I have shown elsewhere,<sup>26</sup> this work included some allusions to contemporary religion and politics, too.<sup>27</sup>

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25. See Pàmias 2001.

26. Pàmias 2004a. Cf. Marinone 1990.

27. I wish to thank Susan and Lowell Edmunds who read the manuscript carefully and provided corrections and valuable suggestions. I am also greatly indebted to the anonymous referee of *Classical Philology* and to the editor for helpful criticism and comments, which have improved this note.

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#### A HIPPONACTEAN ECHO IN CATULLUS (*FRIGUS*, 44.20)

Catullan commentary has had little to say about Hipponax, beyond superficial references to the traditional metrical background of Catullus' choliambics.<sup>1</sup> When the pre-Callimachean Greek iambic tradition is invoked, Hipponax typically (and not without reason) receives second billing to Archilochus.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the "colore ipponatteo" of Catullan (as well as Lucilian and Horatian) invective has been clearly established, even if demonstrable Hipponactean verbal reminiscences are somewhat elusive, and even if some of the "Hipponactean" coloration must be attributed to the mediating influence of Callimachus.<sup>3</sup> As for the meter, one may say that Catullan choliambic poetry adopts not merely the Hipponactean metrical framework,<sup>4</sup> but also the ethos of the Greek poet's use of the meter. This correlation has been perceptively signaled by Douglas Thomson, who has emphasized that Catullus "uses the choliambic metre . . . as a rule . . . for serious attacks."<sup>5</sup>

The Hipponactean ethos can be discerned far more broadly in Catullus' handling of characteristic themes and topoi, as discussed by Massimo Lenchantin de Gubernatis and others. One such recurring topos involves the discomforts of cold, as in fragments 42 Dg (32 W), 43 Dg (34 W), 61 Dg (59 W), and 194.9–11 Dg (115.9–11 W). Despite the silence of commentators on this connection, it is worth considering the possibility of a Hipponactean background to Catullus' choliambic Poem 44, the ostensible subject of which is his *gravedo frigida*, accompanied by a *frequens tussis*.

1. Citations of the fragments of Hipponax use the text and numeration of Degani 1983 (hereafter, Dg; texts, with notes and translations, also available in Degani 2007), together with the numeration of West 1989 (W). Translations are from West 1994.

Let it be recalled that choliambic meter might well have been used before Hipponax, despite frequent assertions (e.g., Courtney 1993, 105, or Godwin 1999, 6, 19) that Hipponax "invented" the scazon. As rightly observed by Masson (1962, 22, with earlier references), the traditional attribution of priority to Hipponax "sert surtout à montrer quel est l'écrivain qui a illustré le premier ce type de vers. Au-delà d'Hipponax, le problème est insoluble."

2. E.g., Syndikus 1984, 211 (ad Catull. 37), 221 (ad 40), 285 n. 2 (ad 59). A rare exception (192, ad 33): "Diebes- und Lumpenmilieu kennt man seit Hipponax als Thema jambischer Dichtung." In a more extended compass: Wray 2001, 167–89, on "Archilochian" modes of invective in Catullus.

3. On Catullus and Alexandrian choliambic poetry, see, e.g., Syndikus 1984, 41. The Italian phrase derives from chapter 9 ("Colore ipponatteo della poesia catulliana") of Lenchantin de Gubernatis 1933, lxxxvii–lxxxix. For a balanced discussion of the issue, see Degani 1984, 67–68, with further references, among which Koenen (1977) deserves special mention, despite the uncertainty of some of his specific textual claims; see the critique by Degani (1981), as well as Degani 1993. Rosen (1988, 35 n. 23) discusses possible parallels between Catullus and Hipponax frag. 20 Dg (12 W).

4. With, as is well known, variations derived from Callimachus' practice; on the most salient (i.e., the disallowed spondaic variant preceding the final two syllables), see Courtney 1993, 105 (ad Matius frag. 16).

5. Thomson 1997, 346 (ad Catull. 60); similarly 259 (ad 22), and further 284 (ad 31, the only real exception to this generalization; on this problem see also Syndikus 1984, 189).