

ORION'S CLUB. A NOTE ON GERMANICUS, *ARATI PHAENOMENA* 651*

In lines 646-60 of his translation of Aratus' *Phaenomena*, Germanicus narrates the story of Orion, the mythical hunter killed by a scorpion sent by Diana because of his attempt to rape the goddess, and then transformed into a star.¹ In particular, line 651 describes Orion's hunting:

nudabatque feris angusto stipite silvas.

The wording of this verse caused some exegetical difficulties, centred around the expression *angusto stipite*, which seems inadequate as a definition of the mythical hunter's club, and moreover contradicts the corresponding passage in Aratus, where Orion's κορύνη is defined στιβαρά, 'stout'.² In both of the latest critical editions of Germanicus' *Aratea* (dating back in reality to the seventies of the past century), by Le Boeuffle and Gain,³ the text is emended: while Le Boeuffle accepts Orelli's conjecture *ambusto* for *angusto*,⁴ Gain, following a suggestion by Housman, prints

* I wish to thank the anonymous referee and Professor Bruce Gibson for their helpful comments and suggestions.

¹ On Orion's myth in Aratus, Germanicus and other Latin translators see my article 'Il mito di Orione in Arato e nei suoi traduttori latini' (forthcoming). On Germanicus' Aratean translation see in general D.M. Possanza, *Translating the Heavens: Aratus, Germanicus and the Poetics of Latin Translation* (New York, 2004).

² Cf. Arat. 638-9 θηρία πάντα | καρτερὸς ὤριων στιβαρῆ ἐπέκοπτε κορύνη.

³ A. Le Boeuffle, *Germanicus, Les Phénomènes d'Aratos* (Paris, 1975); D.B. Gain, *The Aratus ascribed to Germanicus Caesar* (London, 1976).

⁴ J.C. Orelli, *Phaedri Aug. Liberti Fabulae Aesopiae. Accedunt Germanici Caesaris Aratea, Pervigilium Veneris* (Zurich, 1832), 193. The parallels of Prop. 4.1.28 *miscabant usta proelia nuda*

augustas, referring to *silvas*;⁵ but neither conjecture appears to be particularly appropriate to the context. More recently Watt proposes to emend to *robusto*,⁶ which would be a faithful translation of Aratus' σπιβαροῦ: this correction gives perhaps a better sense, but is paleographically more removed from the transmitted reading and does not offer a plausible explanation of the origin of the corruption.

On the other hand, a convincing explanation of the meaning of the verse was provided already in 1898 by Thiele, who argued that *angusto stipite* should be considered a deliberate alteration by Germanicus of Aratus' description, based on the observation of Orion's figure as portrayed in an astronomical illustration or celestial globe.⁷ In the ancient images of the constellation known to us, Orion is in fact often armed with a *pedum* or λαγωβόλον, a thin curved stick used for hare hunting,⁸ as attested, for example, in the depiction of Orion on the so-called Farnese globe (which

sude, quoted by Le Boeuffle (n. 3) ad loc., and Sil. 8.549 *gestabant tela ambustas sine cuspidē cornos*, quoted by Gain (n. 3), 120, do not seem decisive.

⁵ A.E. Housman, 'The *Aratea* of Germanicus', *CR* 14 (1900), 26-39, at 35-6 (= J. Diggle and F.R.D. Goodyear, *The Classical Papers of A.E. Housman*, 3 vols. [Cambridge, 1972], 2.495-515, at 510). Housman supported his conjecture by comparing the corresponding passage in the late antique Aratean translation of Rufus Festus Avienus (*Arat.* 1180-2 *cum sacrata Chii nemora et frondentia late | bracchia lucorum, cum silvae colla comasque | devotae tibimet manus impia demolita est*, etc.): but the parallel appears rather vague. See also the discussion of Gain (n. 3), 120.

⁶ W.S. Watt, 'Eight Notes on Germanicus' *Aratea*', *RhM* 137 (1994), 72-7, at 75.

⁷ G. Thiele, *Antike Himmelsbilder. Mit Forschungen zu Hipparchos, Aratos und seine Fortsetzern und Beiträgen zur Kunstgeschichte des Sternhimmels* (Berlin, 1898), 48. See also W. Leuthold, *Die Übersetzung der Phaenomena durch Cicero und Germanicus* (Zurich, 1942), 65.

⁸ See E. Saglio, s.v. *Pedum*, in Daremberg-Saglio IV.1 (Paris, 1907), 368-9.

probably reproduces a model going back to Hipparchus),⁹ as well as in some illustrations contained in several Aratean manuscripts, such as the Leidensis Vossianus lat. Q. 79 of Germanicus.¹⁰ Thiele's idea was sarcastically dismissed by Housman, who objected that *angustus stipes* can in no way mean *gracilis*.¹¹ But for once we can say that Housman was wrong. There are in fact a couple of examples in which the adjective *angustus*, referring to a weapon, assumes the exact meaning of 'thin, narrow'. The first one is found in a passage of Tacitus, describing a kind of spear, with a short and narrow iron head, used by some German peoples: Tac. *Germ.* 6.1 *rari gladiis aut maioribus lanceis utuntur: hastas vel ipsorum vocabulo frameas gerunt angusto et brevi ferro*. The second and more interesting example, specifically of a club, narrower in the handle, then widening toward the end, comes from the grammatical treatise of Marius Plotius Sacerdos (third century A.D.): Sacerd. *gramm.* 505.27-9 Keil *si fuerit rhopalius versus, qui a monosyllabo verbo incipiens gradatim crescit et ῥόπαλον, id est Herculis clavam, imitatur ab angusto et tenui in latitudinem desinens*. These parallels, although later than Germanicus, confirm that *angusto stipite* can be understood in the sense of 'with (his) thin club', and that the transmitted wording can therefore be retained.

More generally, this verse offers a particularly clear and interesting example of the importance of astronomical illustrations for Germanicus' translation. We know that, apart from celestial globes, illustrated editions of Aratus, furnished with images representing the different stars and

⁹ See Thiele (n. 7), 27-42, and esp. 30 on Orion's figure.

¹⁰ See Thiele (n. 7), 119-21. A larger collection of examples of this iconography can be seen on the website of the Warburg Institute Iconographic Database (http://warburg.sas.ac.uk/vpc/VPC_search/main_page.php, search Orion [accessed 3 September 2018]).

¹¹ See Housman, loc. cit. (n. 5): '*angustus* no more means *gracilis* than *laxus* means *crassus*. *angustus stipes* is a cudgel affording insufficient room for a colony of white ants which have eaten it hollow.'

constellations described by the poet, were produced in antiquity, probably even since the Hellenistic age:¹² and Germanicus could surely draw on this iconographic material – which in part passed also into our medieval manuscripts – in order to integrate or, as in this case, to correct the text of Aratus and his description of various constellations.¹³

EMANUELE BERTI

Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa

emanuele.beriti@sns.it

¹² See E. Dekker, *Illustrating the Phaenomena. Celestial Cartography in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2013).

¹³ On this aspect, after Thiele (n. 7), 45-8, and Leuthold (n. 7), 61-5, see most recently A. Santoni, ‘Aspetti della mitologia celeste negli *Aratea* di Germanico: a proposito di Engonasi, Orse, Auriga’, in F. Guidetti (ed.), *Poesia delle stelle tra antichità e medioevo* (Pisa, 2016), 203-30, esp. 217-26.