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Autor: Castelletti, Cristiano

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Following Aratus' plow: Vergil's signature in the Aeneid

By Cristiano Castelletti, Fribourg

Abstract: This paper discusses two possible boustrophedon acrostics, as yet unnoticed, in Vergil's Aeneid (1,1–4) and Aratus' Phaenomena (6–8). Vergil's acrostic reads a stilo M(aronis) V(ergili), which is interpreted as the poet's signature. The particular nature of this acrostic seems to be inspired by the boustrophedon acrostic $i\delta\mu\hat{\eta}$ (= $i\delta\mu\sigma\sigma\dot{\nu}\eta$) which Aratus places at the beginning of his poem, hinting at its presence with key words. The $\beta\sigma\sigma\tau\rho\phi\eta\delta\dot{\nu}$ (turning like oxen in plowing) can be associated, both in Greek and in Latin, with the verb "to plow" (ἀροῦν, arare) and the name 'Άρατος / Aratus. Using the word stilus (meaning "pen", but also "weapon") Vergil not only signs his masterpiece but also indicates to which poetic genre it belongs, that is, epic. Vergil (= Tityrus) used the calamus at the beginning of the Eclogues to celebrate the Musa tenuis, whereas in the Aeneid he will use the stilus to celebrate the arma uirumque.

Although the subject remains a source of much skepticism, several findings seem to confirm the intentional use of acrostics by Vergil; in particular the linear acrostics *MARS* in *Aen*. 7,601–604¹ and *FONS* in *Ecl*. 1,5–8², and the syllabic acrostic *MAVEPU* in *G*. 1,429–433, commonly considered to be the poet's signature³. In this paper I aim to shed light on a passage in which I am inclined to think the great Latin poet has concealed a message in a different kind of acrostic. The sequence I am referring to is highly suggestive, since it is the proem of the *Aeneid*:

Arma uirumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oriS Italiam fato profugus Lauiniaque ueniT Litora – multum ille et terris iactatus et altO Vi superum, saeuae memorem Iunonis ob iraM

(Verg. Aen. 1,1-4)

I sing of arms and of the man, fated to be an exile, who long since left the land of Troy and came to Italy to the shores of Lavinium; and a great pounding he took by land and sea at the hands of the heavenly gods because of the fierce and unforgetting anger of Juno.

(transl. . West)D

- 1 See Fowler (1983).
- See Clauss (1997). See also UNDIS in Ecl. 9, 34–38, with Grishin (2008). Danielewicz ((2005) 324) has recently suggested reading the acrostic INANIS in Verg. Ecl. 8,42–47. For further supposed Vergilian acrostics see Scarcia (1993); Domenicucci (1996) 47–60; Damschen (2004) 106–108 and Katz (2007).
- First identified by Brown (1963) 102–105; see most recently Somerville (2010).

The first and the last letter of each line, reversing the direction of reading every other line (as in a boustrophedon script), read "A S T I L O M V", which I suggest should be understood as "A STILO M (aronis) V(ergili)", and interpreted as: from the stylus⁴, that is, "from the pen" of Vergilius Maro⁵. The word MARONIS would be confirmed by IRAM, the last word in the fourth line, which, read in reverse (that is, in the direction of the acrostic), provides not only the M, but also MAR.

Obviously the mere occurrence of a sequence of letters conveying meaning cannot be sufficient proof as to the intentionality of the author's creation, especially in a case as particular as the one discussed here. Let us therefore verify the genuine character of this hypothetical acrostic. The actual message imparted by the acrostic, a *sphragis* of the poet, could provide a first element confirming this assumption. Indeed, it is well known that one of the main functions of acrostics was precisely to enable poets to sign their work⁶. There would therefore be nothing incongruous in the presence of the author's mark in the incipit⁷ of the *Aeneid*. In the case of the *Georgics*, Vergil had placed the acrostic *MA VE PU* in what seemed at first a minor sequence of the poem, but critics have provided extensive proof that not only the place of the acrostic, but also the characteristics of its composition (e.g. the inverted order of the *tria nomina*, *MA VE PU*, instead of the canonical *PUblius VErgilius MAro*) were inspired by the sequence enclosing Aratus' famous acrostic AEIITH⁸ (which we will discuss later in this article). The same inversion of the names occurs in the acrostic I have set out to present here

- A very useful article on the stylus is still Lafaye (1909). The term stilus refers to a long, sharply pointed piece of metal (a spike for example), and also to the pointed instrument used to carve letters on a wax tablet, the stylus, which can be translated into modern English as "pen"; cf. OLD, s.v. 3 and 4. There are numerous occurrences of the word in Latin literature (cf. OLD and Forcellini, s. v. stilus), see for instance Plaut. Bacch. 728 cape stilum propere et tabellas, Cic. Verr. 2,2,101 uertit stilum in tabulis suis, quo facto causam omnem euertit suam, Hor. Sat. 1,10,72–73 saepe stilum uertas, iterum quae digna legi sint | scripturus. Stilus can also be a metonymy for writing, composing, creating, or even style (cf. OLD, s.v. 4b); however, in our specific case, as we will see later in the article, the author refers to the instrument.
- The word stilus does not otherwise occur in Vergil, in fact the term appears almost exclusively in prose (with a few exceptions, as the passage of Horace mentioned in the previous note, to which one might add Hor. Sat. 2,1,39 sed hic stilus haud petet ultro and Plaut. Bacch. 715, 996; Mil. 38). For the iunctura a stilo (meaning "pen"), see for instance Cic. Fam. 7,25,2 urge igitur nec transversum unguem, quod aiunt, a stilo; is enim est dicendi opifex and Quint. Inst. 6,1,42 at qui a stilo non recedunt, aut conticescunt ad hos casus aut frequentissime falsa dicunt. For occurrences of ablative of origin used in connection with the preposition a, without verb, see TLL 1,28,28-63, s.v. a, ab.
- A general account of acrostics can be found in Graf (1893); Vogt (1967); Courtney (1990); Damschen (2004) 88–94; Luz (2010) 1–77. For the widespread practice (among Latin as well as Greek authors) of signing one's work with an acrostic, see for instance Courtney (1990) 7–13.
- The most recent editions of the Aeneid (e.g. Geymonat (2008), with bibliography) are unanimous in stating that the first line of the poem is arma uirumque cano... and not Ille ego qui... On this question, see in particular Austin (1968).
- 8 On this aspect, see most recently Somerville (2010).

 $(M \dots V)$, which in my opinion can easily be justified in the light of this previous case. However the most striking aspect is undoubtedly the boustrophedon reading of the acrostic. I believe the reasons why Vergil chose this form are to be found once again in the Aratean model. Let us see why.

Recently J.T. Katz has shown how Vergil, paying tribute to Aratus at the beginning of the *Georgics*, coined a play on words based on the name of the Hellenistic poet⁹, just as Aratus had done at the beginning of the *Phaenomena*. The words *terram / uertere*, in particular, in G. $1,1-2^{10}$, are placed in the same positions within the line as $\hat{\epsilon}\hat{\omega}\mu\epsilon v$ / $\alpha\rho\rho\eta\tau\sigma v$ in *Phaen*. 1-2; being equivalent to *arare*, the past participle of which is *aratus*, they allude to the name of the poet of Soli, who in turn referred to himself using the word $\alpha\rho\eta\tau\sigma v^{11}$. But the proem of the *Phaenomena* also exhibits an ingenious feature which, as far as I know, has not yet been noticed:

Έκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, τὸν οὐδέποτ' ἄνδρες ἐῶμεν ἄρρητον· μεσταὶ δὲ Διὸς πᾶσαι μὲν ἀγυιαί, πᾶσαι δ' ἀνθρώπων ἀγοραί, μεστὴ δὲ θάλασσα καὶ λιμένες· πάντη δὲ Διὸς κεχρήμεθα πάντες.
Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος εἰμέν. Ὁ δ' ἤπιος ἀνθρώποισι 5 δεξιὰ σημαίνει, λαοὺς δ' ἐπὶ ἔργον ἐγείρει μιμνήσκων βιότοιο· λέγει δ' ὅτε βῶλος ἀρίστη βουσί τε καὶ μακέλησι, λέγει δ' ὅτε δεξιαὶ ὧραι καὶ φυτὰ γυρῶσαι καὶ σπέρματα πάντα βαλέσθαι.

(Arat. *Phaen*. 1–9)

Let us begin with Zeus, whom we men never leave unspoken. Filled with Zeus are highways and all meetingplaces of people, filled are the sea and the harbours; in all circumstances we are all dependent on Zeus. For we are also his children, and he benignly gives helpful signs to men, and rouses people to work, reminding them of their livelihood, tells when the soil is best for oxen and mattocks, and tells when the seasons are right both for planting trees and for sowing every kind of seed.

(transl. . idd)D K

The same method of reading (boustrophedon acrostic), applied to the first four lines, reveals the sequence E N I A Π A Σ K, which does not give rise to any particularly interesting conclusion¹². Things change however if we go to line 6. The

- 9 The probable wordplay had already been discovered by Levitan (1979) and discussed by Bing (1990).
- 10 Quid faciat laetas segetes, quo sidere <u>terram | uertere</u>, Maecenas, ulmisque adiungere uitis.
- 11 For the demonstration, see Katz (2008) 111–116.
- 12 To obtain a combination of letters that makes sense, we have to drop the final κ and read ἐνὶ ἄπας or, dropping the ἄ and the κ (thus arriving at a symmetrical structure), read ἐνὶ πᾶς. Considering ἐνί to be a form of ἔνεστι or ἐνέσται one can understand "πᾶς is in", and see a reference to the quadruple occurrence of πᾶς in these 4 lines (bearing in mind the fact that the acrostic πᾶς

boustrophedon reading, starting from the end of line 6, brings forth the sequence IDMH (if we stop at line 7), or IDMHI if we also consider a letter of the following line, that is $i\delta\mu\dot{\eta}$, or $i\delta\mu\hat{\eta}$ respectively. According to the LSJ $i\delta\mu\dot{\eta}=i\delta\mu\sigma\dot{\upsilon}\nu\eta$ (knowledge, skill), and the term is indeed attested by Hesychius. Before we decide which of the two forms ($i\delta\mu\dot{\eta}$) should be considered, we must justify reading from the end of line 6 and not from the start.

That should not be too difficult: all we need to do is to follow the clues Aratus left us. Indeed, it has already been shown that in the passage that encloses the famous acrostic Λ E Π TH, the poet of Soli has inserted messages that indicate the presence of the acrostic to the reader.

Σκέπτεο δὲ πρῶτον κεράων ἑκάτερθε σελήνην.

Ἄλλοτε γάρ τ' ἄλλη μιν ἐπιγράφει ἔσπερος αἴγλη,

ἄλλοτε δ' ἀλλοῖαι μορφαὶ κερόωσι σελήνην

εὐθὺς ἀεξομένην, αἱ μὲν τρίτη, αἱ δὲ τετάρτη·

τάων καὶ περὶ μηνὸς ἐφεσταότος κε πύθοιο.

Λεπτὴ μὲν καθαρή τε περὶ τρίτον ἦμαρ ἐοῦσα

εὕδιός κ' εἴη, λεπτὴ δὲ καὶ εὖ μάλ' ἐρευθὴς

πνευματίη· παχίων δὲ καὶ ἀμβλείησι κεραίαις

785

τέτρατον ἐκ τριτάτοιο φόως ἀμενηνὸν ἔχουσα

ἢ νότφ ἄμβλυνται ἢ ὕδατος ἐγγὺς ἐόντος.

(Arat. Phaen. 778-787)

Observe first the moon at her two horns. Different evenings paint her with different light, and different shapes at different times horn the moon as soon as she is waxing, some on the third day, some on the fourth; from these you can learn about the month that has just begun. If slender and clear about the third day, she will bode fair weather; if slender and very red, wind; if the crescent is thickish, with blunted horns, having a feeble fourthday light after the third day, either it is blurred by a southerly or because rain is in the offing.

(transl. D. Kidd)

In this case, the hint lies in σκέπτεο δὲ πρῶτον κεράων (ἑκάτερθε σελήνην) in line 778, which means "look at the edges first", that is, at the beginning of the lines¹³. As far as our boustrophedon acrostic is concerned, I believe clues can

originates from πᾶσαι at line 3 and closes on πάντες at line 4). It has already been noted that Aratus might have composed a "gamma acrostic" playing on the word πᾶς at lines 803 to 806 (on which Levitan (1979) 57–58; Clauss (1997) 274), and maybe also the acrostic πᾶν at lines 343–345 (on which Rostropowicz (1998) 109–111). In any case, critics have attested that not only are acrostics to be found in Aratus' work, but also telestics, isopsephoi and other plays on words. See e.g. Scarcia (1993), Fakas (1999), and the very useful discussion in Danielewicz (2005).

13 For more explanations, see Nelis-Feeney (2005), who have demonstrated that Vergil uses the same technique in order to leave clues. For example *prima mouent ... Martem*, hints at the acrostic *MARS* of *Aen.* 7,601–604. The same technique is used, among others, by Valerius Flaccus to draw attention (*capitum ... ordo ... respicias*) to his acrostic *LANIABOR* in *Arg.* 4,177–184 (see Castelletti (2008) 221–224).

be found in at least two points: first of all, at the beginning of line 6, we find $\delta \epsilon \xi i \grave{\alpha}$ σημαίνει, which seems to say: "the right side / the right indicates", that is, that we should start reading from the right¹⁴. Indeed, it is at the right end of line 6 that we find the first letter of the acrostic. The last word of the following line (7) is $\mathring{\alpha} \rho i \sigma \tau \eta$, which I take as a suggestion that the reader should proceed from right to left ($\mathring{\alpha} \rho i \sigma \tau \eta$) $\mathring{\alpha} \rho i \sigma \tau \rho \circ \mathring{\alpha} \rho i \sigma \tau \circ \mathring{\alpha} \rho i \sigma \tau \circ \mathring{\alpha} \rho \circ \mathring{$

At this stage, we should determine whether ἰδμή or ἰδμῆ makes sense in this passage. The acrostic is contained in lines 5 to 9 of the prologue, in which we learn that "[we are all dependent on Zeus] for we are also his children, and he benignly gives helpful signs to men, and rouses people to work, reminding them of their livelihood, tells when the soil is best for oxen and mattocks, and tells when the seasons are right both for planting trees and for sowing every kind of seed". At first sight, the context seems particularly appropriate to evoke Zeus' act of generosity, revealing knowledge (and science) to human beings, in other words, the ίδμή of agriculture. All the more reason to compose a boustrophedon acrostic, as it is also a visual reproduction of the movement of the plow pulled by oxen. In my opinion, the fact that Zeus reveals this knowledge through signs (δεξιὰ σημαίνει¹⁶, line 6), which obviously have to be identified and interpreted by humans, gives more point to the insertion of an acrostic, as it too will need to be identified first, and then interpreted. All of this reflects what scholars have already observed about the significance of signs in Aratus' poem¹⁷, which appears clearly right from the beginning: "In addition to announcing the poem's topic, Aratus' proem neatly states the Phaenomena's conception of the world as

- 14 Aratus seems to compose a "gamma acrostic" on σημαίνει at line 808 (on which, see most recently Clauss (1997) 274).
- I wonder whether Aratus himself is alluding to these three hints when he writes, at the end of his poem (lines 1142–1144): καλὸν δ' ἐπὶ σήματι σῆμα | σκέπτεσθαι μᾶλλον δὲ δυοῖν εἰς ταὐτὸν ἰόντων | ἐλπωρὴ τελέθοι τριτάτῳ δέ κε θαρσήσειας "It is a good idea to observe one sign after another, and if two agree, it is more hopeful, while with a third you can be confident" (transl. D. Kidd).
- 16 Volk (2010) 201: "The idea of the sign is central to the *Phaenomena*, as is apparent from the fact that forms of the noun σῆμα (pl. σήματα) "sign" appear 47 times in the course of the poem, those of the verb (ἐπι)σημαίνω "to signal" 11 times".
- On this topic (on which Martin (2003) 138 states "Aratos accorde à la tradition la valeur d'un signe, d'un message envoyé par Zeus, et qui doit être déchiffré") see most recently Volk (2010) 200–208, with discussion and bibliography. "The *Phaenomena* is all about signs: not about imparting a body of knowledge about specific signs, but about the idea of signification itself", ibid. 203.

a cosmos full of benevolent signs from an omnipresent god who has the welfare of human beings at heart"18.

If we read $i\delta\mu\dot{\eta}$, the acrostic would be in the nominative (as in $\lambda\epsilon\pi\dot{\eta}$, at lines 783–787), but in my view, the correct reading must be $i\delta\mu\hat{\eta}$, for at least two reasons. The first is of structural nature: IΔMHI would be situated in lines 6 to 8, that is, within the three verses containing the key words that help identify it (δεξιὰ σημαίνει, ἀρίστη, βουσί).

The second reason lies in a parallel passage which, if our reading is correct, could help prove that the acrostic is intentional. As noted above, the only occurrence of the term $i\delta\mu\dot{\eta}$ we know of is to be found in Hesychius. The search through parallel passages therefore has to aim for the word $i\delta\mu\sigma\dot{\upsilon}\upsilon\eta$, a rare term, but used by a dozen authors, of which the first seems to have been Hesiod:

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Κρείφ δ' Εὐρυβίη τέκεν ἐν φιλότητι μιγεῖσα 375 

Άστραῖόν τε μέγαν Πάλλαντά τε δῖα θεάων 

Πέρσην θ', ὃς καὶ πᾶσι μετέπρεπεν <u>ἰδμοσύνησιν</u>. 

(Hes. Theog. 375–377)
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With Kreios Eurybia shared intimacy, noble among goddesses, and bore great Astraeus and Pallas, and Perses, who shone out amongst them all for his wisdom.

(transl.M.L. West)

This passage is interesting, as it refers to deities connected with stars and celestial bodies, among which Perses shines out through his wisdom ($\pi \hat{\alpha} \sigma \iota ... i \delta \mu o \sigma \acute{\nu} v \eta \sigma \iota v$). We shall come back to this passage later, as the most interesting text, as far as our acrostic is concerned, is to be found in Nicander:

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ἀγύγιος δ' ἄρα μῦθος ἐν αἰζηοῖσι φορεῖται, 

ὡς, ὁπότ' οὐρανὸν ἔσχε Κρόνου πρεσβίστατον αἷμα, 

Νειμάμενος κασίεσσιν ἑκὰς περικυδέας ἀρχάς 345 

Ιδμοσύνη νεότητα γέρας πόρεν ἡμερίοισι 

Κυδαίνων δὴ γάρ ῥα πυρὸς ληίστορ' ἔνιπτον. 

Αφρονες, οὐ μὲν τῆς γε κακοφραδίης ἀπόνηντο· 

Νωθεῖς γὰρ κάμνοντες ἀμορβεύοντο λεπάργφ 

Δῶρα πολύσκαρθμος δὲ κεκαυμένος αὐχένα δίψη 350 

Ρώετο, γωλειοῖσι δ' ἰδὼν ὁλκήρεα θῆρα
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Volk (2010) 200 and 204: "At some fundamental level, all signs can be traced back to the agency of Zeus, and Aratus comes back periodically to the god's role as the ultimate giver of signs (264–267, 741–743, 769–772, 963–966)". Particularly relevant is the passage shortly preceding the lines with the acrostic AEIITH: "For we men do not yet have knowledge of everything from Zeus, but much still is hidden, whereof Zeus, if he wishes, will give us signs anon; he certainly does benefit the human race openly, showing himself on every side, and everywhere displaying his signs" (*Phaen.* 768–772; transl. D. Kidd).

Ούλοὸν ἐλλιτάνευε κακῆ ἐπαλαλκέμεν ἄτη Σαίνων· αὐτὰρ ὁ βρίθος ὃ δή ῥ' ἀνεδέξατο νώτοις ἤτεεν ἄφρονα δῶρον· ὁ δ' οὐκ ἀπανήνατο χρειώ. (Nic. Ther. 343–354)

Now there is a tale of ancient days current among men how, when the first-born seed of Cronos became lord of heaven, he apportioned to his brothers severally their illustrious realms, and in his wisdom bestowed upon mortal Youth, honouring them because they had denounced the Fire-Stealer. The fools, they got no good of their imprudence: for, being sluggards and growing weary, they entrusted the gift to an ass for carriage, and the beast, his throat burning with thirst, ran off skittishly, and seeing in its hole the deadly, trailing brute, implored it with fawning speech to aid him in his sore plight. Whereat the snake asked of the foolish creature as a gift the load which he had taken on his back; and the ass refused not its request.

(transl. A.S.F. ow-A.KG holfiel8)

As we see, in this famous passage, in which Nicander signs his poem with an acrostic¹⁹, the word that provides the second letter of the signature is ίδμοσύνη (line 346). A coincidence? I don't think so, especially as the actual passage refers to Zeus (defined as Κρόνου πρεσβίστατον αίμα), having distributed power among his siblings "with wisdom, knowingly" (ἰδμοσύνη)²⁰. Obviously we cannot be absolutely certain that Nicander had the Aratean acrostic in mind when he chose ἰδμοσύνη (= ίδμῆ), but the fact that this word does not otherwise occur in his work, and that it refers to Zeus, whose ἰδμοσύνη is praised, seems to me quite significant. Moreover, the mythological episode narrated by Nicander happens to be inspired by Hesiod (Theog. 881–885)²¹ and Aratus himself, whose agonistic relationship with Hesiod is visible as early as the proem²², would not have picked by chance a word of Hesiodic inspiration to compose his acrostic. If that is the case, the boustrophedon character of the acrostic could be interpreted, ultimately, as an allusive reference to the author of the Erga²³, once more with a polemical intention, given that Hesiod's Zeus, "hiding the livelihood of men"24 is very different from the king of the Olympians imagined by Aratus, who, on the contrary, "reminds people of their livelihood"25.

- 19 On the acrostic NIKANΔPOΣ (lines 345–353), see Jacques (2002) LXX–LXXI and Luz (2010) 16–22.
- 20 The scholia to Nicander indicate: ίδμοσύν η ·σὺν ἐπιστήμη, γνώσει.
- 21 See Jacques (2002) CVII and 28.
- As we have already noted, Hesiod's influence is conspicuous in the *Phaenomena*; however, while imitating his archaic model in certain points, Aratus clearly departs from it in others. Besides Martin (2003) 138 and the comments on μεσταί (line 2) and μιμνήσκων βιότοιο (line 7), see especially Erren (1967) 9–31 and Fakas (2001) 5–66. For a synthesis with bibliography, see most recently Volk (2010) 199–204.
- 23 The boustrophedon nature of the acrostic seems appropriate for an allusion to a pastoral genre.
- 24 Cf. Hes. Erga, 42–48 Κρύψαντες γὰρ ἔχουσι θεοὶ βίον ἀνθρώποισιν ... ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς ἔκρυψε χολωσάμενος φρεσὶ ἦσιν, Ι ὅττι μιν ἐξαπάτησε Προμηθεὺς ἀγκυλομήτης.
- 25 Cf. Volk (2010) 200-201: "The contrast to Hesiod [sc. in Aratus' proem] could not be more pronounced: Zeus as described in the proem to the Works and Days (3-7) is all-powerful, but

Let us go back to Vergil. In the light of the analysis presented above, I suggest that the boustrophedon acrostic a stilo M(aronis) V(ergili) is not only intentional, but also that it has a precise metapoetic function. Vergil, as we said at the beginning, had already appended his signature to the Georgics and I am convinced he did so at the beginning of the Aeneid too. This time, the signature takes the form of a boustrophedon acrostic, a choice that implies more than the poet's mere desire for uariatio. Although this very archaic type of script26 would be suited for the incipit of a poem dedicated to origins, such as the Aeneid, and would indeed be an elegant way to mark the transition from the previous didactic poem on country life (the Georgics), Vergil chose the βουστροφηδόν primarily to pay tribute to one of his main literary models, Aratus. The tribute is all the more eloquent as it not only reproduces a technique already used by the Hellenistic poet, but also connects the verb arare, 'to plow', with the name Aratus. Besides, I would not rule out the possibility that Aratus, who relates his own name to the word ἄρρητον, might have used this type of script, which in Greek too can allude to the verb "to plow" (ἀροῦν)²⁷, in order to refer to himself. In any case, in Latin, the verb arare is used in a figurative sense in reference to the process of writing²⁸ and the use of the term stilus calls to mind that same image, that of a sharp tool that leaves a mark in the soil (or in wax tablets, when used for writing). All of which takes on even more meaning if we consider that Vergil seems already to have made an allusive reference to Aratus, in relation with an acrostic, at the beginning of the Bucolics. Indeed, as has been demonstrated by Clauss²⁹, Vergil inserted the acrostic *FONS* in the first Eclogue:

Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi
siluestrem tenui musam meditaris auena:
nos patriae finis et dulcia linquimus arua.
nos patriam fugimus: tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra
Formonsam resonare doces Amaryllida siluas.

O Meliboee, deus nobis haec otia fecit.

Namque erit ille mihi semper deus, illius aram
Saepe tener nostris ab ouilibus imbuet agnus.

his ability to raise and oppress human beings at will is threatening rather than reassuring, and in hiding the livelihood of men (42,47,50), he acts in a manner diametrically opposed to that of Aratus' Zeus, who by means of his propitious signs "reminds people of their livelihood" (μιμνήσκων βιότοιο, 7; Hunter (2008) 157–158)".

- 26 The inscription of the *lapis niger* (CIL I² 1 = ILLRP 3), for instance, was written in boustrophedon script.
- 27 For modern scholars, as Katz correctly points out, of the name "Άρατος may be more closely related to ἀρᾶσθαι (to pray), than to ἀροῦν or ἄρρητον (see Katz (2008) 107, n. 3 and 113, n. 3).
- 28 Cf. TLL 2, 627,43-46, s.v. aro II, quoting e.g. Mart. 4,86,11 (libelle) inuersa pueris arande charta. The motiv of plowing can also be found in what is considered the most ancient testimony of vernacular Italian, the famous "Veronese riddle" (on which see most recently De Angelis (2003)): "Se pareba boves, alba pratalia araba et albo versorio teneba et negro semen seminaba".
- 29 Clauss (1997).

ille meas errare boues, ut cernis, et ipsum ludere quae uellem calamo permisit agresti.

(Verg. Ecl. 1, 1-10)

(Meliboeus) You, Tityrus, lie under the canopy of a spreading beech, wooing the woodland Muse on slender reed, but we are leaving our country's bounds and sweet fields. We are outcasts from our country; you, Tityrus, at ease beneath the shade, teach the woods to re-echo "fair Amaryllis".

(Tityrus) O Meliboeus, it is a god who gave us this peace – for a god he shall ever be to me; often shall a tender lamb from our folds stain his altar. Of his grace my kine roam, as you see, and I, their master, play what I will on my rustic pipe.

(transl. H.R. Fairclough-G.P. Goold)

As Clauss has already suggested, the acrostic *FONS* would therefore allude to Vergil's source of poetic inspiration³³. Certainly Theocritus, Callimachus and Hesiod are among the main literary models for the *Bucolics*, but the *fons* to which lines 9–10 allude, I would guess, is Aratus, who inspired Vergil to use the technique of the acrostics and who is probably recalled in the sentence *meas errare boues*, an allusion to the boustrophedon movement and to the verb *arare*. Besides, Virgil will explicitly allude to Aratus further on in the *Bucolics*, in the words *ab Ioue principium Musae*, *Iouis omnia plena*; | *ille colit terras*; *illi mea carmina curae*³⁴ (with a reference to the first fragment of Cicero's *Aratea*³⁵) and

³⁰ An identification already suggested by Servius (in Ecl. 1, p. 4,21–23 Thilo): et hoc loco Tityri sub persona Vergilium debemus accipere; non tamen ubique, sed tantum ubi exigit ratio.

³¹ Cf. TLL 3,1,122,65–123,37, s.v. calamus.

³² Clauss ((1997) 271) indicates that *formosam* too (line 5) can be understood as hinting at the presence of the acrostic.

For the use of fons as a literary model, see TLL 6,1,1025,8-1026,18, s.v. fons II B; OLD, s.v. fons 4a.

³⁴ Ecl. 3,60–61. On the imitation of Aratus in this passage of the Bucolics, see Lipka (2001) 112 and Katz (2008) 113, who finds another allusion to Aratus' name in colit terras (line 61).

³⁵ Cic. Arat. fr. 1 Soubiran a Ioue Musarum primordia.

will do so again in the *Aeneid*: in an explicit way, with *ab Ioue principium generis*³⁶ and allusively, with the acrostic *a stilo* (which seems to echo Cicero's *a Ioue*, the translation of the first two words of the *Phaenomena* – $i\kappa \Delta \iota \delta \varsigma$).

Conclusions

In the proem of the *Georgics*, Vergil had already used several allusions to pay tribute to Aratus³⁷. If our analysis is correct, there were earlier allusive references to Aratus by means of acrostics at the beginning of the *Eclogues*. Therefore, if we consider with what care Vergil composed his poems and connected them to each other with precise structural references³⁸, there should be nothing astonishing in his concealing his signature at the beginning of the *Aeneid*, in a manner both deferential towards his models and self-laudatory³⁹. I would however like to take a closer look at the term *stilus*, in order to suggest a last explanation as to the choice of this word to compose the acrostic.

Many critics have repeatedly asserted⁴⁰ that the main function of the Aratean acrostic $\lambda \epsilon \pi \tau \dot{\eta}$ is to announce a poetic manifesto characterized by $\lambda \epsilon \pi \tau \dot{\eta} \tau \dot{\eta} \dot{\eta}$. In the first verses of the first *Eclogue*, Vergil gives several clues that herald the *Bucolics*' poetic program. Among various references to the pastoral genre, we find the *tenuis auena* (used by Meliboeus to celebrate the *Musa siluestris*; line 2), recalled⁴² at line 10 (where we have identified the reference to Aratus) by the *calamus agrestis* on which Tityrus can play (*ludere*). In the *Aeneid*, it is clear from the very first lines that the *Musa tenuis* of the pastoral lyric has given place to the epic Muse. I would therefore argue that with the acrostic *a stilo*, Vergil not only signs his masterpiece, but also indicates to which poetic genre it belongs. Indeed, the *calamus* used by Tityrus/Vergil in the *Bucolics* is replaced by the *stilus*⁴³ in the *Aeneid*. Both terms denote in-

- 36 Aen. 7, 219.
- On the influence of Aratus and Hesiod in the *Georgics*, see Farrell (1991) 131–168. As noted by Katz (2008) 112 "both Aratus and Vergil nod to Hesiod at the very beginning of their respective poems, but Vergil in the *Georgics* points to Hesiod more *through Aratus* than directly".
- 38 On this aspect, see for instance Nelis (2004).
- 39 In view of this, the occurrence of the word memorem in the middle of the fourth line of the Aeneid, that is, in the verse that provides the initials of the signature (M and V), may not be fortuitous. To be precise (a quality Vergil certainly did not lack), if we count the letters, memor is exactly in the centre of the verse. Moreover, the middle letter of memor is M, the initial of both memoria and Maro.
- 40 See for instance Jacques (1960); Kidd (1997) 445–446; Martin (2003) 472.
- 41 The λεπτότης is indeed a central concept of the *Phaenomena*'s poetics, but some scholars disagree with the *communis opinio* that this concept is also relevant for Callimachus' aesthetics, and that the acrostic states a poetic program. On this debate, see Luz (2010) 50–51 and Volk (2010) 205–208.
- 42 Calamus and auena are synonyms, as auena is the Latin equivalent of κάλαμος; see Cairns (1999).
- 43 The fact that both words are in the ablative (calamo, stilo) may not be fortuitous.

struments used for writing ("pen"), but instruments of a very different nature: one is a cane stem dipped in ink and used to write on papyrus (or parchment), whereas the other is a rigid rod (made of metal, bone or ivory), with a sharp edge, intended to carve wax tablets. The *calamus* is also a musical instrument (a reed pipe) and therefore adapted to the light style of pastoral lyric, whereas the *stilus*, being harder and sharper, can also be used as a weapon⁴⁴ and is therefore suitable for writing about the armies and warriors that characterize the epic genre. Besides, it is not a coincidence that the word that starts the acrostic should be *arma*.

I therefore suggest that a stilo M(aronis) V(ergili), besides providing Vergil's signature in the Aeneid, also announces its poetic genre, and fulfils the purpose many critics have attributed to the Aratean $\lambda \epsilon \pi \tau \dot{\eta}$ and to other examples that derive from it⁴⁵.

As I wrote in the introduction to this article, acrostics often arouse skepticism and certainly the mere occurrence of a sequence of letters that happen to make sense is not sufficient proof of an author's intention. In my opinion, however, while critics can always argue for chance, if the word fits the context of the passage and is supported by clues left by the poet himself to attract the reader's attention⁴⁶, and if an intertextual analysis reveals a poetic tradition, we may assume that the author has composed an intentional acrostic. Therefore,

- For the stylus (i.e. γραφίς, γραφεῖον, stilus, graphium) used as a weapon, see for instance Lafaye (1909): "On conçoit qu'un instrument si acéré, facilement transportable dans un pli du vêtement, pouvait à l'occasion devenir une arme dangereuse et tenir lieu de poignard, comme nous le montrent certains récits", e.g. Suet. Iul. 82, Cal. 28, Claud. 35; Prud. Perist. 9,51. The stilus was also a tool used for military purposes, see Lafaye 1909, 1511; OLD, s.v. stilus 1 and Forcellini, s.v. stilus: STILUS proprie dicitur quidquid pungit; quare sumitur de instrumento quolibet erecto et acuminato; speciatim vero in re militari stili dictae sunt ferreae cuspides, sudes acutae, stimuli, acumina latenter humi infixa, in quae hostes incauti incidentes, et praecipue equitatus, sese misere induebant. Bell. Afr. 31,7 tum egregiae munitiones castrorum atque ualli fossarumque altitudo et extra uallum stili caeci mirabilem in modum consiti uel sine defensoribus aditum aduersariis prohibebant; Sil. 10,413–414 ceruorum ambustis imitantur cornua ramis, | et stilus occulitur, caecum in uestigia telum.
- 45 For other examples of acrostics stating a poetic intention, see Damschen (2004).
- 46 The report of MH points out that for the acrostic a stilo (as well as for the Arataean ἐνὶ πας) there are no clues left for the reader such as those found for ἰδμῆ. As a matter of fact, for the large majority of intentional acrostics there are no clues for the readers and scholars can only argue that they fit the context. Moreover, acrostics are a poetic trick and the poet doesn't necessarily feel the need nor the desire to indicate their presence to the readers. Only in rare cases do we find a combination of context, hints and literary tradition, all of which provide a very high probability of the acrostic being intentional. A boustrophedon acrostic is indeed striking, but some scholars would consider a stilo intentional even without the Aratean parallel, while others would never be convinced no matter how much evidence one could produce. Ancient texts are still full of surprises, as I have recently pointed out with the "Greek" acrostic AID OS, found in Valerius Flaccus (see Castelletti (2012)). I am convinced that what now seems a hapax (a Greek word [αἰδώς] used in acrostic in a Latin poem) will be matched by other occurrences found by scholars. The same thing is likely to happen as far as boustrophedon acrostics are concerned.

I suggest that not only the Aratean $i\delta\mu\hat{\eta}$ but also the Vergilian *a stilo M(aronis)* V(ergili) are deliberate features of the poem.

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Correspondence: Cristiano Castelletti Institut des Sciences de l'Antiquité et du Monde byzantin Philologie classique Rue Pierre-Aeby 16

1700 Fribourg cristiano.castelletti@unifr.ch