

**Zeitschrift:** Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica

**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft

**Band:** 69 (2012)

**Heft:** 1

  

**Artikel:** Following Aratus' plow : Vergil's signature in the "Aeneid"

**Autor:** Castelletti, Cristiano

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-283558>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 05.08.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## 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 ἰδμῆ (= ἰδμοσύνη) which Aratus places at the beginning of his poem, hinting at its presence with key words. The βουστροφηδόν (turning like oxen in plowing) can be associated, both in Greek and in Latin, with the verb “to plow” (ἀροῦν, *arare*) and the name Ἄρατος / *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.* 7,601–604<sup>1</sup> and *FONS* in *Ecl.* 1,5–8<sup>2</sup>, and the syllabic acrostic *MA VE PU* in *G.* 1,429–433, commonly considered to be the poet's signature<sup>3</sup>. 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).

2 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).

3 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 stylus<sup>4</sup>, that is, “from the pen” of Vergilius Maro<sup>5</sup>. 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 work<sup>6</sup>. There would therefore be nothing incongruous in the presence of the author’s mark in the incipit<sup>7</sup> 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 *P*ublius *V*ergilius *M*aro) were inspired by the sequence enclosing Aratus’ famous acrostic ΑΕΠΙΤΗ<sup>8</sup> (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

- 4 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.
- 5 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*.
- 6 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.
- 7 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 ... 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 poet<sup>9</sup>, just as Aratus had done at the beginning of the *Phaenomena*. The words *terram / uertere*, in particular, in *G.* 1,1–2<sup>10</sup>, are placed in the same positions within the line as ἐὼμεν / ἄρρητον 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 ἄρρητον<sup>11</sup>. But the proem of the *Phaenomena* also exhibits an ingenious feature which, as far as I know, has not yet been noticed:

Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, τὸν οὐδέποτ' ἄνδρες ἐὼμεν  
 ἄρρητον· μεστὰ δὲ Διὸς πᾶσαι μὲν ἀγυαί,  
 πᾶσαι δ' ἀνθρώπων ἀγοραί, μεστὴ δὲ θάλασσα  
 καὶ λιμένες· πάντη δὲ Διὸς κεκρήμεθα πάντες.  
 Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος εἰμέν. Ὁ δ' ἥπιος ἀνθρώποισι  
δεξιὰ σημαίνει, λαοὺς δ' ἐπὶ ἔργον ἐγείρει  
 μμνήσκων βιότοιο· λέγει δ' ὅτε βῶλος ἀρίστη  
 βουσί τε καὶ μακέλῃσι, λέγει δ' ὅτε δεξιὰ ὦραι  
 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 conclusion<sup>12</sup>. 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 terram | uertere, 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 ἐνὶ to be a form of ἐνεσσι 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 ΙΑΜΗ (if we stop at line 7), or ΙΑΜΗΙ if we also consider a letter of the following line, that is ἰδυή, or ἰδυῆ respectively. According to the LSJ ἰδυή = ἰδυοσύνη (knowledge, skill), and the term is indeed attested by Hesychius. Before we decide which of the two forms (ἰδυή or ἰδυῆ) 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 ΛΕΠΤΗ, the poet of Soli has inserted messages that indicate the presence of the acrostic to the reader.

Σκέπτεο δὲ πρῶτον κέραων ἐκάτερθε σελήνην.  
 Ἄλλοτε γάρ τ' ἄλλη μιν ἐπιγράφει ἔσπερος αἴγλη,  
 ἄλλοτε δ' ἄλλοιαι μορφαὶ κερώσι σελήνην 780  
 εὐθὺς ἀεξομένην, αἱ μὲν τρίτῃ, αἱ δὲ τετάρτῃ·  
 τῶν καὶ περὶ μηνὸς ἐφεσταότος κε πύθοιο.  
 Λεπτὴ μὲν καθαρὴ τε περὶ τρίτον ἡμαρ ἐοῦσα  
 εὐδιός κ' εἴη, λεπτή δὲ καὶ εὖ μάλ' ἐρευθῆς  
 πνευματὶν· παχίων δὲ καὶ ἀμβλείῃσι κεραΐαις 785  
 τέτρατον ἐκ τριτάτοιο φῶς ἀμενηνὸν ἔχουσα  
 ἢ νότῳ ἀμβλυνταὶ 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 κέραων (ἐκάτερθε σελήνην) in line 778, which means “look at the edges first”, that is, at the beginning of the lines<sup>13</sup>. As far as our boustrophedon acrostic is concerned, I believe clues can

originate from πᾶσαι at line 3 and close 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 has 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 δεξιὰ σημαίνει, which seems to say: “the right side / the right indicates”, that is, that we should start reading from the right<sup>14</sup>. 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 ἀρίστη, which I take as a suggestion that the reader should proceed from right to left (ἀρίστη > ἀριστερά). In my opinion however, the fact that definitely speaks in favor of this assumption is that the first word at the beginning of line 8 (where the acrostic would end) is βουσί. Therefore, it does not seem completely senseless to read δεξιὰ σημαίνει... βουσί, a message meaning “the right (and then the left) point to the oxen”, which confirms that the poet is alluding to the boustrophedon movement. Besides, if our reading is correct, not only would the poet have composed a boustrophedon acrostic, but he would also have hinted at its presence<sup>15</sup>.

At this stage, we should determine whether ἰδυή or ἰδυῆ 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 ἰδυή 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 σημαίνει<sup>16</sup>, 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’ poem<sup>17</sup>, 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).

15 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· μάλλον δὲ δυοῖν εἰς ταῦτόν ἰόντων | ἐλπωρὴ τελέθει· τριτάτῳ δέ κε θαρσύνειας “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”.

17 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.





Οὐλοὸν ἐλλιτάνευε κακῇ ἐπαλαλκόμεν ἄτῃ  
 Σαίνων· αὐτὰρ ὁ βρῖθος ὃ δὴ ῥ' ἀνεδέξατο νότοις  
 ἦτεν ἄφρονα δῶρον· ὃ δ' οὐκ ἀπανήνατο χρεῖω.  
 (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. Gow-A.K.G. Holfield<sup>86</sup>)

As we see, in this famous passage, in which Nicander signs his poem with an acrostic<sup>19</sup>, the word that provides the second letter of the signature is ἰδυοσύνη (line 346). A coincidence? I don't think so, especially as the actual passage refers to Zeus (defined as Κρόνου πρεσβίστατον αἶμα), having distributed power among his siblings “with wisdom, knowingly” (ἰδυοσύνη)<sup>20</sup>. Obviously we cannot be absolutely certain that Nicander had the Aratean acrostic in mind when he chose ἰδυοσύνη (= ἰδυῆ), but the fact that this word does not otherwise occur in his work, and that it refers to Zeus, whose ἰδυοσύνη is praised, seems to me quite significant. Moreover, the mythological episode narrated by Nicander happens to be inspired by Hesiod (*Theog.* 881–885)<sup>21</sup> and Aratus himself, whose agonistic relationship with Hesiod is visible as early as the proem<sup>22</sup>, 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 *Erga*<sup>23</sup>, once more with a polemical intention, given that Hesiod's Zeus, “hiding the livelihood of men”<sup>24</sup> is very different from the king of the Olympians imagined by Aratus, who, on the contrary, “reminds people of their livelihood”<sup>25</sup>.

19 On the acrostic ΝΙΚΑΝΔΡΟΣ (lines 345–353), see Jacques (2002) LXX–LXXI and Luz (2010) 16–22.

20 The scholia to Nicander indicate: ἰδυοσύνη· σὺν ἐπιστήμῃ, γνώσει.

21 See Jacques (2002) CVII and 28.

22 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 μμνήσκων 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, ἵ ὅτι μιν ἔξαπάτησε 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 script<sup>26</sup> 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)<sup>27</sup>, 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 writing<sup>28</sup> 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 Clauss<sup>29</sup>, Vergil inserted the acrostic *FONS* in the first Eclogue:

*Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi* (M)  
*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.* 5  
*O Meliboe, deus nobis haec otia fecit.* (T)  
*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" (μυμνήσκων βιότοις, 7; Hunter (2008) 157–158)".

- 26 The inscription of the *lapis niger* (CIL P 1 = ILLRP 3), for instance, was written in boustrophedon script.
- 27 For modern scholars, as Katz correctly points out, of the name Ἀρατος 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 motif 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.* 10

(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)

Clauss rightly argues that *FONS* is intentional, but his discussion and conclusions fail to include some elements which I consider essential to fully grasping its meaning. Indeed, the much discussed *deus*, who has never been unanimously identified by critics, could allude not only to Octavian or Apollo, but also to the Zeus of Aratus and to Aratus himself. This *deus* actually *meas errare boues ... permisit* (9–10), as the Aratean Zeus λέγει δ' ὅτε βῶλος ἀρίστη βουσί (*Phaen.* 7–8). But above all, the *deus* (= Aratus), has given me (Tityrus = Vergil<sup>30</sup>) the capacity to write (*meas errare boues*) and to play (*ludere* = παίζειν) with the *calamus* (the pen<sup>31</sup>), that is: to contrive "games with a pen", in other words, acrostics (in this case, *FONS*). The words *ut cernis* may be interpreted as a hint pointing to the acrostic ("as you can see, there is an acrostic")<sup>32</sup>.

As Clauss has already suggested, the acrostic *FONS* would therefore allude to Vergil's source of poetic inspiration<sup>33</sup>. 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*<sup>34</sup> (with a reference to the first fragment of Cicero's *Aratea*<sup>35</sup>) and

30 An identification already suggested by Servius (*in Ecl.* 1, p. 421–23 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.

33 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*<sup>36</sup> 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* – ἐκ Διός).

### Conclusions

In the proem of the *Georgics*, Vergil had already used several allusions to pay tribute to Aratus<sup>37</sup>. 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 references<sup>38</sup>, 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-laudatory<sup>39</sup>. 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 asserted<sup>40</sup> that the main function of the Aratean acrostic λεπτή is to announce a poetic manifesto characterized by λεπτότης<sup>41</sup>. 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), recalled<sup>42</sup> 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*<sup>43</sup> in the *Aeneid*. Both terms denote in-

36 *Aen.* 7, 219.

37 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 weapon<sup>44</sup> 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 *λεπτή* and to other examples that derive from it<sup>45</sup>.

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 attention<sup>46</sup>, and if an intertextual analysis reveals a poetic tradition, we may assume that the author has composed an intentional acrostic. Therefore,

44 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 infixae, 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 πᾶσι*) 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 *AIDOS*, 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 ἰδμῆ but also the Vergilian *a stilo M(aronis) V(ergili)* are deliberate features of the poem.

### Bibliography

- Austin (1968): R.G. Austin, *Ille ego qui quondam...*, «CQ» 18, 107–115.
- Bing (1990): P. Bing, *A Pun on Aratus' Name in Verse 2 of the Phainomena?*, «HSPH» 93, 281–285.
- Brown (1963): E.L. Brown, *Numeri Vergiliani: Studies in "Eclogues" and "Georgics"*, Brussels.
- Cairns (1999): F. Cairns, *Virgil Eclogue 1. 1–2: a literary programme?*, «HSPH» 99, 289–293.
- Castelletti (2008): C. Castelletti, *Riflessioni sugli acrostici di Valerio Flacco*, «GIF» 60, 219–234.
- Castelletti (2012): C. Castelletti, *A "Greek" Acrostic in Valerius Flaccus (3.430–4)*, «Mnemosyne» 65, 319–323.
- Clauss (1997): J.J. Clauss, *An Acrostic in Vergil (Eclogues I 5–8): the Chance that Mimics Choice?*, «Aevum» 10, 267–287.
- Courtney (1990): E. Courtney, *Greek and Latin Acrostichs*, «Philologus» 134, 3–13.
- Damschen (2004): G. Damschen, *Das lateinische Akrostichon: Neue Funde bei Ovid sowie Vergil, Grattius, Manilius und Silius Italicus*, «Philologus» 148, 88–115.
- Danielewicz (2005): J. Danielewicz, *Further Hellenistic Acrostics: Aratus and Others*, «Mnemosyne» 58, 321–334.
- De Angelis (2003): A. De Angelis, *Le "dita separate": un' ipotesi lessicale e una sintattica per l'indovinello veronese*, «ZRPh», 119, 107–133.
- Domenicucci (1996): P. Domenicucci, *Astra Caesarum: Astronomia, astrologia e catasterismo da Cesare a Domiziano*, Pisa.
- Erren (1967): M. Erren, *Die Phainomena des Aratos von Soloi: Untersuchungen zum Sach- und Sinnverständnis*, Wiesbaden.
- Fakas (1999): C. Fakas, *Ein unbeachtetes Telestichon bei Arat*, «Philologus» 143, 356–359.
- Fakas (2001): C. Fakas, *Der hellenistische Hesiod: Arats Phainomena und die Tradition der antiken Lehrepik*, Wiesbaden.
- Farrell (1991): J. Farrell, *Virgil's Georgics and the Traditions of Ancient Epic*, Oxford.
- Fowler (1983): D.P. Fowler, *An Acrostic in Vergil (Aeneid 7601–4)?*, «CQ» 33, 298.
- Geymonat (2008): M. Geymonat (ed.), *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Roma.
- Graf (1893): G. Graf, s.v. *Akrostichis*, in: *RE* 1,1,1200–1207.
- Grishin (2008): A.A. Grishin, *An acrostic in Eclogue 9*, «HSPH» 104, 237–240.
- Hunter (2008): R.L. Hunter, *Written in the Stars: Poetry and Philosophy in the Phaenomena of Aratus*, in: Id. *On Coming After: Studies in Post-Classical Greek Literature and its Reception*. Berlin. vol. 1, 153–188. [originally published in «Arachnion» 1.2 (1995)]
- Jacques (1960): J.M. Jacques, *Sur un acrostiche d'Aratos (Phén. 783–787)*, «REA» 62, 48–61.
- Jacques (2002): J.M. Jacques (ed.), *Nicandre, Œuvres, tome II, Les Thériaques*, Paris.
- Katz (2007): J.T. Katz, *An Acrostic Ant Road in Aeneid 4*, «MD» 59 [publ. 2008], 77–86.
- Katz (2008): J.T. Katz, *Vergil Translates Aratus: Phaenomena 1–2 and Georgics 1.1–2*, «MD» 60, 105–123.
- Kidd (1997): D. Kidd, *Aratus, Phaenomena*, Cambridge.
- Lafaye (1909): G. Lafaye, s.v. *stilus*, in: C. Daremberg-E. Saglio (eds.), *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, 4, 2, Paris, 1510–1511.
- Levitan (1979): W. Levitan, *Plexed Artistry: Three Aratean Acrostics*, «Glyph» 5, 55–68.
- Lipka (2001): M. Lipka, *Language in Vergil's Eclogues*, Berlin.
- Luz (2010): C. Luz, *Technopaignia. Formspiele in der griechischen Dichtung*, Leiden-Boston.
- Martin (2003): J. Martin (ed.), *Aratos, Phénomènes*, tome II, Paris.
- Nelis (2004): D. Nelis, *From Didactic to Epic: Georgics 2.458–3.48*, in: Monica Gale (ed.), *Latin Epic and Didactic Poetry: Genre, Tradition and Individuality*, Swansea, 73–107.

- Nelis-Feeney (2005): D. Nelis and D. Feeney, *Two Virgilian acrostics: certissima signa?*, «CQ» 55, 644–646.
- Rostropowicz (1998): J. Rostropowicz, *Król i poeta, czyli o Fajnomenach Aratosa z Soloj*, Opole.
- Scarcia (1993): R. Scarcia, *L'isopsefo di Arato*, in R. Pretagostini (ed.), *Tradizione e innovazione nella cultura greca da Omero all'età ellenistica. Scritti in onore di B. Gentili* (Roma), vol. 3, 971–980.
- Somerville (2010): T. Somerville, *Note on a reversed acrostic in Vergil Georgics 1. 429–33*, «CP» 105, 202–209.
- Vogt (1967): E. Vogt, *Das Akrostichon in der griechischen Literatur*, «A&A » 13, 80–95.
- Volk (2010): K. Volk, *Aratus*, in: J. Clauss and M. Cuypers (eds.), *A Companion to Hellenistic Literature*, Malden (MA), 197–210.

## 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