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Astronomical Imagery in Two Epigrams Ascribed to Germanicus Caesar (*Anthologia Palatina* 9.17 and 9.18)

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Abstract

The presence of astronomical imagery in two consecutive epigrams on the theme of pursued hares in book 9 of the *Anthologia Palatina* (9.17 and 9.18) both strengthens their ascription to Germanicus Caesar and suggests that his astronomical and literary interests extended beyond the youthful production of a Latin translation of Aratus' *Phaenomena*. The meaning of these two epigrams can only be understood fully by paying attention to the interplay of astronomical imagery between them and by considering Germanicus' innovative account of two constellations in his *Aratea*: the Dog and the Hare.

Keywords

Germanicus Caesar – Aratus – *Aratea* – astronomy – constellations – *Anthologia Palatina*

In the ninth book of the *Anthologia Palatina* we find two consecutive epigrams (9.17 and 9.18) ascribed to Germanicus Julius Caesar, the adopted heir of the emperor Tiberius. Both describe the pursuit of hares by dogs. In 9.17 such a pursuit is described by a third-person narrator who turns to address a hunted hare directly at the end of the epigram:

οὔρεος ἐξ ὑπάτοιο λαγὼς πέσεν ἔς ποτε βένθος,
ἐκπροφυγεῖν μεμαὼς τρηχὺν ὀδόντα κυνός·
ἀλλ᾽ οὐδ᾽ ὣς ἤλυξε κακὸν μόρον· αὐτίκα γάρ μιν
εἰνάλιος μάρψας πνεύματος ὠρφάνισεν.
ἐκ πυρός, ὡς αἶνος, πέσες ἐς φλόγα· ἦ ῥά σε δαίμων
κὴν ἁλὶ κὴν χέρσῳ θρέψε κύνεσσι βοράν.[1]

Once a hare cast itself down from the very top of a mountain into the depths of the sea, yearning to escape from the jagged teeth of a dog. But the hare did not evade an evil fate in this way: for immediately a dog of the sea caught it and deprived it of breath. Out of the fire, as the saying goes, you have fallen into the flame. Truly a god reared you as food for dogs in the sea and on dry land.

In 9.18 we find a switch to a first-person description of this pursuit from the hare's point of view:

ἐκ κυνὸς εἶλε κύων με. τί τὸ ξένον; εἰς ἐμὲ θῆρες
ὑγροὶ καὶ πεζοὶ θυμὸν ἔχουσιν ἕνα.
αἰθέρα λοιπὸν ἔχοιτε, λαγοί, βατόν. ἀλλὰ φοβοῦμαι,
οὐρανέ· καὶ σὺ φέρεις ἀστερόεντα κύνα.[2]

One dog after another seized me. What is odd about that? Sea beasts and land beasts hold the same anger towards me. Hares, may the heavens remain accessible to you! But I fear you, sky: you bear a starry dog too.

There has been some question about Germanicus' authorship of these epigrams since an alternative ascription to the emperor Hadrian added by the so-called 'Corrector' of the *Anthologia Palatina* can be found in the margin beside *AP* 9.17.[3] However, this alternative Hadrianic ascription has not also been added to *AP* 9.18. This led Page to assert that the ascription of both epigrams to Germanicus is 'free from objection' because of the fact that they form a clear pair, with the latter poem only making sense in light of the former: as Page argues, if the second epigram is unproblematically ascribed to

1 *AP* 9.17. Text is from Page 1981. All translations are my own.

2 *AP* 9.18.

3 On the question of the authorship of *AP* 9.17-18 and other epigrams in the *Anthology* ascribed to members of the Roman Imperial family see Page 1981, 555-558. On the 'Corrector' and the various scribes associated with the *Anthologia Palatina* see Cameron 1993, 99-120.

Germanicus, then the first of the pair is most probably also to be attributed to him.[4]

There are additional compelling reasons to accept Germanicus' authorship of these two epigrams. These become clearer when the astronomical imagery which yokes the two poems together is fully elucidated, and once the connections between the imagery in these epigrams and Germanicus' *Aratea*, a translation of Aratus' astronomical didactic poem the *Phaenomena*, are properly recognised. The following discussion will deal with each of these issues in turn to suggest that *AP* 9.17-18 presents us with further evidence of Germanicus' astronomical interests.

AP 9.17-18 form a thematically connected pair of epigrams that are clearly meant to be read together.[5] On a broad structural level, the pairing of the two poems is reflected in the chiastic movement between different planes of existence over the course of each epigram. In 9.17 the hare moves from the highest possible terrestrial point on the 'very top of a mountain' (οὔρεος ἐξ ὑπάτοιο, 1) to the depths of the sea (ἔς … βένθος, 1). In 9.18, however, this movement is reversed: beasts of the sea are mentioned first, followed by beasts of the land (θῆρες | ὑγροὶ καὶ πεζοί, 1-2), before the epigram finally culminates with the mention of the highest possible point above land of all, the sky itself. The movement in these epigrams from the highest point to the lowest, and from the lowest back to the very highest again, coupled with the continued presence of dangerous dogs throughout this imagined course, both reflects the ceaseless and unavoidable nature of the described chase and yokes these two poems together through a sense of perpetual rise and fall.

This sense of rise and fall culminates in the final two lines of 9.18, where the hare's imagined catasterism reverses its previous downward plunge to the bottom of the sea. But both the uttermost watery depths and the vast expanse of the sky prove to be equally inhospitable locations for the hunted animal, since the former contains a voracious dog 'of the sea' (εἰνάλιος, 9.17.4) that desires to make a meal of its leporine prey just as dogs on land do (κὴν ἁλὶ κὴν χέρσῳ … κύνεσσι βοράν, 9.17.6), while the latter is home to a 'starry dog' (ἀστερόεντα κύνα, 9.18.4) which renders the heavens similarly out of bounds. The presence of dangerous dogs in both the sea and the sky may at first seem paradoxical, even non-sensical. But both regions do indeed boast dogs of their own: the 'dog of the sea' in 9.17 refers to the dogfish, a small shark, while the identity of the

4 Page 1981, 555-558.

5 The *Anthologia Palatina* also contains another anonymous epigram, 9.371, on the theme of the hare's failure to escape from dogs on land or in the sea which is similar to 9.17: on this epigram see Page 1981, 549-550.

'starry dog' of 9.18 has been partially elucidated by Page, who suggested that this is a reference to Sirius (Σείριος), the Dog Star.[6]

While Page is correct that Sirius has something to do with this epigram's mention of a 'starry dog', this interpretation does not go far enough in drawing out the astronomical image that underpins both of these epigrams. The 'starry dog' in question is not a reference to Sirius alone, but to the entire constellation Canis Major (Κύων), a figure situated in the southern celestial hemisphere which contains the bright Dog Star. Crucially for these epigrams, Canis Major is a figure almost always grouped in the sky and conceptualised along with two other nearby southern constellations: the huntsman Orion (Ὠρίων) and Lepus (Λαγωός), the Hare.[7]

But it is not through their proximity in the sky alone that the Dog and Hare constellations are forever connected: the stories and actions attached to each of these celestial figures also create an inextricable link between the two. The earliest full account we possess of the interaction of these two constellations can be found in Aratus' *Phaenomena* at 326-341, a passage which follows the introduction of Orion, a constellation which is said to be bright and easy to identify:

> τοῖός οἱ καὶ φρουρὸς ἀειρομένῳ ὑπὸ νώτῳ
> φαίνεται ἀμφοτέροισι Κύων ἐπὶ ποσσὶ βεβηκώς,
> ποικίλος, ἀλλ᾽ οὐ πάντα πεφασμένος, ἀλλὰ κατ᾽ αὐτὴν
> γαστέρα κυάνεος περιτέλλεται· ἡ δέ οἱ ἄκρη
> ἀστέρι βέβληται δεινῷ γένυς, ὅς ῥα μάλιστα
> ὀξέα σειριάει· καί μιν καλέουσ᾽ ἄνθρωποι
> Σείριον. οὐκέτι κεῖνον ἅμ᾽ ἠελίῳ ἀνιόντα
> φυταλιαὶ ψεύδονται ἀναλδέα φυλλιόωσαι·
> ῥεῖα γὰρ οὖν ἔκρινε διὰ στίχας ὀξὺς ἀΐξας,
> καὶ τὰ μὲν ἔρρωσεν, τῶν δὲ φλόον ὤλεσε πάντα.
> κείνου καὶ κατιόντος ἀκούομεν· οἱ δὲ δὴ ἄλλοι
> σῆμ᾽ ἔμεναι μελέεσσιν ἐλαφρότεροι περίκεινται.

6 See Page 1981, 558. 'Dogs of the sea' are found early on in the Greek literary tradition: see e.g. *Od.* 12.96, where Scylla is said to fish for 'dolphins and (sea-)dogs' (δελφῖνάς τε κύνας τε); later writers distinguish between various different sub-types of dogfish: see e.g. Arist. *HA* 566a31, Opp. *H.* 243-244, Ael. *NA* 1.55. Sirius is already known and referred to as the Dog Star in Homer: see the famous comparison of Achilles to Sirius, called the 'Dog of Orion' (κύν᾽ Ὠρίωνος), at *Il.* 22.29.

7 The first extant mention of the entire Canis Major constellation can be found in Eudoxus frr. 73 (τοῦ Κυνὸς οἱ πόδες) and 82 (τοῦ Κυνὸς τὰ ἐμπρόσθια); the Hare is also mentioned in Eudoxus fr. 73. See also Eratosthenes *Catasterismoi* 33-34.

ποσσὶν δ' Ὡρίωνος ὑπ' ἀμφοτέροισι Λαγωὸς
ἐμμενὲς ἤματα πάντα διώκεται· αὐτὰρ ὅ γ' αἰεὶ
Σείριος ἐξόπιθεν φέρεται μετιόντι ἐοικώς,
καί οἱ ἐπαντέλλει καί μιν κατιόντα δοκεύει.[8]

Such a guardian also appears below Orion's raised back, the Dog, stood on two feet, variegated, but not completely bright: instead he goes around with his middle dark. But the tip of his jaw is set with a wondrous star which scorches out (σειριάει) very keenly, and men call it the Scorcher (Σείριον). And when it rises at the same time as the sun no longer do trees deceive it by feebly sprouting leaves. For having darted sharply it easily pierces through the ranks of leaves, strengthening some, but utterly destroying the bloom of others. We also hear about the Scorcher while it sets, but the Dog's other stars lie around more faintly to define its legs. Under both of Orion's feet the Hare is forever constantly chased: the Scorcher is always borne behind as if in pursuit, both rising after it and watching it while it sets.

As Aratus' account suggests, the Hare and Dog constellations are conceived of as two interconnected figures in the sky, forever locked in a constant relationship of pursuer and pursued.[9] This unceasing astral pursuit is thus hinted at not only in the final line of *AP* 9.18, but throughout both epigrams, since the inescapable chase between dog and hare from higher to lower planes and back again which these poems describe echoes the repetitive daily risings and settings of these animals' celestial counterparts.

The mention of the 'starry dog' thus constitutes the final astronomical punchline of these two epigrams, though the combination of the perpetually pursued hare theme and the emphasis on that animal's rising and falling movements hints at these poems' potential cosmic import throughout. Moreover, there are further reasons to suspect that the Dog and Hare constellations are figures that the reader is meant to recognise throughout *AP* 9.17-18 which become apparent when we turn to the *Aratea*, the Latin translation and

8 Text from Kidd 1997.

9 Aratus refers to the Dog and Hare's endless chase twice more in the *Phaenomena*: at 384, where the Hare is described as hunted (διωκομένοιο Λαγωοῦ), and at 594-595, where the risings of the Hare and Dog are connected together (ἀντέλλει … Λαγωὸς … πρότεροί τε πόδες Κυνὸς αἰθομένοιο). On Aratus' representation of the Dog and Hare constellations in the *Phaenomena*, see Kidd 1997, 305-311.

adaptation of Aratus' *Phaenomena* attributed to Germanicus Caesar, the probable author of these epigrams.[10]

Germanicus seems to have had a real interest in astronomy, something evident not only from his decision to translate Aratus' poem in the first place, but also from the fact that many details in the *Aratea* suggest that he was well-steeped in the finer details of the more technical aspects of the field. For example, it is clear from the Roman's translation of Aratus' work that he was keen to correct obvious astronomical errors of the earlier poet and that he had knowledge and made use of technical paratexts relating to the astronomical content of the poem, such as the second-century BCE astronomer Hipparchus of Nicaea's *Commentary on the Phaenomena of Aratus and Eudoxus*, as well as astronomical illustrations such as those found on celestial globes.[11] This interest in correcting Aratus' astronomical errors is one of the reasons why the *Aratea* is far from a strictly literal translation of its Greek original: though Germanicus sticks fairly closely to the structure and overall content of Aratus' *Phaenomena* throughout, his *Aratea* is far from lacking in creative innovations of its own.[12]

One such poetic innovation on Germanicus' part involves his description of the Dog and Hare constellations.[13] This becomes clear if we examine *Aratea* 331-343, a Latin adaptation of the Aratean lines quoted above (*Phaenomena* 326-341) which describe the relative positions of Orion, the Dog and the Hare in the southern sky:

> tale caput magnique umeri, sic balteus ardet,
> sic uagina ensis, pernici sic pede lucet;
> talis ei custos aderit Canis ore timendo:
> ore uomit flammam, membris contemptior ignis.
> Sirion hanc Grai proprio sub nomine dicunt.
> cum tetigit Solis radios, accenditur aestas,

10 On the authorship and date of the *Aratea* see Steinmetz 1966, 450-482; Le Boeuffle 1975, vii-x; Gain 1976, 16-20; Possanza 2004, 15-16, 219-243; Fantham 2006, 388-391; Stiles 2017, 878-881.

11 On Germanicus' knowledge of technical astronomical texts related to the *Phaenomena* and correction of obvious Aratean errors see Le Boeuffle 1975, xix-xx; Gain 1976, 14-16; Kidd 1997, 204; Possanza 2004, 58, 92; Lightfoot 2017, 959-960 n. 35. On evidence for Germanicus' use of astronomical illustrations to correct Aratus' text, see Berti 2019, 916-917.

12 On Germanicus' creative re-working of his Aratean original see especially Possanza 2004, 105-217.

13 On the treatment of the Dog and Hare constellations in the tradition of Latin astronomical poetry see Negri 1997, 203-233.

> discernitque ortu longe sata: uiuida firmat,
> at quibus astrictae frondes aut languida radix,
> exanimat. nullo gaudet maiusue minusue
> agricola et sidus primo speculatur ab ortu.
> auritum Leporem sequitur Canis et fugit ille:
> sic utrumque oritur, sic occidit in freta sidus.
> tu paruum Leporem rimare sub Orione.[14]

> Such are his [i.e. Orion's] head and great shoulders, thus his belt blazes out, thus he shines with the scabbard of his sword and his swift foot; such is his guardian Dog with his frightening mouth: he spews forth flame from his mouth, though the fire is fainter in his limbs. The Greeks call this flame with its own name: Sirius. When it has touched the rays of the sun, the summer heat blazes up, and on its rising it widely separates the crops: it strengthens the vigorous crops, but extinguishes those with shrivelled growth or weak roots. The farmer rejoices in no star less, or more: from its first rising he watches for it. The Dog pursues the long-eared Hare, and it flees. Both constellations rise up in this way, in this way they fall down into the sea. You may examine the small Hare under Orion.

There are two particular innovations in Germanicus' account of the Dog and the Hare that are worth considering further alongside *AP* 9.17-18. The first is the detail that these constellations not only rise up in the sky together, but also jointly plunge into the sea as they set and go out of view under the horizon (*sic utrumque oritur, sic occidit in freta sidus*, 342). This detail about the watery ending of the Dog and Hare's setting deviates from Aratus' original account, which describes how Sirius the Dog Star rises behind the Hare and watches it as it sets (Σείριος ἐξόπιθεν φέρεται μετιόντι ἐοικώς, | καί οἱ ἐπαντέλλει καί μιν κατιόντα δοκεύει, 340-341). Moreover, later in the *Aratea* (681-683) Germanicus emphasises the Hare's daily fall into the sea once more when he turns to focusing on the settings of each constellation:

> tum Canis abscondit totius corporis ignis
> et latet Orion et semper tutus in undis
> est Lepus.

> Then the Dog hides the fire of his whole body and Orion lies hidden and the Hare is safe always in the waves.

14 Text from Gain 1976.

Germanicus' departure from Aratus' account through his insistence that the Dog pursues the Hare constellation so that the latter falls into the sea itself thus echoes the literal pursued hare's plunge into the sea in *AP* 9.17 (λαγὼς πέσεν ἔς ποτε βένθος, 1), an action which potentially takes on a retrospective astronomical import once the reader reaches the reference to the dangers posed by the 'starry dog' (ἀστερόεντα κύνα, 4) of the final line of *AP* 9.18. But these epigrams also present a further twist on the metaphorical slippage between the idea of a literal pursued hare and the figurative image of the rising and setting Hare constellation which is present throughout both poems, since while the *Aratea*'s Hare is ultimately 'safe in the waves' (*tutus in undis*, 682) once it has plunged into the deep, *AP* 9.17 makes clear that any actual hare that follows suit must fear dog-fishes and any other threatening sea creatures that it happens to meet.

This slippage between the imagery of a literal animal and figurative constellation, along with Germanicus' take on the Dog and Hare constellations in his *Aratea*, may also account for another seemingly puzzling detail of *AP* 9.17. In that epigram the poet chooses to describe the hare's plight once it has leapt into the sea with a proverb: 'out of the fire, as the saying goes, you have fallen into the flame' (ἐκ πυρός, ὡς αἶνος, πέσες ἐς φλόγα, 5)—a fiery image that seems either slightly paradoxical or incongruous at first glance given the explicitly watery context of the actions described. Certainly, the choice of this proverb did not strike Page as particularly pertinent to the epigram's meaning, since he dismisses it as "dull" and does not comment on the unexpected introduction of fiery imagery into lines which have hitherto focused on the sea.[15] There is, however another way of approaching the poet's choice in this instance. As the passages from Aratus' *Phaenomena* and Germanicus' *Aratea* quoted above demonstrate, the Dog was a constellation explicitly associated with the arrival of fiery heat in antiquity, since Sirius' morning rising takes place at the hottest time of the year (cf. *Phaenomena* 332-335 and *Aratea* 331-334).[16] This initially incongruous-seeming choice of a proverb relating to extreme heat in *AP* 9.17 thus foreshadows the astronomical denouement of *AP* 9.18, hinting at Sirius 'the Scorcher' and the celestial Dog and Hare pursuit which the final line of the latter epigram finally reveals.

Moreover, the explicit association of the Dog constellation with fire and flame is yet another of Germanicus' poetic innovations in the *Aratea*. While Aratus' description of the Dog associates the constellation with extreme summer heat that has the potential to ruin crops (*Phaenomena* 332-335) and etymologises the name of Sirius by linking it with the verb to scorch (σειριάω), it

15 Page 1981, 558.

16 See Kidd 1997, 305-310.

is only in Germanicus' version that we find the explicit image of flames being vomited forth by the fiery Dog constellation (*ore uomit flammam, membris contemptior ignis*, 334) as it pursues the Hare through the night sky and into the sea (*Leporem sequitur Canis et fugit ille | sic utrumque oritur, sic occidit in freta sidus*, 341-342) in addition to the description of the extreme summer heat (*accenditur aestas*, 336) associated with the rising of this constellation as a whole. The figurative flight of the hare from proverbial flames in *AP* 9.17 thus not only foreshadows the introduction of the fiery Dog constellation in *AP* 9.18, but also points to that constellation's strong connection with extreme heat, as well as hinting at Germanicus' innovative take on the Dog and the Hare in his translation of Aratus' original poem.

In this way the astronomical image which is explicitly introduced in the final line of *AP* 9.18 can be seen implicitly to underpin both epigrams as a whole, with the reader realising only with the sudden introduction of the 'starry dog' that the actions described could potentially apply to the figurative movements of the Dog and Hare constellations as well as to literal hares. Germanicus' undoubtedly strong general interest in the Greek astronomical tradition, his production of astronomical poetry, and the apparent inclusion in *AP* 9.17-18 of specific details of the *Aratea*'s presentation of the Dog and Hare thus all combine to suggest that the ascription of these poems to him rather than to the emperor Hadrian is even more secure, as well as potentially indicating that his astronomical and literary interests extended beyond the youthful production of a Latin translation of Aratus' *Phaenomena*.[17]

17 I am very grateful to the anonymous reader for drawing my attention to another point in potential favour of Germanicus' authorship of these epigrams, namely the similarities between the content and wording of *AP* 9.18 and Ov. *Her.* 10.93-96 (*si mare, si terras porrectaque litora vidi, | multa mihi terrae, multa minantur aquae. | caelum restabat—timeo simulacra deorum! | destitutor rabidis praeda cibusque feris*). In this Ovidian passage Ariadne, stuck on the shore, laments Theseus' desertion and now fears not only the beasts of the sea and land, but even the sky itself, which contains 'images of the gods' (*simulacra deorum*, 10.95). These *simulacra deorum* may refer to constellations: as such this phrase would point forward to Ariadne's coming catasterism as the constellation Corona (for this astronomical interpretation of the *simulacra* of line 10.95 see Barchiesi 1986, 96-100 and 1989, 173-174; though see also Volk 2003, 348-353 for an alternative view). The author of *AP* 9.18 thus seems to have been very familiar with Ovid's work and interest in the stars—something which we can certainly say to have been true of Germanicus, the dedicatee of the *Fasti*.

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