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

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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 ἀξηθν (= ἀξοῦσαν) which Aratus places at the beginning of his poem, hinting at its presence with key words. The βοῦτροποιήσεως (turning like oxen in plowing) can be associated, both in Greek and in Latin, with the verb “to plow” (ἀποβάν, arare) and the name Ἀποτόκ / Aratus. Using the word stīlus (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 cālemus at the beginning of the Eclogues to celebrate the Musa tenēris, whereas in the Aeneid he will use the stīlus to celebrate the arma virumque.

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 signature.

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 virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oriS
Italiam fato profugus Lausiniaque ueniT
Litora - multum ille et terris lactatus et altO
Vi superum, saeuae memorem lunonis ob iuM

(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. D. West)

1 See Fowler (1983).
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 (in a boustrophedon script), read “A S T I L O M V W," which I suggest should be understood as “A STILO (arionis) V (ergilius)," and interpreted as: from the stylus, that is, “from the pen” of Vergiliius Maro. 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 siphragis 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. There would therefore be nothing incongruous in the presence of the author’s mark in the incipit 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 Publicus Vergilius Maro) were inspired by the sequence enclosing Aratus’ famous acrostic AEITHA (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 styli is still Lafayette (1890). 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 P游艇. 728 cape stilum propere et tabellas, Cic. Verr. 2.210,109 uertit stilum in librum sui, quo facto causam omnem uerissi, saepe stilum uertas, etrum quae digna legi sint scripturis. 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 baud petet uitro et Plaut. Bacc. 715, 996; Mil. 36). For the nomenclature of stilus (meaning “pen”), see for instance Cic. Fam. 725.2 uergit igitur nec transversum uengum, quiuq uaint, a stilu; est enim et decendi opifex et Quint. Inst. 6.1,42 at qui a stilu non recedunt, aut contucescunt ad hos causas aut frequentissimae 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); Damshorn (2004) 88-96, Lux (2010) 1-71. For the widespread practice (among Latin as well as Greek authors) of signing one’s work with an acrostic, see for instance Courtney (1990) 7-17. 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).

7 On this aspect, see most recently Somerville (2010).

8 Following Aratus’ plow: Vergil’s signature in the Aeneid

(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, just as Aratus had done at the beginning of the Phaenomena. The words terram / uerere, in particular, in G. 1.1–20, are placed in the same positions within the line as εομου / άρησσυν 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 άρησσυν. But the proem of the Phaenomena also exhibits an ingenious feature which, as far as I know, has not yet been noticed.

9 The probable wordplay had already been discovered by Levitan (1979) and discussed by Bing (1990).

10 Quid faciat laetas veses, quo didere terram / uerere. Maccenas, ulmisque adhucne uitis.


12 To obtain a combination of letters that makes sense, we have to drop the final χ and read είναί άξος or, dropping the δ and the χ (thus arriving at a symmetrical structure), read είνα μάχη. Considering είνα to be a form of ενεργος or ενεργος one can understand “σαξς is in", and see a reference to the quadruple occurrence of σαξς in these 4 lines (bearing in mind the fact that the acrostic σαξς
boustrophedon reading, starting from the end of line 6, brings forth the sequence ΙΑΘΗ if we stop at line 7, or ΙΑΜΗ if we also consider a letter of the following line, that is ιδήμι or ιδήμη respectively. According to the LSJ ιδήμη = ιδήμοσα (knowledge, skill), and the term is indeed attested by Hesychius. Before we decide which of the two forms (ιδήμη or ιδήμη) 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 ΑΕΤΗΣ, the poet of Soli has inserted messages that indicate the presence of the acrostic to the reader.

following Aratus’ plow: Vergil’s signature in the Aeneid

be found in at least two points: first of all, at the beginning of line 6, we find δέξια σημάτων, 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 δρίστην, which I take as a suggestion that the reader should proceed from right to left (δρίστην > δριστησο). 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 βους. Therefore, it does not seem completely senseless to read δεξιά σημάτων... βους, 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 presence15.

At this stage, we should determine whether ιδήμη or ιδήμη 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 ἱδήμα 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 (δεξιά σημάτων16, 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 σημάτων at line 806 (on which, see most recently Claus (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’ ἐκ σημάτων σῆμα Ιαθής ἑκατεοθεῖα μᾶλλον δὲ δοῦν ἐν τοῖς τόποις Ιαθῆς ἐλεήμονες μετά τριετῆς ἐπάσχει τις ἐπάσχει τις ἐπάσχει ἐπάσχει τις. “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. σημάτων) “sign” appear 47 times in the course of the poem, those of the verb (ἐν)σημαίνω “to signal” 11 times.”
17 On this topic (on which Martin (2003) 138 states “Aratos accorde à la tradition la ‘l’eur 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.

In this case, the hint lies in σχέτη δ’ ἐκ πρῶτων κρέασιν (ἐκπατρίσησε 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 originate from μᾶος at line 3 and closes on κάῦς at line 4. It has already been noted that Aratus might have composed a “gamma acrostic” playing on the word σήμα at lines 803 to 806 (on which Levitan (1979) 57–58; Claus (1997) 274), and maybe also the acrostic σήμα at lines 343–345 (on which Astrupowicz (1998) 109–111). In any case, critics have attested that not only are acrostics to be found in Aratus’ work, but also telestics, isoposei, and other plays on words. See e.g. Scarce (1993), Pakas (1999), and the very useful discussion in Daniewicz (2005).

For more explanations, see Neil-Fenney (2005), who have demonstrated that Vergil uses the same technique in order to leave clues. For example prima mocens Mariaem, hints at the acrostic MARS of Aen. 7.126–128. The same technique is used, among others, by Valerius Flaccus to draw attention (capitum ... ordo ... respicius) to his acrostic LANIABOR in Arg. 4.177–186 (see Castelletti (2008) 221-224).
a cosmos full of benevolent signs from an omnipresent god who has the welfare of human beings at heart". 18

If we read ἱμή, the acrostic would be in the nominative (as in λεπτή, at lines 783–787), but in my view, the correct reading must be ἱμή, for at least two reasons. The first is of structural nature: ΙΔΜΗ would be situated in lines 6 to 8, that is, within the three verses containing the key words that help identify it (δεξιά σημαίνει, ἁρπάζει, βοσκεῖ).

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 ἱμή we know of is to be found in Hesychius. The search through parallel passages therefore has to aim for the word ἱμοσύνη, a rare term, but used by a dozen authors, of which the first seems to have been Hesiod:

375 Κρείος δ’ Ἔρυμβος τεκνὲν ἐν φιλότητι μεγέθα
Αστρατίν τε μέγαν Πάλλαντα τε διὰ θέλεαν
Πέρσην δ’ ἰδεῖ παρεκκλησεν ἱμοσύνην.

(Ḥes. Theog. 375–377)

With Kreios Eurybia shared intimacy, noble among goddesses, and bore great Astraus 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 (πᾶσα... ἱμοσύνην).

As we see, in this famous passage, in which Nicander signs his poem with an acrostic 19, the word that provides the second letter of the signature is ἱμοσύνη (line 346). A coincidence? I don’t think so, especially as the actual passage refers to Zeus (defined as Κρόνου πρεσβίτατον αἴμα, having distributed power among his siblings "with wisdom, knowingly" (ἱμοσύνην) 20. Obviously we cannot be absolutely certain that Nicander had the Aratan acrostic in mind when he chose ἱμοσύνη (= ἱμή), but the fact that this word does not otherwise occur in his work, and that it refers to Zeus, whose ἱμοσύνη 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 proem 22, would not have picked by chance a word of Hesiodic inspiration to compose his acrostic. If that is the case, the boustrphedon character of the acrostic could be interpreted, ultimately, as an allusive reference to the author of the Erga 23, 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.

18 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 (264–262, 741–743, 769–772, 965–966). Particularly relevant is the passage shortly preceding the lines with the acrostic ΑΕΠΗΤΗ: “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 now; he certainly does benefit the human race openly, showing himself on every side, and everywhere displaying his signs” (Phain. 768–772; transl. D. Kidd).

20 The scholia to Nicander indicate: ἵμος ὁ νόος σῶν ἐπιστημῆς, γνώσει.
22 As we have already noted, Hesiod’s influence is conspicuous in the Phainomena; however, while imitating his archaic model in certain points, Aratus clearly departs from it in others. Besides Martin (2003) 138 and the comments on ergon (line 3) and μυθήματα (line 7), see especially Ennen (1967) 9–31 and Fakas (2001) 5–66. For a synthesis with bibliography, see most recently Volk (2010) 199–204.
23 The boustrphedon nature of the acrostic seems appropriate for an allusion to a pastoral genre.
24 Cf. Hes. Erga, 42–48 Κράνων γὰρ ἔχον θεοί βιοὺς ἄνθρωποι... δέλλα Ζεὺς ἐκείνοι χαλάσαμενοι οὐφείλει ζωῆς... ἐν δεμακανίης διώτι ἐνδεχόμενον ἔργον ζωῆς.
25 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 boustrophenod acrostic *a silo 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 boustrophenod acrostic, a choice that implies more than the poet’s mere desire for *uariatio*. Although this very archaic type of script 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 βουστροφημον passim 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 *arae*, ‘to plow’, with the name *Aratus*. Besides, I would not rule out that Aratus, who relates his own name to the word ἄραρνον, might have used this type of script, which in Greek too can allude to the verb “to plow” (ἀρῶν), in order to refer to himself. In any case, in Latin, the verb *arae* is used in a figurative sense in reference to the process of writing 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 Clausss, Vergil inserted the acrostic *FONS* in the first Eclogue:

**Tityre, tu pantalae recubans sub tegmine fagi**
**siluestrem tenui musam meditaris avena:**
**nos patriae fiant et dulcia linquimus arua.**
**nos patriam fugimus: tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra**

**Formosam resonare doces Amaryllida siluis.**

**O Meliboeus, deus nobis haec oitia fecit.**

**Namque erit ille mihi semper deus, illius aram**

**Saepe tener nostris ab oculibus imbuere agrus.**

his ability to raise and oppress human beings is a threat to the well-being of the living. His words can be read as a metaphor for the demolition of the *Aeneid* Zeus, who by means of his propitious signs “reminds people of their livelihood” (μνημόνευμα τοῦ θεοῦ, Thule (2008) 157–158).

26 The inscription of the *lapis niger* (CIL P 1 = ILLRP 3), for instance, was written in boustrophenod script.
27 For modern scholars, as Katz correctly points out, of the name ἄραρσις may be more closely related to ὀρείθυς (to pray), than ὀρείθυς or ἄραρνον (see Katz (2008) 107, n. 3 and 113, n. 3).
28 *CIL TLL* 2, 6274–46, s.v. aro II, quoting e.g. Var. 4.86.11 (*lilibe*) *inversa pueri arande charta.* The motif of plowing can also be found in what is considered the most ancient testimony of vernacular Italian, the famous “Venerese riddle” (on which see most recently De Angelis (2003)): “Se parebo boves, alsa prattalia araba et albo versario teneba et negro semen seminaba”.
29 Clausss (1997).

(Transl. H.R. Fairlough-G.P. Goold)

Clausss 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 bouses*... *permisit* 9–10, as the Aratean Zeus *λέγει* ὑπ' ὑπ' ὑπ' ὑπ' ὑπ'. But above all, the deus (= Aratus), has given me (Tityrus = Vergil) the capacity to write (meas errare bouses) and to play (ludere = nōcēvus) with the *calamus* (the pen), 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 see, there is an acrostic”).

As Clausss has already suggested, the acrostic FONS would therefore allude to Vergil’s source of poetic inspiration. 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 bouses*, an allusion to the boustrophenod movement and to the verb *arae*. Besides, Vergil will explicitly allude to Aratus further on in the *Bucolics*, in the words *ab lice principium Musae, Ious omnia plena; ille colit terras; illi mea carmina curae* (with a reference to the first fragment of Cicero’s *Aratea*) and
will do so again in the Aeneid: in an explicit way, with ab Ioue principium generis and allusively, with the acrostic a stilo (which seems to echo Cicero’s a loque, 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. 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, 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. I would however like to take a closer look at the term stiulus, in order to suggest a last explanation as to the choice of this word to compose the acrostic.

Many critics have repeatedly asserted that the main function of the Aratean acrostic λέκτη is to announce a poetic manifesto characterized by λέκτατης. 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 silvestris; line 2), recalled 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 stiulus 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 memoria in the middle of the fourth line of the Aeneid, that is, in the verse that provides the initials of the signature (M), may not be fortuitous. To be precise (a quality Vergil certainly did not lack), if we count the letters, memoria is exactly in the centre of the verse. Moreover, the middle letter of memora is M, the initial of both memoria and Muro.
41 The aeromph is indeed a central concept of the Phaenomena’s poetics, while 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 synonymous, as auena is the Latin equivalent of κυλομος: see Cairns (1999).
43 The fact that both words are in the ablative (calamo, stilo) may not be fortuitous.

44 For the stylius (i.e. γραφή, γραφεῖον, stiulus, graphium) used as a weapon, see for instance Lafaye (1909): “On conçoit qu’un instrument si acéré, facilement transportable, pouvait à l’occasion devenir une arme dangereuse et tenir lieu de poignard, comme nous le montrent certains récits”, e.g. Suet. Jul. 82, Cal. 28, Claud. 35; Prud. Persis 9.51. The stiulus was also a tool used for military purposes, see Lafaye 1909, 1511; OLD, s.v. stiulus and Forcellini, s.v. stiulus: STILUS propre dictur quidquid punget; quare sumitur de instrumento quolibet emcto et acuminato; speciatim vero in re militari stilti dictae sunt ferreæ cupides, suedes acutes, striul, acumina latenter humi infixa, in quae hostes incerti incidentes, et praecipe aequitad, sese minere indubieant. Bell. Afr. 31,7 tum egregiae munitiones castrorum atque walli fossarumque altitudine et extra uallum stili caeci mirabilem in modum consueti uel sine defensioribus aditum aduersarius prohibebant; Sil. 10,413–414 cumorum ambitus immitur coram ramis, e stiulus occulatur, caecum in vestigia tulam.
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 Aratean ἐν γάζα) there are no clues left for the reader such as those found for ἐν γάζα. 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 need the feel 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 [οὐδὲν] 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 ὁδὸν but also the Vergilian a stilo M(aronis) V(ergilli) are deliberate features of the poem.

Bibliography


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