

Cristiano Castelletti* and Pierre Siegenthaler
**Virgilian Echoes in the *Aenigmata Symposii*:
 Two Unnoticed *Technopaignia***

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Abstract: This paper aims to provide a new interpretation of the first riddles of the *Aenigmata* ascribed to Symposius, discussing two *technopaignia* that seem to have gone unnoticed by scholars. The first one is the boustrophedon acrostic TAVROD (“by the ox” or “from the ox”), embedded in the opening riddle of the collection (*Graphium/Stilus*). The second acrostic is in the third riddle (*Anulus cum gemma*): the boustrophedon sequence spells the word *CIRIUS* (or *CISIUS*), which could be interpreted as the author’s signature (his name would be *Caerius* or *Caesius*), or as the adjective *cereus*, “of wax”, or as a transliteration of the Greek κύριος “Lord”. The sources of inspiration for these features are the boustrophedon acrostics ASTILOMV (= *A STILO M[aronis] V[ergili]*), and *MOS QIS EI* (= *mos quis ei?*) composed by Virgil at the very beginning of the *Aeneid* (the poet’s *sphragis*). Virgil (whose source of inspiration is Aratus) used the boustrophedon to allude to the origins of writing, and to archaic Rome. The author of the *Aenigmata*, revealing his mastery of the techniques of acrostic composition, provides a late antique reading of his sources, acknowledging the genuine character of the Virgilian *sphragis*.

Keywords: *technopaignia*, boustrophedon, acrostic, *sphragis*, *Aenigmata Symposii*

T. J. Leary’s recent publication of a new critical edition and commentary of the *Aenigmata* ascribed to Symposius (= Leary 2014) testifies to the popularity of this intriguing collection of riddles among scholars.¹ Most of the research devoted to

1 The *Aenigmata Symposii* is a collection of one hundred riddles of three hexameters each. The answer to each riddle is contained in its *titulus*. The riddles are organised in thematic sequences and preceded by a fifteen-verse preface, situating the poems in the context of a Saturnalian banquet. In what follows, we will refer to the author’s name as Symposius, which seems to be

***Corresponding author: Cristiano Castelletti**, Université de Fribourg, IAB – Philologie Classique, Rue Pierre-Aeby 16, 1700 Fribourg – Switzerland, E-Mail: argocast@gmail.com

Pierre Siegenthaler, Université de Neuchâtel, Institut d’Histoire, Espace Louis-Agassiz 1, 2000 Neuchâtel – Switzerland, E-Mail: pierre.siegenthaler2@gmail.com

this *corpus* focuses on textual criticism and crucial issues such as the author's name, the date and the origin of the composition.² However, the complexity and the literary relevance of this work seem to have been acknowledged only at the end of the 20th century.³ In the last decades M. Bergamin has proposed new keys of interpretation for the *Aenigmata*,⁴ arguing that riddles embed multiple levels of meaning: beside the literal description of an object, they can also have alternative solutions, suggested by different mechanisms.⁵ This paper aims to provide a new interpretation of the first riddles, discussing two *technopaignia*⁶ that seem to have gone unnoticed by scholars.

Let's start with the opening riddle of the collection, *Graphium/Stilus*:⁷

*de summo planus sed non ego planus in imo
uersor utrimque manu. diuerso munere fungor:
altera pars reuocat quicquid pars altera fecit.*

more correct than Symposius, generally favoured in the English-speaking world; for explanations, see Leary (2014) 2.

2 On the author's name, see Leary (2014) 1–4 and Bergamin (2005) XI–XIV. The dating and geographical localisation of the *Aenigmata* have often been based on their presence within the *Codex Salmasianus*. Riese's opinion (1869), making Symposius a North African poet of the “Renaissance vandale” between the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 6th century, has been authoritative for a long time. According to Leary (2014) 4–6, Symposius composed the *Aenigmata* between 368 (after Ausonius' *Griphus ternarii numeri*) and 500 (before the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* which is tentatively dated). However, this question could still be discussed, reconsidering the composition of the *Anthologia Salmasiana* (cf. Vössing 1993), and Bergamin's intertextual analysis, which would then make the hypothesis of a later date plausible (6th century rather than 5th?); moreover, Symposius would not necessarily be North African (see Bergamin 2005, XIV–XVI).

3 From the second half of the 1980's, scholars begin to develop an understanding and interpretation of the collection that goes beyond a simple succession of riddles: specific attention is given to the literary genre, the intertextual relations and the structure of the work. Cf. Munoz Jiménez (1985); Pavlovskis (1988); Polara (1993); Bergamin (1994); Pizarro Sánchez (1999); more recently, Sebo (2013) and Leary (2014).

4 See in particular Bergamin (2005), but also (1994); (2004); (2007).

5 Bergamin (2005) XXIV–XXX provides a classification of six mechanisms allowing this double-level interpretation, pointing out that these can overlap and combine in different manners. For a discussion on the multiplicity of interpretative levels of a text (particularly the Bible), see also Dobschuetz (1921).

6 On *technopaignia* in general, see Luz (2010) and Kwapisz/Petrain/Szymanski (2013).

7 *Graphium* (or *grafium*) is the *titulus* provided by most of the *codices*, but it is also an uncommon word. In four manuscripts (c Gu L M) originating from different *recensiones*, the *titulus* is *Stilus*. Cf. Leary (2014) 64.

Flat at the top but not flat at the bottom, I'm turned either way in the hand. I discharge a conflicting duty: one end undoes whatever the other has done.⁸

The literal interpretation of this poem does not reveal anything more than the physical and functional description of a concrete object, the stylus. Pointed at one end and flat on the other, this item is used to write or erase on a wax tablet.⁹ Bergamin's analysis adds a second, metapoetic level to this rather pragmatic interpretation.¹⁰ Indeed, exploiting the polysemous nature of the term *planus* ("flat", but also "plain", meaning "clear, obvious"), this image of the *stilus* provides a definition of the riddle as Symposius understands it: obvious at first ("on the surface": *de summo planus*), but actually complex ("in-depth": *non ego planus in imo*). This interpretation, which is fundamental for a "multiple-level reading" of the whole work, is highlighted by the position of the riddle *Graphium/Stilus*: placed at the very beginning of the collection, this first riddle helps the reader to correctly understand the others.

Scholars have pointed out that literary allusion, through the re-use of metrical-prosodic schemes, of *iuncturae*, *clausulae* or even hemistichs, is an important mechanism in Symposius' writing: carefully inserted as a clue, it often plays a part in the resolution of the riddle, by stimulating the reader's poetic memory.¹¹ As for this first riddle, we would like to pinpoint another level of literary allusion.

Our starting point is the recently observed *sphragis*, composed by Virgil at the very beginning of the *Aeneid* (1.1–4):¹²

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

The sequence A–S–T–I–L–O–M–V, which reads as a boustrophedon acrostic,¹³ should be understood as follows: "A *STILO* M[aronis] V[ergili]", that is "from the

⁸ Latin texts and English translations of the *Aenigmata* are borrowed from Leary (2014).

⁹ On the stylus, see Lafaye (1909); Harder (1998); Leary (2014) 65.

¹⁰ Cf. Bergamin (2005) XXIV–XXV; 80.

¹¹ Cf. Bergamin (2005) XLIII–XLIV: "La memoria di un passo o di un episodio letterario può facilitare il riconoscimento dell'oggetto descritto oppure contribuire a costruire l'immagine che l'enigma vuole suggerire sviando dalla soluzione". See also Polara (1993) 207 and Bergamin (1994) 40–42.

¹² For a discussion on this *sphragis*, cf. Castelletti (2012a); (2014) 64–65 and (forthcoming).

¹³ Technically, acrostics are composed of the first letters of a sequence of verses and telestichs of the last ones. We call *acroteleuton* the combination of an acrostic and a telestich. Since the reading direction of this *technopaigion* follows a boustrophedon movement (which includes the first and

stylus of Virgilius 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*.

To fully understand the signification of this *sphragis* (and its morphology) one needs first to consider Virgil's source of inspiration: the boustrophedon acrostic *ΙΑΜΗΙ* (ἰδμῆι = ἰδμοσύνη) composed by Aratus at the beginning of his poem.¹⁴ The function of this Aratean *technopaignion* is primarily paradigmatic. As pointed out by K. Volk,¹⁵ Aratus' *Phaenomena* describes the constellations as a sign system devised by Zeus for the benefit of human beings. Aratus figuratively depicts these signs as though they were "letters in the sky", a veritable text inscribed in the physical world. The writing metaphor is pervasive in Aratus' poem and the *Phaenomena* thus presents an important early instance of the concept of the "readability" of the world, which is also expressed by an extensive use of *technopaignia*, such as acrostics and other forms of letter play.

The fact that the very first¹⁶ *technopaignion* composed by Aratus is a boustrophedon acrostic is highly significant. Indeed, the boustrophedon imitates the movement of the plough pulled by oxen, and Aratus precisely mentions agriculture in the passage under discussion (*Phaen.* 5–9). Besides, ploughing is a fairly common metaphor for writing (verse) ever since the Greek archaic poets (see e.g. Pind. *N.* 6.32; 10.26) and this image also survives in Latin literature.¹⁷ The aim of this *technopaignion* is therefore programmatic: the sky, the visible world and its manifestations (the *phaenomena*), can be read, given that stars, just like letters, are considered to be *stoicheia*, basic elements that have been placed where they belong by divine intervention.¹⁸ The boustrophedon acrostic is the first paradigm

the last letter of each line, and changes direction at each verse), and therefore is not a genuine *acroteleuton*, we will keep the simplified definition of boustrophedon acrostic, which allows immediate visualisation of this composition's intention.

14 See Arat. *Phaen.* 6–8. For the discussion, see Castelletti (2012a) 85–89. The boustrophedon movement of this *technopaignion* is signalled to the reader by the key-words δεξιὰ σημαίνει ... (ἀρίστη > ἀριστερά) ... βοῦσι.

15 See Volk (2012).

16 We also need to mention that Aratus seems to compose a wordplay on his own name in the two first lines of the poem (ἔωμεν / ἄρρητον, 1–2), on which see Bing (1990) and Katz (2008).

17 On the metaphorical use of ploughing for writing (verse), in Greek poetry, see e.g. Bing (1984). For a discussion about the survival of this analogy (also found in the *indovinello veronese*) and the assimilation *stilus* = *uomer*, see Thraede (1965) 79–116. See also Bergamin (2005) 81.

18 The equation star = letter is never made explicit in the *Phaenomena*. However, as Volk (2012) 212 correctly points out "unlike Lucretius, who repeatedly likens the atoms of the physical world to the letters in his own poem (see e.g. Lucr. *DRN* 1.823–27, 2.688–99 and 2.1013–22), Aratus makes no straightforward claim that the phenomena he describes behave in the manner of a script and does not employ language that unambiguously refers to writing. Nevertheless, there are numer-

provided by Aratus, to reach the ἰδμῆ (knowledge), required to read the entire universe. And this is indeed what the word ἰδμῆ implies: knowledge derived from “seeing” (the verb ἰδεῖν, “to see”, and οἶδα “I know, because I have seen” share the same etymology).¹⁹

Virgil had already used Aratus as model to compose his *sphragis* in the *Georgics*,²⁰ and draws on his work again in the *Aeneid*. The choice of a boustrophedon acrostic is particularly evocative. Indeed, the Latin verb *arare* means “to plough”, but is also used metaphorically for “to write (poetry)”: the image is the same, that of an object leaving a trace either on a field or on a writing surface.²¹ Yet, it is precisely this idea of a trace, of a sign (a σῆμα), which can be seen, identified, and also reproduced, that is at the origin of the process of writing.

The boustrophedon is a very archaic type of writing. Many examples, such as the boustrophedon inscription of the *Niger Lapis* (CIL I²,1), found in the Roman Forum, were widely known in Virgilian times. But in this case, the choice of a boustrophedon is strongly connected with that of the word *stilus* and the ablative of origin (*a stilo*).²² The analogy between a *stilus* and a plough (and between the writing process and ploughing) was already known before Virgil, as testified, for example, by a fragment of Titus Quinctius Atta (died in Rome in 77 BCE), quoted by Isidore of Seville (*Orig.* 6.9.2): *uertamus uomerem / in cera mucroneque aremus osseo* (“let us turn the ploughshare and plough in the wax with a point of bone”). Therefore, at the beginning of his poem dedicated to the origins (the origins of the *Urbs*), Virgil exploits this analogy to evoke a very specific image, that of a trace, a *sulcus*, recalling the founder’s own trace: i.e. the *sulcus primigenius*, the trace left on the ground by Romulus’ plough. This reading (fully discussed in Castelletti forthcoming) is supported by several other features embedded in the *Aeneid*’s prologue, such as the boustrophedon acrostic MOS QIS EI (= *quis mos ei?*), at *Aen.*

ous indications in both the *Phaenomena* itself and the history of its reception that point to the implicit idea of written signs”. Several examples of reception of the Aratean “heavenly writing” are discussed in Castelletti (2016).

¹⁹ Cf. Chantraine (1999) s.v. οἶδα.

²⁰ For Virgil’s *sphragis* MA(ro) VE(rgilius) PV(blius), concealed in G. 1.429–433, see lastly Somerville (2010).

²¹ Cf. *TLL* II, 627, 43–46, s.v. *aro* II, quoting e.g. Mart. 4.86.11 (*libelle*) *inuersa pueris arande charta*. Virgil chose the *boustrophedon* 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*, with the name *Aratus*.

²² For occurrences of the ablative of origin used in connection with the preposition *a*, without a verb, see for example *dulces a fontibus undae* (Verg. *G.* 2.243), *non ab scaena et histrionibus, sed ab armis aut etiam a palaestra* (Cic. *de Orat.* 3.220) and other occurrences in *TLL* I, 28, 28–63, s.v. *a*, *ab*.

1.8–11, the acronym AVC (hinting at *Ab Vrbe Condita*) at v. 1, and a very sophisticated *Wortstellung*, through all of which the poet establishes a link between himself and the founder of Epic (Homer, but also Ennius) as well as between Augustus and Romulus. Therefore Virgil's *sphragis* at the beginning of the *Aeneid* (a poem on the genesis of Rome) can ultimately be interpreted as a literary act of foundation.

The genuine character of these Virgilian features seems to find confirmation in Propertius, who composes the same acronym (AVC), and the boustrophedon acrostics AQIS (= *aquis*) and ICNE (= *igne*) in his very famous passage witnessing Virgil's composition of the *Aeneid* (Prop. 2.34.61–66, in the poet's own sphragistic elegy).²³

After these necessary premises, let us get back to Symposius. Since Virgil was an important literary source for Symposius, can we expect to find trace of his *technopaignia* in the *Aenigmata*, especially in the first one, which refers to the *stilus*?²⁴ Before starting any analysis, it is important to state that the question about the intentionality of the Virgilian and Aratean occurrences discussed above is not an issue for our demonstration.²⁵ Indeed, just as Aratus seems to have drawn inspiration for his intentional acrostic ΑΕΙΠΘΗ (*Phaen.* 783–787) from the (most likely) unintentional Homeric acrostic ΑΕΥΚΗ (*Il.* 24.1–5),²⁶ we can argue that Symposius did, one way or the other, recognize the sequence *A STILO MV* as intentional.

Let us start by noting that the *stilus* riddle of Symposius and the acrostic on *stilus* at the beginning of the *Aeneid* occupy both the same emphatic position, being located in the first three verses of their respective work.²⁷

Let us then focus on the three lines of the riddle's text, which all suggest a boustrophedon movement. The overall composition, considered a "rhetorical tour de force",²⁸ designs a back and forth movement from one side of the verse to the other (*de summo ... in imo; uersor ... diuerso; altera pars reuocat ... pars altera fecit*). All this is made possible by a careful use of literary figures of speech such

²³ For a full discussion of these Propertian features (as an answer to Virgil's ones), see Castelletti (forthcoming).

²⁴ On Symposius' sources, see Leary (2014) 28–30 (esp. 29 for allusions to Virgil), and Bergamin (2005) XLII–XLVII.

²⁵ The question about the intentionality of acrostics (and *technopaignia* in general) is a debated issue amongst scholars. For a discussion, see Katz (2013) 4–10.

²⁶ On this aspect, see Luz (2010) 4–6 and 49–51.

²⁷ Excepting, of course, the preface of the *Aenigmata*, and the verses *ille ego qui ...* (considered as *spuri* by all the recent editors of Virgil) which, in some manuscripts of the *Aeneid*, precede *arma uirumque cano*. On this last issue, see Austin (1968).

²⁸ Cf. Scott (1979) 119.

as repetitions, oppositions, chiasmus and alliteration. But, most importantly, as it is often the case with *technopaignia*, one can spot keywords attracting the reader's attention.²⁹ For instance, we can consider *de summo* and *in imo* as indicating the extremities of each verse; they invite the reader to focus on the initial and final letters. The sequences *in imo* / *uersor* ("at the extremity, I turn round") and *uersor utrimque* ("I'm turned at both ends") can be read as allusions to a boustrophedon movement, changing its direction from one verse to the other.

If we apply a boustrophedon reading, following the same criteria already used for the beginning of the *Aeneid* (starting from the first letter of the first verse), the sequence spells DORVAT, which does not seem to be particularly significant. However, if we read it backwards³⁰ (considering *reuocat* of line 3 as a signpost),³¹ starting from the last letter of the last verse, the resulting sequence TAVROD appears much more interesting. Note that the letters of the word TAVRO occupy the same places as Virgil's *STILO*:

A ... S
I ... T
L ... O

Verg. *Aen.* 1.1–3

D ... O
V ... R
A ... T

Symp. *Aenig.* 1.1–3

The presence of a bovid (*taurus*) seems to confirm the allusions to the boustrophedon movement, which mimics the path of the oxen furrowing a field. It is, moreover, a *taurus* that is attached to the *uomer* in Virgil's *Georgics*,³² and it is an ox (alongside a cow) that pulls the plough during the foundation of a city (to furrow the *sulcus primigenius*), according to the original Etruscan ritual described by Varro.³³ Lastly, even if there is no apparent link, it is worthwhile to mention that one of the most sophisticated riddles, in which Symposius displays knowledge of

²⁹ On the signpost technique to signal a *technopaignion*, see e.g. Feeney/Nelis (2005) and Castelletti (2014).

³⁰ In addition to the Virgilian acrostic MA–VE–PV mentioned previously, other attestations of 'inverted' acrostics are being examined by Castelletti (2014) 60–66 and Danielewicz (2013).

³¹ The same verb, inspired by the Virgilian *reuertentis* (*G.* 1.427), is used for instance by Valerius Flaccus to indicate the backwards reading of his *sphragis* in Val. Fl. 2.372; for explanations, see Castelletti (2014) 52–53.

³² Cf. Verg. *G.* 1.43–46: *Vere nouo, gelidus canis cum montibus umor / liquitur et Zephyro putris se glaebe resoluit, / depresso incipiat iam tum mihi taurus aratro / ingemere et sulco attritus splendescere uomer.* *G.* 3.515–517: *Ecce autem duro fumans sub uomere taurus / concidit et mixtum spumis uomit ore cruorem / extremosque ciet gemitus.*

³³ Cf. Varro, *L.* 5.143: *Oppida condebant in Latio Etrusco ritu multi, id est iunctis bobus, tauro et uacca interiore, aratro circumagebant sulcum.* On Romulus' plough and the Urbs' *sulcus primigen-*

mythology, geography, astrology, as well as bilingual etymology, is riddle 32 (*taurus*).

M. Bergamin notes that the locution *de summo* (v. 1) is rather exceptional.³⁴ If we accept this reading,³⁵ the complete acrostic sequence would be TAVROD. On a morphological point of view, there would be only one way to make sense of it: an archaic ablative ending in -d.³⁶ But why would the poet choose such a form? Given the Virgilian model (and its Propertian answer), Symposius could have simply imitated his source(s), composing an archaic word in a boustrophedon acrostic.³⁷ As previously observed, the choice of an ablative of origin (*a stilo*) enhances the idea, already suggested by the boustrophedon, of a connection with the past and the origins (of the *Urbs* and of the process of writing). If Symposius was aware of all this, it would be no surprise to see him imitate the same concept *cum variatione* (the archaizing form TAVROD could either be an ablative of means “by the ox” or an ablative of origin “from the ox”). Therefore, the author of the *Aenigmata* would show himself as a founder,³⁸ as Virgil did before him. Indeed, some modern

ius, see also Tac. *Ann.* 12.24; Plut. *Rom.* 11; Ov. *Fast.* 4.819–826; Briquel (2000) and Carandini (2006) 410–440.

34 Cf. Bergamin (2005) 80 (“locuzione rara”) and XL (“anomalo uso della preposizione *de*”). Leary has no remarks on this.

35 If we take a look at Bergamin’s apparatus, we can see that the manuscripts disagree, reading either *e summo* (L) or *a summo* (E). Emending *de summo* into *in summo*, the boustrophedon acrostic would read TAVROI. This word could hardly be Latin, but rather the transliteration of Greek TAYPOI: the substantive ταῦρος (the bull or the ox), either in nominative plural ταῦροι, or in the dative singular ταῦρῳ. In both cases, the evocation of a bovid would still allude to the boustrophedon. However, the standard text makes good sense, and the archaizing form TAVROD, justified by the imitation of the Virgilian and Propertian models, would also explain the problematic locution *de summo*.

36 On this particular type of ablative (widely used by Plautus), for which the oldest attestation seems to be in the inscription on the *Niger Lapis* (*iouestod*) and the last datable ones are of the beginning of the 2nd century BCE (in the *Senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus*), see for instance Prat (1975). On the monuments and the inscription of the *Niger lapis*, see Coarelli (1983) 161–188 and (1999).

37 Apart from *saetiger* in 36.1 and *suboles* in 60.2 (on which see Leary 2014, ad loc.) there is no trace of other archaisms in the corpus. This is mostly due to the fact that Symposius’ language was rather “classic” (or scholastic, according to Bergamin 2005, XL–XLII, and Leary 2014, 26–30). However, the Virgilian and the Propertian compositions would legitimate the archaic form *taurod*. Indeed, Virgil’s *MOS QIS EI* and Propertius’ *AQIS* and *ICNE* are deliberate archaisms (probably inspired by the *Niger Lapis*’ inscription), hinting to the origins of the *Urbs*; discussion in Castelletti (forthcoming).

38 This idea will be reused, in a sort of ring-composition, in the last riddle (100, *Monumentum*), on which see *infra*.

scholars regard Symposius as the father of riddling as a literary genre.³⁹ But the *taurus* and the ploughing remind us of course of agriculture, and if the *Aenigmata Symposii* are to be considered specifically in a Saturnalian context (as firmly argued by Leary),⁴⁰ it would make sense to start the collection with an allusion (all the more, using an archaising form) to the original nature of the festival, the worship of Saturn and agriculture.⁴¹

It would be no surprise if in the opening riddle, Symposius had wanted to claim an affiliation with his predecessors (Virgil, Propertius and maybe also Aratus and his tradition),⁴² as they have done before him. A metapoetic allusion could thus be found in the third verse of our riddle: by using his *stilus* the author “brings back” (*reuocat*) what has been written by poets of the past (*quicquid pars altera fecit*). This interpretation is supported by the many allusions, quotations (sometimes diverted) and repetitions inserted throughout the *Aenigmata*. In this respect, it would be possible to read the sequence *in imo* / *uersor* as an allusion to the wordplay linking the opening of Virgil’s *Georgics* (v. 1–2: *Quid faciat laetas segetes, quo sidere terram / uertere*) and the beginning of Aratus’ *Phaenomena* (v. 1–2: Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, τὸν οὐδέποτ’ ἄνδρες ἐώμεν / ἄρρητον ...).⁴³ The position of the words *in imo* / *uersor*, which straddle verses 1 and 2, seems to be evocative: Symposius places *uersor* in the same position as Virgil’s *uertere* (*uerso* is the frequentative form of *uerto*).⁴⁴

39 This is especially Bergamin’s opinion, which can already be grasped from the subtitle of her edition and commentary on Symposius, “La fondazione dell’enigmistica come genere poetico”. On the history and genre of riddling, and the unique and innovative nature of Symposius’ work, see Bergamin (2005) XVI–XX. See also Leary (2014) 10–12.

40 See Leary (2014) 6–13.

41 On this aspect, see Leary (2014) 8.

42 Symposius appears to be familiar with the Greek language, as the riddles *Beta* and *Malum* attest (see also *Grus* with Leary 2014, 113). However, if a basic level of Greek is sufficient to compose Greek wordplays in some riddles, a more advanced knowledge is required to read Aratus’ poem in the text. It is also possible that Symposius worked with Latin commentaries, in which he might have found glosses on Aratean *technopaignia*, but this remains speculative. Some *aenigmata* share themes and images with some riddles of the *Palatine Anthology*: Symp. 2 and AP 9.162; Symp. 7 and AP 14.5; Symp. 59 and AP 14.62; Symp. 69 and AP 14.56 and 108 (cf. Bergamin 2005 ad loc.; Leary 2014 ad loc. and 28). The eventuality that Symposius borrowed from these texts directly should not be excluded, but here again, it is possible that he only knew them through intermediaries – or did not know them at all. On the importance of the indirect transmission of Greek literature in the Latin West during Late Antiquity, see Cameron (2011) 527–566. For a comparison between Symposius’ riddles and those of the Greek tradition, see Beta (2013).

43 For a discussion, see Katz (2008) 111–116.

44 Of course (as it has already been observed by Bergamin 2005, 81), the use of *uersor* reminds us of the formula *stilum vertere*, proverbial since Hor. S. 1.10.72: *saepe stilum uertas, iterum quae digna legi sint / scripturus*.

spoken. Nor was it a small matter, it was the semblance of a mighty conflict to set out or solve each one in turn. But so that I, who had brought nothing with me that I could say, should not appear the only one to have been shamefully silent, I composed these lines extempore from their verbal riddling†. Among madmen, you shouldn't be sane. Pardon the fact, dear Reader, that a drunken muse lacks judgement.

The opposition between oral creation and written composition is particularly highlighted by the presence of the (boustrophedon) acrostic, which is a completely visual feature. In this perspective, the acrostic allows the author to place his riddle production in a literary register, thus distancing himself from a less sophisticated form of riddle, more recreational and orally performed.⁴⁸ The importance of this relation to writing is even more significant if we consider the genre of the riddle. To our knowledge, Symposius is the first Latin author to produce such a collection of riddles, complete and coherent, a collection that he elevates (echoing the famous Horatian self-celebrating model)⁴⁹ to the rank of literary monument in the riddle 100, *Monumentum*. Shall we consider that Symposius recalls, perhaps in a way that is deliberately derisive and caricatural (he makes it a drunkard's occupation), the humble origins of the genre, in an attempt to underline what could be an act of literary foundation? At any rate, starting with a Virgilian-echoing riddle (1), and ending with a Horatian-echoing one (100), would add a witty (self-laudatory) touch to the bounded structure of the collection,⁵⁰ bringing allusively together the two authors that Symposius recalls most often.⁵¹

A few more observations. The boustrophedon acrostic in Symposius' first riddle is maybe followed by a second one,⁵² in the third riddle (*Anulus cum gemma*, "a signet ring"):

⁴⁸ Cf. Sebo (2013) 185: "For here Symposius gives an account of his riddles' origin which, though clearly false, assumes a culture of oral riddling familiar to his audience. The *Praefatio* reveals that within Symposius' milieu there is still a conception of riddles as oral and agonistic – as confirms our best late antique source on riddling, Athenaeus". The fact that Symposius' collection provides the *titulus* of every riddle highlights the general impression of a product made to be carefully read, in order to appreciate the cleverness and erudition of its composition. On this aspect, see also Leary (2014) 12–13.

⁴⁹ See Hor. *Carm.* 3.30.1 *exegi monumentum*. On this Horatian echo, see the commentaries of Bergamin (2005) and Leary (2014) ad loc.

⁵⁰ On the bounded structure of the poem, linking the first and the last riddle, see Leary (2014) 14–15 and 246.

⁵¹ On the influence of Virgil and Horace in Symposius, see Leary (2014) 29.

⁵² As previously observed, the boustrophedon acrostic of *Aen.* 1.1–4 (*A STILO MV*) is followed by another one (*MOS Q(u)IS EI*, *Aen.* 1.8–11), after a three-verse interval (which would correspond to Symposius' riddle 2).

*Corporis extremi non magnum pondus adhaesi***I** :
*Ingenitum dicas, ita pondere nemo grauatu***R**.
*Vna tamen facies plures habitura figura***S**.

I have clung fast, no great weight at the body's end (so unburdened is anyone by this weight, you would declare it inborn), a single countenance but one nonetheless which will have many impressions.

The sequence *corporis extremi ... adhaesi* could be a signpost attracting the reader's attention to the extremities of the verses.⁵³ If we apply a boustrophedon reading, this time starting from the initial C of *corporis* and ending with the S of *figuras* (since there are no signposts suggesting a backwards reading), the sequence spells the word *CIRIUS* or *CISIUS* (depending on the *codices*).⁵⁴ Even if the word does not appear to be identifiable at first, three interpretations can be suggested.

We could of course be tempted to see a signature in this, as in Virgil's *A STILO M V*.

R. Merkelbach argues that *Symposius* could simply be a *nomen signum*.⁵⁵ The object presented in the riddle, the *anulus cum gemma*, is an *anulus signatorius*, destined to leave its seal – its *sphragis* – in the wax.⁵⁶ Moreover, the term *ingenitum* in verse 2, if understood in the sense of “inborn, acquired by birth”, could refer to a patronymic.

There are very few occurrences of the names *CIRIUS* and *CISIUS*.⁵⁷ Besides, we should note that the author, being limited by a maximum of six letters imposed by the riddle's three verses, could have chosen a particular form of the name *CAERIUS* or *CAESIUS*. This form could be explained by the fact that the diphthong AE would contract to a monophthong I, a very frequent contraction at the time. We could thus see in verse 3 (*una tamen facies plures habitura figuras*) a subtle

⁵³ Instead of *extremi*, several manuscripts provide the reading *extremo* (cf. Bergamin 2005, 6; 84–85), which would still work with our hypothesis (*extremo ... adhaesi*: “I am attached to the extremity”).

⁵⁴ The reading *grauatur* in line 2 is preferred to *grauatus* both in manuscripts and by modern editors.

⁵⁵ See Merkelbach (1983). See also Murru (1980) who argues that *symposii* could be a common noun belonging to the title of the work (“riddles of the banquet”).

⁵⁶ Cf. Bergamin (2005) 84; Leary (2014) 69–70.

⁵⁷ *Cirius*: cf. CIL XII, 5685 10; CIL VIII, 7414 (CIRIVS or C. IRIVS?); revision of CIL XII, 2989, see AE 1995 (1998) 315: *D(is) M(anibus) | Ciriae Quin | tinae M. Luc | conius Pate | mu[s u]xori | pientissime*. *Cisius*: cf. CIL X, 8056, 92; CIL XII, 529.

double sense, creating a wordplay specifically referring to this contraction:⁵⁸ “a single shape (*facies*) will yet contain several letters (*figuras*)”.⁵⁹

The form *CAERIUS* or *CAESIUS* would then be really close to *Caelius* (*Firminius Symphosius* or *Firminus Lactantius*), which some editors identify as the poet's name.⁶⁰

A second possibility would be to read *CIRIUS* for *cereus*, “of wax”:⁶¹ it is in wax that the signet ring leaves its mark. A thematic link would thus unify this boustrophedon acrostic with the one in the riddle *stilus*; an object also closely linked with wax. The spelling contrasts with *Symposium*'s scholastic Latin. However, given the author's taste for double meanings, it could also be possible that he has deliberately chosen an ambiguous writing, which could combine two significations.

Lastly, we could also understand this *CIRIUS* as a transliteration⁶² of the Greek κύριος,⁶³ in a riddle where some scholars have spotted Christian symbo-

58 When *Symposium* plays with letters to convey a *nomen*, it always happens in the final verse of a poem: cf. 36.3: *nomine numen habens si littera prima periret* (*Porcus/Orcus*); 74.3: *littera decedat, uolucris quoque nomen habebō* (*Lapis/Apis*); 84.3: *Hoc uolo ne breuiter mihi syllaba prima legatur* (*Mālum/Mālum*).

59 For *figura* meaning “(shape of a) letter”, see *TLL* VI, 729, 52–61, s.v. *figura*.

60 See Bergamin (2005) XI–XII and Leary (2014) 2–3. The name *Caelius Firminianus Simphosius* dates back to the codex Vat. lat. 4493, where it designates the author of the poem *De Fortuna* (a poem actually from the *Symposium duodecim sapientum*). Pithou (1590) not only published this *De Fortuna* and a *De liore* under the name *Caelius Firminianus Simphosius* (which he nevertheless lists as *Caelius Firmianus Symphosius* in his index), but he also published the *Aenigmata* under the name *Caelius Symphosius* (listed as *Caelius Symposium* in the index). If it is generally admitted that Pithou assimilated two similar names, could we also envisage a reverse contamination that occurred earlier in the manuscript tradition? Conversely, if Pithou did not assimilate those names but purposely wanted to differentiate two different poets, we need to ask ourselves whether or not he could have used other sources naming our *Symposium Caelius* (or *Caerius/Caesius*). Friedrich (2002) 481–511 proposes to consider (with Vat. lat. 4493) the *Symposium duodecim sapientum* as the lost *Symposium* of Lactantius: the text of the manuscript *Caelii Firminiani Simphosii de Fortuna*, “*Caelius Firminianus Simphosius' De Fortuna*” would thus come from an earlier *Caeli Firmiani symposii de fortuna*, “the *De fortuna* from *Caelius Firmianus' Symposium*”.

61 The form *cirius* is more widely attested later in the Middle Ages, but we can already read *primitircius* during the 6th century in Gregory of Tours (*Hist.* 2.9; 2.37).

62 Latin transliterations of Greek words are not unusual. Moreover, it has been recently observed that Greek words have been used in acrostics in Latin poems, such as *AIDOS* (αἰδώς) in Val. Fl. 3.430–34 (see Castelletti 2012b), and *NECROI ... DAUNIAS* (νεκροὶ Δαυνίας) in Val. Fl. 4.399–417 (see Castelletti 2014, 61–67). See also Damschen (2004) 101 and Danielewicz (2013). On *Symposium*'s knowledge of Greek language, see above note 42.

63 The transliteration of the *υ* into *i*, which reproduces the iotacistic pronunciation of the *υ*, is attested from the 1st century BCE, first in *cognomina* and more extensively thereafter; cf. Biville

lism. In particular, M. Bergamin sees, in poems 1 to 7, a united sequence forming an initiatory journey (from a symbolical point of view), leading to the knowledge of the human soul through the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. More precisely, the four opening poems of the corpus emphasize the primacy of the written text (*Graphium*), in particular the Scriptures (*Harundo*), protected by a seal (*Anulus cum gemma*) and indecipherable without the suitable key (the understanding of God's Word, *Clavis*).⁶⁴ We therefore observe two pairs of riddles in which the second riddle responds, thematically or symbolically, to the first one. The unity of the sequence would be reinforced by the presence of boustrophedon acrostics in the first riddle of each pair. Moreover, the last verse of riddle 4 (*seruo domum domino, sed rursus seruor ab ipso*) seems to put an emphasis on *dominus*, which would be highlighted through the acrostic *CIRIUS* (i.e. the Lord). If we accept it, *CIRIUS* would be the only formal textual clue in a work where Christian references are never explicit, but latent.⁶⁵

It would be difficult (and risky) to say more. Probably the most reasonable interpretation is the first one (the author's name), but it is of course very complicated to prove anything.

Before concluding, a last remark could be made about the divergent reading directions of the acrostics in the riddles 1 and 3. If we consider the materiality of the text, we might infer that the first acrostic, which is ascending, points towards the preface it is referring to; the second one points to the following riddle, which responds to it symbolically and lexically. Therefore the first acrostic would allusively draw on the origins of the riddle and the poets of the past such as Virgil, whereas the second one would point to the future, the advent of a new riddling

(1987) 17. The confusion was also possible in Greek in Symposius' time, cf. Gignac (1976) 268 and PSI 935.7: κριου attested for κυριου in the 5th or 6th century.

⁶⁴ The seal could recall the *liber signatus septem sigillis* from the Apocalypse and the *clavis* is a frequent term of the Biblical exegesis to designate the understanding of the Holy Scriptures. On the symbolism of the opening sequence, see Bergamin (2005) XXXVII; LI–LII; 80–90. Other scholars (such as Dale Scott) deny symbolic content in Symposius, cf. Leary (2014) 4–10.

⁶⁵ Symposius does not bring any Christian element forward explicitly, but his cultural and allegorical horizon seems strongly christianised. The most representative example is the riddle 82 in which the union of the three elements of the *conditum* (wine, honey and spices) strongly recalls the Trinity: *Tres olim fuimus qui nomine iungimur uno. / Ex tribus est unus, et tres miscentur in uno. / Quisque bonus per se; melior qui continet omnes* ("Once we were three who are joined in a single name. From three there is one and three are mixed in one. Each of us is good by itself; better is that which contains us all"). This analogy between Symposius' *Conditum* and the Trinity is legitimised by the use of a similar comparison during the 5th century by Apponius, *In canticum canticorum expositio* 11; 20; sq. Cf. Bergamin (1994) 58–60; (2005) 180–181. Against the idea of Christian influence in the *Aenigmata*, see Leary (2014) 4.

literature (marked by God's seal?), which became quite popular during the Middle Ages.

Even if chance could always be advocated for all the above discussed occurrences, the use of a boustrophedon does not appear to be in total contradiction with the genre of the riddle as it progressively emerges, multiple and complex, in *Symposium*. More precisely, the construction of a second level of signification through an allusion to the written text's materiality is also perceptible in riddle 96 (which proposes a mathematical impossibility and a play on the number of words in each verse).⁶⁶ *Symposium*'s medieval successors will also cultivate the use of *technopaignia* in their *aenigmata*, sometimes through even more sophisticated patterns than boustrophedon acrostics.⁶⁷

To what extent has *Symposium* been a model for that topic is difficult to say, as well as how much he was actually aware of the tradition linking Virgil to Aratus. At any rate, our poet seems completely at ease with the techniques of acrostic composition. The majority of ancient texts have been lost but it is worth studying the extant evidence, in order to understand how *technopaignia* survived and developed. Their continuity might be much more linear than what is generally admitted, and their study could improve our knowledge of ancient authors and their cultural environment.

66 *Nunc mihi iam credas fieri quod posse negatur. / Octo tenes manibus, sed me monstrante magistro / sublati septem reliqui tibi sex remanebunt* ("Now indeed believe me that what is said to be unable to happen does. You hold eight in your hands but with me guiding you as a teacher, if seven have been taken away, six will be left to you"). The three verses count respectively eight, seven and six words. On the functioning of this riddle also perceived as a finger-play, and on its title (*De VIII tollas VII et remanet VI* or *Verba*), see Leary (2014) 237–241.

67 In his preface, Aldhelm of Malmesbury (640–709) uses a long acroteleuton doublet (where the initial and final letters of each verse are the same), to write the message: *ALDHELMVS CECINIT MILLENIS VERSIBVS ODAS*. Tatwine, Archbishop of Canterbury (died 734) skillfully disposes the couplet *SVB DENO QVATER HAEC DIVERSE ENIGMATA TORQVENS / STAMINE METRORVM EXSTRVCTOR CONSERTA RETEXIT* on the whole of his forty poems. The first half is readable through the initial letters of each riddle's first verse; the second half is readable through the final letters of those same first verses, read backwards, starting from poem 40 (the mechanism is concretely explained in the work's final *Conclusio*). In (Saint) Boniface (c. 675?–754) the solution of each riddle is readable as an acrostic; note *Aenig. De uirtutibus* 5 (*De caritate*), where the word *CARITAS* can be read twice in verses 1–14, downwards and upwards (from the top to the bottom, considering the initial letter of each unpaired verse; from the bottom to the top, considering that of each paired verse). Lastly, the acrostic *PAVLVS* can be read in the riddle *De uino* which is integrated, with some reservations, in the *Aenigmata Bernensia*, also known as *Aenigmata Tullii* (63). See the *index acrostichorum* in De Marco/Glorie (1968) 909.

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