Ovid and the Story of Capella (*Fasti* 5.111–28)

This paper analyzes the insufficiently appreciated section of Ovid’s *Fasti* on the myth of the nymph Amalthea and her goat who nursed the baby Jupiter hidden in Crete and earned stellar form as a reward. I focus on the manipulation of sources, the construction of the narrative, and the particular Ovidian thematics.

The story was widely told by Hellenistic authors (Callimachus, Aratus, Eratosthenes, Nicander) in various permutations (e.g. number of nymphs, sometimes sustenance from honey as well as milk, Amalthea as goat or nymph, Pan as side-kick, aition of Zeus’s aegis). Elsewhere in the *Fasti* (3.443–44) Ovid recalls especially the version in Callimachus’ *Hymn to Zeus* (multiple Cretan nymphs), but here he follows the general outlines of Eratosthenes *Cat.* 13 (Amalthea as nymph whose goat suckles the divine baby, not as the goat herself; catasterism). From the start, however, Ovid also creates a heavily Aratean atmosphere. After the clear opening allusion to the opening of the *Phaenomena* (111 *Ab Iove surgat opus*), mention of a catasterism won by serving the infant Jupiter (112) feints at the first star-myth in the *Phaenomena*, a unique tale of the Bears nourishing the infant in Crete (30–35). But Ovid instead goes on tell of Jupiter’s more famous caprine nurse—mentioned by Aratus later in his poem (B. W. Boyd, *Phoenix* 2000: 71–73)—even while he continues to echo the Aratean Bears. The opening allusion signals as well that the whole 18-verse section is a kind of equivalent to the 18-verse Hymn to Zeus that opens Aratus’ poem. While Ovid’s movement is not formally hymnic, he keeps Jupiter in view throughout, naming the divinity six times. In place of the Stoic Zeus who guides the universe in Aratus, Ovid features a chapter in the birth-legend of the god, which is the focal point of Callimachus’ first Hymn. The allusion to Aratus’ hymn may thus at the same time glance in general terms at Callimachus’ *Hymn to Zeus*.

Onto the story of the nymph and the goat who nursed Jupiter, Ovid grafts an aition for the Cornucopia or Horn of Amalthea, apparently for the first time (perhaps anticipated in a confused scholion to Aratus 156). After an elaborate description of the goat, Ovid picks up precisely the phrasing of her milky service from the opening (121 *lac dabat illa deo*; cf. 113 *dati . . . lactis*) but this has now shifted to background information in the imperfect tense while, in a clever indirection, the action focuses instead on the goat breaking off one of her horns, which, filled with fruits, the nymph sets at the baby’s mouth. Besides the witty narrative move, we may note that the Ovidian Amalthea’s nurture of the divine infant is doubled: her goat gives the baby milk; she feeds him fruit from the goat’s severed horn.

Other innovations (none of which seem to have been noted elsewhere) are 1) romanticizing the goat as ‘beautiful’ (117 *formosa*), whereas Eratosthenes and others style her fearsome, as befits the terrifying aegis that Zeus would fashion from her skin; 2) changing her designation to the diminutive Capella (also *Met.* 3.594), which has a neoteric spirit (*capella* 14 x at verse-end as here in Virgil’s *Eclogues*)—previously in Latin she is Capra; never diminutive in Greek; Manilius and Pliny follow Ovid); 3) the nurse-goat’s lost horn become Cornucopia is stellified along with the nanny goat herself—the Cornucopia is not a constellation and so Ovid must be conflating with the myth of Capricorn (Gk. Aigokeros), the horned Pan-like goat-man who, according to Eratosthenes (*Cat.* 27), was reared with Zeus in Crete and later set among the stars by Zeus along with his mother the goat. As Ovid phrases it, the idea of memorializing Abundance in the wake of Jovian victory has an Augustan resonance (E. Gee, *Ovid, Aratus, and Augustus* 126–53) as well as brings strong closure to the section through ring-composition and other devices—among these is to neatly align in conclusion the infant’s two sources of nourishment by replacing Capricorn with an asterized Horn of Amalthea.

Aspects of Ovid’s originality here can be further illuminated by attention to the story’s later reception, viz. in Manilius 1.365–70 and a second-century AD frieze depicting the nurse feeding the baby Jupiter with cornucopia.