

Classical *Auctoritas* and Encomium in Tycho Brahe's *De Nova Stella*

This paper will examine Tycho Brahe's uses of classical authority in the *De Nova Stella* (1573). The treatise deals with Brahe's observation of the supernova (a star exploding in its last stages of life) which was visible with the naked eye from 1572 to 1574. Brahe uses Virgil and Ovid to perform encomium for himself and his astronomical studies.

Brahe concludes the treatise with a section entitled *In Uraniam Elegia Autoris*. When constructing the *locus amoenus* where he says he met the muse Urania, a stand in for the supernova, the author alludes not only to Virgil's bucolic works, but also to the *Aeneid*. Brahe writes of his homeland at line 5, "*Scania dives opum, studiisque exercita belli.*" He uses the words Virgil wrote to describe Carthage at *Aeneid* I.14. Brahe changes the *asperrima* to *exercita*, switching from what can be read as a pejorative superlative to a more neutral or positive word. This allusion makes sense when read in the context of the end of *Aeneid* I, where Iopas, court bard at Carthage, sings of celestial phenomena and the Tyrians and Trojans applaud him (740-7). Brahe here not only compares his homeland to an ancient, venerable location, but particularly to one that has a deep appreciation for astronomical poetry.

After Brahe meets Urania, the last thing she says to him at line 150 is "*nomen ab aeterna posteritate feres,*" which he borrows wholesale from Ovid's *Heroides* 16.376. Belfiore makes clear that "Helen...sacrifices that which convention holds dearer than a woman's life, chastity, to eternal praise in song (Belfiore 1980, 147)." Urania is the Paris to Brahe's Helen. The rest of the poem shows that rather than giving up chastity, like Helen, Brahe gives up noble pursuits, human affairs, and alchemical research; Urania informs him that should he no longer be concerned with

those, he will have immortal fame in return. Brahe performs encomium and near deification for himself with his choice of allusions.

Existing scholarship on the paratextual Latin of astronomical treatises often deals more generally with how astronomers used classical knowledge to promote themselves, as Mosley highlights (Mosley 2007, 3), but it does not get into the literary details of how these scientists wrote their Latin. When poetry is discussed, the focus is usually more on what the poetry can tell us about the figure's life, what it can tell us about their science, or what the poetry reflects about contemporary philosophical trends, as we see with Christianson (Christianson 2003, 44-53), Thoren (Thoren 1990, 71), and Dreyer (Dreyer 1963, 55-56). While all this work is deeply helpful and important, this paper will show how one particular astronomer fashioned himself with his choice of allusions and intertexts.

Bibliography

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