

Boios' *Ornithogonia* as Hesiodic Didactic  
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Boios' now-fragmentary *Ornithogonia* is possibly the first poem devoted completely to collecting myths of metamorphosis, in this case of humans into birds. Dating to the late Classical or early Hellenistic period, this poem provides many of the few clues we have about the genre of metamorphosis poetry before Ovid wrote the *Metamorphoses*. On the basis of a new reading of the fragments, I will argue that the *Ornithogonia* was a didactic poem in the Hesiodic sense.

Beyond discussions of authenticity and source criticism, primarily with a view to understanding the sources for Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, little scholarship on the *Ornithogonia* exists (Knaack, Lafaye). The lack of attention to Boios is clear from the fact that there is still not even a complete collection of his fragments; those wishing to know more about Boios need to read the *Metamorphoseon Synagoge* of Antoninus Liberalis, our main source for the fragments. Similarly, scholarship on metamorphosis has focused primarily on the myths themselves, and not on metamorphosis poetry as a genre (Jannaccone, Fantham, Forbes Irving, et al.). My intent is to consider what it meant to write a multi-book, epic poem devoted to metamorphoses using recent scholarship on Hellenistic didactic poetry to help us place Boios' poem in its appropriate framework (Harder).

I will argue that Boios' *Ornithogonia* was didactic in the Hesiodic sense, conveying useful information, but also providing moral instruction. As in Hesiod, the information and the moral instruction are inseparable: Boios explains the habits and origins of numerous birds, all coming into being through gods responding to human behavior to reward or punish it. These divine responses to human behavior outline a system of morality, which Boios reinforces by explaining the habits of these birds and their use as good or bad omens. Such a connection is itself Hesiodic: at the end of the *Works and Days*, Hesiod declares that to live a virtuous life, one needs to avoid transgressing against the gods by reading bird omens (826-8). Furthermore, Hesiodic elements pervade the fragments of the *Ornithogonia*, with perhaps the most obvious being the role Eris plays in the myth of Aedon, the woman who turns into the nightingale (Ant. Lib. 11). A view of the poem as Hesiodic didactic will also help make sense of the possible association between Boios and Boio, a mythical Delphic priestess: such a connection would provide Boios the authority necessary for any didactic poet.

A more comprehensive view of the *Ornithogonia* will increase our appreciation of the fragments as part of a larger, cohesive work. Knowledge about the aims of this early metamorphosis poem will also help us understand some of the expectations readers may have had in approaching Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Not only did Ovid (and his contemporary Aemilius Macer, who translated it) read and use the poem, but his audience may have known it as well, and such knowledge would have affected how they read his own metamorphosis poem.

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