

Aratean Epigram and the Problems of Hellenistic Reception of the *Phaenomena*

The reception of Aratus' *Phaenomena* in antiquity is well attested and demonstrates the popularity of the poem for many centuries. The earliest surviving examples are probably two epigrams from near-contemporary poets, Callimachus and Leonidas of Tarentum. Although these poems have serious textual issues, scholars have frequently used these two poems (AP 9.507; AP 9.25 respectively) to confirm their readings of poetic flourishes in the *Phaenomena*, such as the acrostic in *Phaen.*783-87 (*leptē*), and the pun on his name (*arrēton*) in *Phaen.*2 (Haslam 1992; Bing 1993; Prioux 2005). Although scholars use these two epigrams with little distinction between them, they actually present quite different views of the source poem. This paper examines the early reception of Aratus' *Phaenomena* through the epigrams of Callimachus and Leonidas of Tarentum in order to understand the place of the newly emerging genre of scientific poetry in the Hellenistic world. When read in conjunction with each other, the poems reveal two separate and distinct Aratuses: one a poet and one a scientific teacher.

This paper will begin with a close reading of the epigrams to clarify the focus of each. The use of *leptē* within each of the poems illustrates their central difference. Callimachus salutes Aratus' *leptai rēsies* (AP 9.507.3-4), which heralds his discovery of the acrostic, but also clarifies his interest in the *Phaenomena*. The importance of *leptotēs* in other metapoetic passages of Callimachus' corpus (e.g., *Aet.*fr.1.11; 24) underscores the literary focus of this epigram. The *Phaenomena* that emerges from this epigram is a Callimachean poem: slight, sweet, and Hesiodic, but not scientific. In contrast, Leonidas compliments Aratus on his *leptē phrontis* (AP 9.25.1-2) and his ability to explain the cosmos. Leonidas eschews any direct discussion of his poetic skill in favor of celebrating the content of the *Phaenomena*. His choice of the word *leptē* cannot be an accident, and shows that he has read the poem carefully, which

makes his puzzling mention of Aratus' explanation of the planets significant. The didactic poet never explains the planets, claiming a lack of competency in an elaborate praeteritio (*Phaen.* 453-61), and thus Leonidas is clearly playing with his reader, suggesting the rest of his compliments are disingenuous. Regardless of their sincerity, his comments are focused exclusively on the content of the poem, not the form. Leonidas stresses clarity and ease of comprehension, even saying that Aratus is second to Zeus in making the stars *phaeinotera* (1.6). Bing believes that there is also a hidden reference to the pun on Aratus' name in this epigram, but the poem only explicitly comments on the subject matter of the work, which, for all the evidence here, could be in prose (Bing 1993).

The paper will close with an investigation into the larger significance of these findings for reception of the work in the Hellenistic period. Aristotle declared that Empedocles and Homer had nothing in common except meter (Arist.*Poet.*1447b), suggesting that a philosophical and scientific subject matter could erase any poetic significance in a work. Aratus' *Phaenomena* fused scientific knowledge with epic poetry and its reception reveals his audience's mixed feelings. The poem inspired many imitators, nevertheless, such as Nicander. Furthermore, it continued to be read for a long time afterwards, as the multiple surviving and attested translations and commentaries indicate. But not all these readers embraced it. Hipparchus, for example, complained that the *charis* of poetry led its readers to trust the astronomy more than was merited (Hipparch.1.1.7). With the possible exception of Nicander, these early readers of Aratus separated, perhaps unconsciously, the two elements the poet sought to unite. A division emerged in this very early reception between the form and the content, between Aratus the poet and Aratus the astronomer, which left its mark on later reception as well. It is remarkable that this division of the *Phaenomena* into its component parts began so early in its reception,

suggesting that the genre of scientific poetry that developed and rose to popularity in the third century was nevertheless problematic to its first audiences.

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