Stars and Constellations in Hyginus’ *Fabulae*: Cementing the Link with the *De Astronomia*

Although most scholars now accept that the *Fabulae* attributed to Hyginus is the work of the same person who wrote the *De Astronomia* (Fletcher), very little work has been done on the link between these two texts. At first glance, there are few similarities: the *De Astronomia* is erudite and the *Fabulae* is an often inept mess (Rose). But this paper will argue that some parts of the *Fabulae* are much more learned than others, and that they are generally the chapters that involve astronomical matters. The presence of such elements in the *Fabulae* not only cements the link between the works but also shows that the *Fabulae* is not completely unlike the *De Astronomia* in quality, and there is thus no reason to argue that it is simply a badly abridged work full of later interpolations (Werth).

After reviewing the basic evidence for the connection between the *Fabulae* and the *De Astronomia*, I will discuss a group of chapters in the former that involve stars and constellations, including 14 (*Argonautae*), 80 (*Castor*), 130 (*Icarus, Erigone et Canis*), 177 (*Callisto*), and 192 (*Hyas*). These chapters share numerous similarities with each other but differ from most of the rest of the *Fabulae*.

First is the presence of catasterisms, which are the subject of *De Astronomia* 2 but relatively rare in the *Fabulae*. Second is the complexity of these chapters, either in terms of length, style, and/or amount of detail. Some of these chapters also provide variants (i.e., giving multiple possibilities for a name or detail), which are rare in the *Fabulae*. Finally, these chapters include between them most of the direct quotations of poetry in the *Fabulae*. This kind of quotation is extraordinarily rare in the *Fabulae*, but references to poets are common in *De
Astronomia 2. In one case (14), the quotation of poetry even demonstrates specialized astronomical knowledge.

All of these characteristics in turn make these fabulae more similar to the general approach of Book 2 of the De Astronomia, which collects the aitia for the constellations. In addition to supporting the argument that both works are by the same author, these similarities may even allow us to suggest that these chapters in the Fabulae betray the author’s particular interests and foreshadow a later, more mature work.

Finally, this examination sheds some much-needed light on the Fabulae, which is widely used but still understudied. The material it transmits was shaped by the particular interests of its author and not all parts of the Fabulae deserve the kind of censure the work as a whole has received from editors and other scholars.

Bibliography

