

Manilian Poetics and the Rhetoric of the Astrological Treatise.

In this paper I argue for a reading of Manilian poetics that emphasizes the author's engagement with the rhetorical imagery and discursive strategies characteristic of Greco-Roman astrology as represented by later didactic texts on the subject. Recent work on the *Astronomica* has sought to situate the poem within the broader context of Greco-Roman intellectual discourse emphasizing the author's engagement not only with the literary tradition, but also with the broader scope of philosophy, religion and natural history (e.g. Volk (2009)). This paper seeks to continue this approach by analyzing Manilian poetics vis-à-vis two (2) distinctive aspects of the rhetoric on display in other ancient texts on astrology, and in contemporary representations of astrologers in Augustan literature.

The first aspect (1) is what Tamsyn Barton (1994: 91-92) calls 'involution': the elaborate accumulation of (frequently contradictory) detail in didactic texts on astrology in a way that overwhelms readers and limits the usefulness of such texts for teaching. Manilius' poem is a prime example of this rhetorical strategy at work and reading the *Astronomica* as representative of this kind of discourse goes some way toward explicating several distinctive features of the poem: the perpetually deferred discussion of the planets (promised at: 2.750 and 965; 3.156-9 and 587-9.), the presentation of alternate and sometimes contradictory procedures, and the frustration of 'the student' expressed in exasperated outbursts at 4.387-9 and 866-72. The second point of focus (2) concerns the pervasive use of economic language and metaphor in the *Astronomica* (see: Glauthier (2011)). Manilius' description of the cosmos is suffused with language and imagery from the world of commerce and finance and here too we find salient parallels in later authors including Manetho, Vettius Valens and Firmicus Maternus.

In conclusion, I argue that the language of astrological didactic plays an important role in Manilian poetics. In the *Astronomica* we find salient parallels with the rhetoric and discursive strategies characteristic of later didactic texts on astrology. Similar rhetoric can also be found in contemporary representations of astrologers in Augustan literature, such as the speech of Horos at Propertius 4.1.71-150. Recognizing Manilius' engagement with the rhetoric of ancient astrology contributes to our appreciation of Manilian poetics, and to our understanding of the poem both within the astrological tradition and within Greco-Roman intellectual discourse more broadly.

Bibliography

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