

Reconsidering the astronomical entries in Ovid's *Fasti*

This paper argues that Ovid revised the *Fasti* in exile far more significantly than has previously been proposed, contending that all the astronomical entries are part of the Tiberian-era revision concurrent with the work's rededication to Germanicus. In her seminal 1985 article Elaine Fantham convincingly showed that the *Fasti* was reworked while Ovid was in exile, but did not consider the astronomical entries part of this revision. In a chapter devoted entirely to "Ovid and the Stellar Calendar" Geraldine Herbert-Brown (2002) does not make this suggestion, nor do any notable monographs or commentators (Barchiesi 1997, Herbert-Brown 1994, Newlands 1995, Pasco-Pranger 2006; Green 2004, Robinson 2011, Heyworth 2019, Fantham 1998, Littlewood 2006). Indeed, most scholars (typified by Fox 2004 and Robinson 2007) have focused the debate on the degree of Ovid's celestial (in)accuracy. In a footnote in her monograph *Ovid, Aratus and Augustus* Emma Gee (2000: 67) briefly mentions the possibility that the astronomical information might not have been part of the initial draft of the *Fasti*, but does not pursue the point. Indeed, I do not believe anyone has detailed this argument in print.

There are three pieces of evidence I use to form my hypothesis and all will be discussed. The first deals with the historical context which prompted Ovid to include astronomical information in his text. The astronomical information included is far more appropriate with the dedicant of the revised *Fasti*, Germanicus, in mind. Germanicus had composed his own translation of Aratus' *Phaenomena* and he and his associates appear frequently as addressees in book 4 of the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, composed in the same period as the *Fasti* revision. Indeed, Germanicus' *Aratea* is no mere translation, it is marked by the addition of astronomical information. It seems reasonable to hypothesize Ovid attempted a similar feat in revising and

rededicating his work to Germanicus. The second deals with differences between wording of the proem at the beginning of the revised Book 1 and that at the beginning of Book 2 the *Fasti*, which has been argued to be the original proem. A close reading and comparison between the two reveals significant changes in how Ovid defined his work at different points in time. The third deals with how the astronomical information is, or rather is not, integrated into the poem writ large. I will offer as comprehensive an examination as time allows to demonstrate how each of the astronomical entries is presented in an isolated fashion, meaning that their removal does not affect the flow or connectivity of the surrounding text.

The paper concludes with a brief discussion about the implications of establishing the astronomical entries as part of Ovid's Tiberian-era revision. Such knowledge radically changes how one might read and interpret both the poem as a whole and the astronomical entries themselves.

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