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ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF HERA-JUNO AT THE END OF ANTIQUITY: THE EXAMPLE OF FULGENTIUS

Summary: The allegorical interpretations of pagan gods flourished in late Antiquity. They were the work of the pagans, who thus sought to spiritualize their religion, but also of some Christians, who thought that the pagan fables were hiding truths they needed to discover.

The goddess Hera-Juno has not escaped the phenomenon. Here we consider, taking as one basis the works of Fabius Planciades Fulgentius, African writer of the fifth-sixth century, what these interpretations are and what they tell us both about this goddess and the mentality of late Antiquity.

Key words: allegory, interpretation, paganism, Hera-Juno, Fulgentius

Allegorical interpretations of the pagan gods flourished at the end of Antiquity. They were conceived by the pagans who used them to spiritualise their religion, as well as by some Christians, who felt that the pagan fables must inevitably harbour some truths that it was important to discover. This phenomenon has a parallel in the allegorical interpretation of some episodes of the Bible, many of which were based on the etymology (far-fetched in the light of modern linguistics) of gods and heroes.

The goddess Hera-Juno was not exempt from such treatment. In this paper, I will examine what Fulgentius the Mythographer, a 5th to 6th century African author who wrote allegorical interpretations of gods and fables from mythology in the *Mythologiae* and the *Expositio Virgilianae continentiae*, tells us about this goddess. In fact, there is nothing about Hera-Juno in the *Expositio Virgilianae continentiae*.

The first passage that interests us is in *De Ioue et Iunone* chapter of *Mythologiae* I 3. The text reads:

[Saturno] etiam quattuor filios subiciunt, id est primum Iouem, secundum Iunonem, tertium Neptunum, quartum Plutonem; id est primum Iouem ut ignem, unde et Zeus Grece dicitur; Zeus enim Greca significatione siue uita siue calor dici potest, siue quod igne uitali animata omnia dicerent, ut Eraclitus uult, siue quod hoc elementum caleat; secundam Iunonem quasi aerem, unde et Era Grece dicitur; et quamuis aerem masculinum ponere debuerunt, tamen ideo sororem Iouis, quod haec duo elementa sibi sint ualde consocia, ideo Iouis et coniugem, quod maritatus aer igne feruescat. Nam et Teopompus in Cipriaco carmine et Ellanicus in dios politia quam descripsit ait Iunonem ab Ioue uinctam catenis aureis et degrauatam incudibus ferreis, illud nihilominus dicere uolentes quod aer igni caelesti coniunctior duobus deorsum elementis misceatur, id est aquae et terrae, quae elementa duobus superioribus grauiora sunt.

Fulgentius equates Jupiter with fire, justifying his interpretation by the god's Greek name, Zeus, which, according to him, signifies life or warmth. He thus associates the Greek name of Zeus either with ζῳή, 'life', or with ζέσσις, 'boiling', 'smouldering', because fire is the primary form of reality, as Heraclites argued, or because it is a hot element. The first etymology can be found in Tertullian, *Against Marcion* I 13. 4 (*figurans Iouem in substantiam feruidam ... secundum sonum Graecorum uocabulorum*), for example, which is a traditional one (cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 395b), while the second can be read in Heraclites, *Homeric Allegories* 23. 6. This raises the question of how much Greek Fulgentius could have known as ζέσσις is not a commonly used word. The Heraclites in this case could be the pre-Socratic philosopher, in whom the fire is given as a principle of all things,¹ but is far more likely to be the author of *Homeric Allegories*, who gave Zeus the same two etymologies as Fulgentius (23. 6),² also identifying him with aether³ (15. 3; 24. 1) and Hera with air (15. 3; 25. 7; 39. 3); like Fulgentius, he also linked the chaining of Hera with the order of succession of the elements (23. 2). But it is not excluded that Fulgentius has confused the two Heraclites. Anyway, it is difficult to know if Fulgentius read them directly (in which case, he knew Greek), or if he heard of them through a Latin source.

Juno is assimilated with air, which is supported by the Greek name for the goddess, Hera. The link between Hera and the Greek ἄηρ, 'air' is frequent in Antiquity (e.g. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* I 13. 4; Martianus Capella 2. 143) but has no scientific basis. And while the word 'air' is masculine in Latin, Fulgentius explains she was considered as Jupiter's sister since the elements of air and fire are inextricably linked, and as his wife because air burns when mixed with fire.

¹ See PRADEAU 2002, 127–130, fragments 44–46.

² Both etymologies are also given by Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* I 11. 16, but the passage is very different to that of Fulgentius.

³ Aether, the upper air, is considered to be a pure form of fire, cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1. 37; 2. 41.

Finally, according to Theopompus and Hellanicus (real or invented references), the episode where Jupiter hangs Juno by her wrists from the heavens with anvils tied to each foot means that air, while closely linked to celestial fire, also merges with two elements from below, namely earth and water. We know that when Heracles returns to Greece after taking Troy, Hera raises a violent tempest against his ship. This angers Zeus so much that he suspends his wife from the edge of Olympus after tying an anvil to each of her feet. This mythical episode is traditionally interpreted as an allegory of four elements, the two anvils being the heaviest elements, earth and water.⁴

Fulgentius thus gives us a physical type of allegorical interpretation of Juno here, which is otherwise quite commonplace in Antiquity.

Juno is then mentioned in *Mythologiae* II 1, a chapter devoted to *Fabula de iudicio Paridis*, a judgement which Fulgentius interprets as a choice between three types of life, meditative life (Minerva), active life (Juno) or voluptuous life (Venus). Paris chooses pleasure (*uoluptatem*) over wealth (*diuitias*) or virtue (*uirtutem*). The text about Juno reads:

Iunonem uero actiuae praeposuerunt uitae; Iuno enim quasi a iuuando dicta est. Ideo et regnis praeesse dicitur, quod haec uita diuitiis tantum studeat; ideo etiam cum sceptro pingitur, quod diuitiae regnis sint proximae; uelato etiam capite Iunonem ponunt, quod omnes diuitiae sint semper absconsae; deam etiam partus uolunt, quod diuitiae semper praegnaces sint et nonnumquam abortiant. Huius quoque in tutelam pauum ponunt, quod omnis uita potentiae petax in aspectum sui semper quaerat ornatum; sicut enim pauus stellatum caudae curuamine concuans antrum faciem ornet posterioraque turpiter nudet, ita diuitiarum gloriaeque appetitus momentaliter ornat, postrema tamen nudat; unde et Teofrastus in moralibus ait: τὰ λοιπὰ γνῶθι, id est: reliqua considera, et Salomon: “In obitu hominis nudatio operum eius.” Huic etiam Irim quasi arcum pacis adiungunt, quod sicut ille ornatus uarios pingens arquato curuamine momentaliter refugit, ita etiam fortuna quamuis ad praesens ornata, tamen est citius fugitiua.

Juno is linked to active life and, indeed, according to traditional etymology her name comes from the Latin *iuuare*,⁵ which did not convince the moderns. Fulgentius associates her with wealth: she is represented with a sceptre⁶ because wealth is similar to sovereignty; her head is covered⁷ because wealth is often hidden; she is the goddess of childbirth (under the name *Iuno Lucina*) because wealth is always productive and

⁴ See BUFFIÈRE 1956, 115–116.

⁵ See MALTBY 1991, s.v. Sometimes the name Jupiter also derives from *iuuare*, see *ibid.*

⁶ Cf. Ovid, *Fasti* 6. 38; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* X 30. 6. This is notably the case of *Iuno Regina* and *Iuno Capitolina*.

⁷ Cf. Martianus Capella 1. 67. See the *LIMC* V 1, p. 824 sq. The passage illustrates Fulgentius's interest in figurative representations.

sometimes abortive. If the peacock enjoys her protection, it is because life, hungry for power, uses ornamentation to look good. In addition, just as the peacock displays an ornate front while the back of its body is exposed when it fans its tail (the long tail feathers no longer cover its back), so the appetite for wealth and glory momentarily secures ornamentation but leaves the end of life bare. Fulgentius illustrates this explanation with two quotes, respectively from Theophrastus (although the text does not appear in the philosopher's preserved works) and Sirach [Ecclesiasticus] (11. 28). Juno is also associated with Iris, a sort of arch of peace since, in the same way as Iris adorns the heavens with her curved arch (inspired from Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 11. 590: *arcuato caelum curuamine signans*) then flees, so fortune is adorned with finery in the present, but this quickly slips away.

The precision *Irim quasi arcum pacis* is problematic. Iris symbolises the rainbow. She is the messenger of the gods, and especially of Juno, but is not specifically a messenger of peace; on the contrary, more often than not she is sent to herald hostilities, as Servius explains regarding *Aeneid* 5. 606: *ex magna parte seruat, ut Mercurius ad concordiam, Iris ad discordiam mittatur: unde et Iris dicta est, quasi εἰρῆς* (the idea is repeated for *Aeneid* 9. 2). Perhaps Fulgentius fuses with Geneses 9. 12–17, where the rainbow is the sign of the pact between God and Man before the flood. It is also possible that by *quasi* he wants to give the etymology of the name: Iris would thus be associated with the Greek εἰρήνη, “peace”, a convergence that has no parallel⁸ and appears to contradict Servius's interpretation of Iris's role. Whatever the case, it is difficult to see the link that this precision *quasi arcum pacis* has with the rest of the story. It is quite possible that we should replace *pacis* by a word such as *opis*, which would give “arch of strength or of abundance”; or *aeris*, “arch of air”, as Iris is associated with air (cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 9. 803: *aeriam ... Irim*) and her name embodies air for Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae* XIII 10. 1: *Et dicitur Iris quasi aeris, id est quod per aera ad terras descendat*).

Here, Fulgentius gives Juno a moral type of allegorical interpretation. In effect, he combines the historic interpretation, whereby simple humans are raised to the ranks of the immortals or divinities, the physical or naturalist interpretation, according to which the gods are physical symbols, and the moral interpretation, which is the most widespread, where myths are the fantastic overlay of moral ideas. What is curious is that he completely dissociates Juno from Hera-Juno, of whom he speaks in I 3 as if they were two distinct goddesses, or at least presenting a different interpretation of the former. In fact, at times he juxtaposes clearly incompatible interpretations of a same divine character. For him, they should complement rather than exclude one another. This technique is frequent in allegorical interpretation and is based on the idea that each myth should be interpreted on its own merits. Thus, any one god could be given two different interpretations from one myth to another.⁹

We may note the rapprochement between Theophrastus and Salomon (to whom is attributed Sirach, probably by confusion with Ecclesiastes, sometimes put under his

⁸ For the etymologies of Iris in Antiquity, see WEICKER *s.v.*; add Heraclites, *Homeric Allegories* 28. 2.

⁹ See BUFFIÈRE 1956, 175.

names). Fulgentius notes points of similarity between the philosophers and pagan poets and the Scriptures several times. His aim was to show that certain myths have a sort of pre-Christian moral value. The implicit idea is that as, by nature, all men have the capacity to attain a certain number of truths, the works of the pagans contain a partial wisdom that the Christians can use to their benefit. It is also normal that the pagans had a sort of prescience of Christianity since the soul innately leans towards monotheism, and the Holy Spirit already existed before Christ.

According to Fulgentius, Juno thus presides over active life. The theory of three types of life dates back to Plato and Aristotle, but the nature of each of the three lives changed.¹⁰ Generally they cover a contemplative life, linked to reflection, an active or political life, linked to power, and a chrematistic or business life, linked to money. Fulgentius innovates in his definition of three lives, mainly by combining wealth and power. Moreover, he adopts an original approach in that he identifies each of the lives with one of the goddesses judged by Paris (Minerva = contemplative life; Juno = active life; Venus = voluptuous life), and alters the role attributed to the respective goddess. Traditionally, Juno offers sovereignty; only Hyginus, *Fables* 92. 3, and implicitly Dio Chrysostom 20. 19 (*On retirement*), include wealth. Here, however, she represents a very negative life of power and wealth. Minerva generally promises Paris the warrior value; Hyginus in *Fables* 92. 3 (followed by the *First Vatican Mythographer* III 5. 3) adds knowledge of all the arts. Only Sophocles, according to Athenaeus of Naucratis, *Deipnosophistae* XV 687c, presents Athena as the goddess of reason and intelligence in the episode of judgement. Fulgentius, however, places her in the role of wisdom. The upshot is that two of the three lives are reproved, although the philosophers did not rebuke an active life.

Nowhere do the ancient texts associate Juno with power or money. This is an extrapolation that can have three sources: the promises Juno made to Paris; the frequent representation of the goddess with a diadem (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* X 30. 6; Martianus Capella 1. 67) and a sceptre (see above); and the nickname of *Iuno Moneta* (where *Moneta* comes from the verb *moneo*; but as coins were originally minted in Rome in the workshop of *Iuno Moneta* on the Capitoline Hill, *moneta* finally came to denote money).

While Fulgentius's interpretation of the judgement of Paris is new, it is nonetheless foreshadowed by certain texts. Athenaeus (*Deipnosophistae* XII 510c) notes that having to choose between pleasure and virtue, Paris chose the former; he assimilates to the episode of Xenophon's anecdote about Hercules as at the crossroads of vice and virtue.¹¹ In the *Homilies* (VI 15, p. 112, 2–3 ed. B. Rehm 1953) and *Recognitions* (X 41) by the pseudo-Clemens, Hera, Athena and Aphrodite respectively represent gravity (σεμνότης), virility (ἀνδρεία) and pleasure (ἡδοναί). For the 4th century neo-Platonist, Sallustius (*On the gods and the cosmos* IV 4–5), the apple represents the world “that, drawing its existence from contraries, is justifiably said to be thrown out by Discord. With various gods granting favours to the World, they appear to quarrel over the

¹⁰ See JOLY 1956, and FESTUGIÈRE 1971.

¹¹ On this association see DAMISCH 2011, 128.

apple; the soul that lives according to sensation – this is in fact Paris – and who sees no other powers in the World except beauty, says that the apple belongs to Aphrodite”. At any rate, the interpretation by Fulgentius, according to whom Paris chooses between power, wisdom and pleasure, gained a foothold in the Middle Ages,¹² and we find it once more in the 16th century in the *Mythologiae* of Natale Conti (VI 23).

Jupiter and Juno are mentioned again in *Mythologiae* II 5 with regard to Tiresias:

Denique duobus diis id est duobus elementis arbiter quaeritur, igni atque aeri, de genuina amoris ratione certantibus. Denique iustum profert iudicium; in fructificandis enim germinibus dupla aeri quam igni materia suppetit; aer enim et maritat in glebis et producit in foliis et grauidat in folliculis, sol uero maturare tantum nouit in granis. Nam, ut hoc certum sit, cecatur etiam a Iunone, illa uidelicet causa, quod hiemis tempus aeris nubilo caligante nigrescat, Iuppiter uero occultis uaporibus conceptionalem factum ei futuri germinis subministrat, id est quasi praescientiam; nam ob hac re etiam Ianuarius bifrons pingitur, quod et praeterita respiciat et futura.

As Tiresias was a man, then a woman, and then a man again, he was asked to referee when Jupiter and Juno, in other words, fire and air, disagreed about the respective quality of the pleasures of love (implying that Tiresias made love in both sexual forms). According to Fulgentius, his judgement is fair: his opinion, mentioned earlier in the text, is that the part of man is three twelfths and that of woman nine twelfths (this proportion is exceptional, as sources usually say one part for man and nine for woman, but this is irrelevant in our case). In effect, as Fulgentius explains, air as a matter helps seeds to develop twice as much as fire. We might expect “three times” rather than “twice”, both because, in what follows, Fulgentius specifies the three contributions of air and the single contribution of fire, and because the ratio of three to one corresponds to the respective condition of woman (Juno, the air) to man (Jupiter, fire) with regard to love. Moreover, the *Second Vatican Mythographer* 106 and the *Third Mythographer* 4. 8, who picks up on this passage of Fulgentius, write “three times.” To back up his theories, Fulgentius explains that Juno blinds Tiresias because the season of winter is darkened by clouds that obscure the air, while Jupiter secretly sends him hot vapour, enabling him to conceive future production, in other words, giving him a sort of prescience. ‘Him’ is obviously Tiresias, to whom Jupiter gives the gift of prophecy and whom Fulgentius associates with the conception and the development of seeds (apparently because of the sight of two copulating snakes that prompted his intervention). Tiresias is finally linked to January: January is the month of Janus, a god with two faces whom sees the past and the future (we find this idea again in Luxorius, *Latin Anthology* 352. 6 ed. A. Riese), just as Tiresias also has two aspects (male and female) and is also clairvoyant.

¹² See EHRHART 1987, 26–27.

The argument lacks clarity, it is true, especially the part of the phrase *Iuppiter uero occultis uaporibus conceptionalem factum ei futuri germinis subministrat, id est quasi praesentiam*. It was used in a very similar form (but with the terms reversed) in the *Second Vatican Mythographer* 106: *Iuppiter uero ei uaporibus occultis prescentiam, id est conceptionem, futuri subministrat germinis*, which Philippe Dain¹³ translated as: “Mais Jupiter à travers ces brumes mystérieuses lui donne la connaissance préalable, c’est-à-dire la conscience de ce qui va naître (But through these mysterious mists, Jupiter gave him prior knowledge, in other words, awareness of what will be born),” and Ronald E. Pepin¹⁴ as: “Jupiter gave him foreknowledge in the dark mists, that is, conception of the future sprouts.” However, in Latin *uapor* encompasses an idea of heat, and it is in this sense that Fulgentius uses the word.¹⁵ Moreover, there is a clear division between Hera, the air, and Jupiter, fire. The translations of Dain and Pepin therefore appear to be flawed.

In any event, there is no ambiguity with regard to our subject: Juno represents the air, while Tiresias represents time considered as the succession of seasons, along with conception and germination.

Fulgentius thus gives us two completely different interpretations of Hera-Juno (indeed he identifies the Greek goddess and the Roman goddess). In one case, she represents the air through a physical allegory. In the second, according to a moral allegory, she symbolises active life. The first interpretation is traditional,¹⁶ the second far more original. This second interpretation is extremely unfavourable to Juno, who is given over to a life of wealth and power, values presented by Fulgentius as vain and often fleeting.

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¹³ DAIN 2000, p. 141.

¹⁴ PEPIN 2008, p. 143.

¹⁵ *Mythologiae* II, 6 (45, 18 ed. R. Helm); *De aetatibus mundi et hominis* 6 (148, 5 ed. R. Helm).

¹⁶ See PÉPIN 1978, index s.v.

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