

Myrtia, n° 34 (2019), 217-223Textual Notes on *Culex* 137-139

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At *Culex* 123-147 the poet introduces a catalogue of trees, modeled after Ovid's own in the *Metamorphoses*,¹ one element of which is the pine-tree. Just like for the other trees in the catalogue, a mythological expansion is provided that locates the most topical mention of the tree in the Argonauts saga, for the pine-tree was the one out of which planks for the ship Argo were made – and in fact this was the very first time in human 'history' that anyone had built a ship,² so that the pine-tree represents not only one element of a well-known ship myth, but the very *root* of all ships in the world.³

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¹ Ov. *met.* 10.86-106. There the catalogue is prompted by Orpheus's song functioning as a summoning spell for all kinds of trees, which walk to him and populate a previously barren place (88 *umbra loco deerat*). While that "rationally" explains the coexistence of otherwise incompatible plants, here it is only the Ovidian precedent, and specifically its usage as a catalogic *locus amoenus*, that allows this non-migratory forest to include plants that cannot either exist together or blossom at the same time. This is one of many elements that prove that the *Culex* was written after Ovid. On the *Culex* catalogue, see S. Seelentag, 2012, pp. 29f. For the Ovidian catalogue, a helpful introduction is in F. Bömer, 1969-86, *ad loc.* (vol. 5, pp. 38f.). The similarities between the two were expounded by L. Castiglioni, 1906, pp. 164ff. (although I do not agree with his suggestion that both texts independently imitated Hellenistic models).

² For alternative versions and the literary relevance of differing treatments in Greek and Roman authors, see J.J. O'Hara, 2006, esp. pp. 34-41.

³ To be precise, one plank from the Dodona oak was also inserted: the mention of the pine-tree after the oak in the *Culex* catalogue (134-6) may well be an allusion to that. That the ship Argo had been made of pine-tree (Gr. *πέυκη*), often with a specific reference to the pine-trees growing on Mt. Pelion, was a much-abused mythical factoid: cf. Eur. *Med.* 3f., Ap. Rhod. 1.386, 525 (Πηλιάς), Catull. 64.1, Phaedr. 4.7.7, Prop. 3.22.13, Ov. *am.* 2.11.2, *her.* 6.47, 18.158 (also *met.* 1.95, an indirect reference to the *prima pinus*: cf. A. Barchiesi, 2005, p. 169), Sen. *Med.* 336, Luc. 6.400, Stat. *Achill.* 1.156, Val. Fl. 1.123 (with A. Zissos, 2008, p. 151), 457 (with A.J. Kleywegt, 2005, p. 268), 687, 5.435. While in many of these cases *pinus* may well be a metonymy, common in Latin verse, for generic "wood" rather than a precise indication of the wood's type, nevertheless pine-tree planks are the only material mentioned in passages that are indeed concerned with a precise botanical classification of the wood itself. The one exception seems to be Enn. *trag.* 209 *abiegnā trabes* (H.D. Jocelyn, 1967, pp. 352f., considers it an anomaly dictated by the specific context of the line). *Pinus* here must be taken as a 'repräsentativer Singular.'

However, the textual material out of which this passage is made in the MSS does not grant safe sailing, and ecdotic carpentry is thus in order. Here is the text:⁴

hic magnum Argoae nauis decus, edita pinus,
proceras decorans siluas, hirsuta per artus
appetit aeriis contingere montibus astra.

137 nauis ζ : nauī V L Γ, *edd.* : uani C || edita C L : addita V Γ

138 proceras V C L : proceratus Γ : proceros *Heinsius, edd.* || decorans *scripsi* : decorat ω

139 appetit ω : ac petit *Heinsius, edd.* || montibus ω : motibus *Scaliger*

At 137 *magnum Argoae nauis decus, edita pinus*, I have accepted: *edita*, the reading in C and L, instead of *addita* of V and Γ, often preferred by editors (including Clausen); and the gen. *nauis* of several *Itali* against the dat. *nauī* in most MSS (V L Γ; C seems to have misread *nauī* and exchanged consonants to have *uani*).

With *edita*, the phrase *edita pinus* is appositive to *Argoae nauis decus*:⁵ “the glory of the ship Argo, the lofty pine-tree” which gave the ship its structure. The adjectival participle *edita* is used with the same sense as *prolata* to indicate the height of the pine-tree as a self-standing object,⁶ regardless of its relative positioning in Argo’s structure—on which, incidentally, it could be meaningfully called “*edita*” only if just one pine-tree trunk had been used for the mast. *Edita pinus* being an appositive nom., the periphrasis characterizing that very *pinus* needs to have *decus* accompanied by a gen. of specification,⁷ which the Humanistic *nauis* provides.

⁴ The text given here is that of my forthcoming critical edition. The *sigla* used for MSS are those used by W.V. Clausen, 1966, to which readers should also refer for the several other minor transmission issues in this text that I am not treating here.

⁵ The phrase *Argoae nauī* itself has no parallel in Latin, but is a calque from Gr. Ἀργῶα ναῦς, first found at Ap. Rhod. 1.319, 2.211, 4.554, 938 (the adj. Ἀργῶος is also at 658, 1620). Afterwards in Greek literature it is only found at Opp. *cyn.* 2.622, *Arg. Orph.* 86, 224, 533f., 619, 879. In Latin, the adj. is found in phrases with nouns meaning/synonymous with “ship”: cf. Hor. *epod.* 16.57 *remige* (the first occurrence of *Argous* in Latin: see the comm. *ad loc.* of D. Mankin, 1995, pp. 267f., and L.C. Watson, 2003, pp. 525f.), Germ. 345, 621 *puppis*, 683 *ratis*, Mart. 13.72.1 *carina*, Stat. *silu.* 4.6.42, *remos*, Val. Fl. 6.116 *uela*, 7.573 *ratis* (with A. Perutelli, 1997, p. 443), 8.294 *malum*, Claud. *carm.* 26 [*Goth.*] 16 *trabibus*. Other occurrences of *Argous* are at Prop. 3.22.13 (with P. Fedeli, 1985, p. 640), Stat. *Theb.* 5.725, 6.343, Stat. *Achill.* 1.156, Val. Fl. 3.3, 430, 691, 6.731.

⁶ See *OLD*, s.v. *editus*, 1. A.E. Housman, 1902, p. 340 [= 1972, pp. 565f.], also prefers *edita* but takes it in the sense of *genita* (i.e. *pinus nauī decus edita* = *genita ad nauem decorandam*), which I do not believe to be correct.

⁷ Periphrases with *decus* indicating various objects conferring “pride” or “glory” usually see this noun followed by a gen. of specification rather than a *dativus commodi*: cf. [Tib.] 3.7 (*Paneg.*

Addita is certainly a Humanistic conjecture as much as *gen. nauis* is, probably meant to have the text imitate phrasings such as VERG. *Aen.* 8.301 *uera Iouis proles* (sc. *Hercules*), *decus addite diuis*.⁸ Such a parallel, though, is also semantically improper, since *decus addere* there literally means “adding something (or someone, or the value of something) to something else.”⁹ The participle *addita* would indeed agree with *nauis* of most MSS, but it is precisely this wrong reading that prompted the ‘emendation’ into a dative-governing verb such as *addita*, and the reading *nauis edita* (not *addita*) of **L** seems to confirm that *edita*, also found in **C** (but with *uani*) was the archetype’s reading before a (disputable) emendation was proposed. This happened within a tradition leading to **V** and **Γ**, which were both largely contaminated and, at least in the case of **V**, followed a stage which saw a Humanist heavily, and most often wrongly, change the text.¹⁰ Whatever the origin of *addita*, in the syntax prompted by it *decus* would be a predicate nom. (“added to the ship as an object of praise”), as in VERG. *Aen.* 8.301 (quoted above).¹¹ However, an expression whereby the pine-tree is later “added” as a *decus* to the ship *Argo*, which was entirely built of pine-tree planks, is counter-intuitive: the ship does not exist until all of the pine-tree planks have been put together and not “added” to something different.¹²

Mess.) 49 *paruae magnum decus urbis Ulixem, catal.* 9.3 *magni magnum decus ecce triumphis*, Sen. *epist.* 66.2 *ipsa* (sc. *uirtus*) *magnum sui decus est*, [Sen.] *Oct.* 424 *siderum magnum decus*, Sil. 15.453 *magnum Dardaniae, Laeli, decus* (in the latter case, usually interpreted as genitive, it could as well be a dative). The poet of the *Culex* often uses *decus* to create periphrases, often in reference to items and characters of (Greek) mythology: cf. 11 *Iouis*, 15 *Asteries*, 18 *Pierii laticis*, 65 *picturae*, 265 *Ithaci*, 317 *Troiae*, 360 *magni orbis*, 402 *Phoebis*; at 317 and 402 it is also construed with an adj. (317 *summum*, 402 *ingens*), as here with *magnum* (for *decus magnum* also cf. Plaut. *Truc.* 517, Liv. 37.20.14, Verg. 10.507, Gratt. *cyn.* 563, Luc. 1.174, Val. Max. 5.6.2, Val. Fl. 8.37, Sil. 13.384).

⁸ Further imitated by Stat. *Theb.* 1.22 *tuque* (sc. *Domitiane*; v. l. *teque*) *o Latiae decus addite famae*.

⁹ Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 1.592 *quale manus addunt ebori decus*, Luc. 3.762 (*Brutus*) *primus Caesareis pelagi decus addidit armis*, Manil. 3.28 (*facile est*) *auroque atque ebori decus addere* (imitating Vergil, quot.), Stat. *Theb.* 3.217 *seraeque decus uelit* (sc. *Aletes*) *addere morti*, 7.692f. *famulo* (sc. *Amphiarao*) *decus addit inane /... Apollo* (with the comm. *ad loc.* of J.J.L. Smolenaars, 1994, 324f.), Sil. 10.307f. *mors additi* (Dausqueius, prob. Delz: *additur* MSS) *urbi / pulchra decus*, 16.578f. *celebrare iuuabat / sacros cineres atque hoc decus addere ludis*.

¹⁰ While **V** and **Γ** have been considered *optimi* (or at least *potiores*) by most previous editors, in my forthcoming edition I am very skeptical that they bear genuine/correct readings whenever in disagreement with the rest of the MSS.

¹¹ Also cf. Sil. 10.307f., provided one accepts the reading *additur* transmitted by the MSS of Silius.

¹² Seelentag’s preference is for *nauis edita* (already printed, among older editors, by C.H. Heyne-K.J. Sillig, 1832, F. Leo, 1891, R. Ellis, 1907, C. Plésent, 1910), which she explains with Housman’s *edita* = *genita* (cit. above). However, the one way to understand *nauis* would be as a dat. of purpose, which whole phrase I do not consider likely or idiomatic.

Also at 138 *proceras decorans siluas* I have changed the text from transmitted *decorat*, accepted by most editors,¹³ into *decorans*. The whole sentence thus reads (starting from 137): “the high pine-tree, glory of the ship Argo, *adorning* the tall forests, here stretches out to the stars.” With the transmitted text, instead, which also has *nauis ... addita* instead of *nauis ... edita*, the sentence runs: “the pine-tree, *added* to the ship Argo, here *adorns* the tall forests”. While this latter reading is not impossible, it has usually necessitated emending *appetit* in the foll. line into *ac petit* in order to obtain a clause coordinated with *decorat* (sc. *decorat ac petit*).¹⁴

My reconstruction is that a transition from *decorans* to *decorat* (*decorãs > decorat*) took place, potentially as part of the misunderstanding that also produced *nauis addita* in the prev. line. With this text, which has *edita pinus* isolated from the standpoint of *métrique verbale*, the phrase *proceras decorans siluas* provides an attributive expansion to *pinus*, itself branching out of the periphrasis referencing it (*magnum decus* etc.). While such an emendation is not strictly necessary whichever reading one adopts in the prev. line, equally unnecessary is the change of *appetit* into *ac petit*: if one were to accept *decorat*, *appetit* could well be coordinated in asyndeton.

Furthermore, I have retained *proceras*, the transmitted reading in the MSS agreeing with *siluas*, against Heinsius’s conjecture *proceros* which has been accepted by most other editors¹⁵ and agrees with *artus*. This may be taken as a further consequence of adopting *edita*: just like the pine-tree is “lofty”, so consequently are the forests that it adorns as their most notable inhabitant.¹⁶ However, the specific *ordo uerborum* itself – *proceras decorans siluas* (as opposed to isometric *siluas decorans*) – suggests that the syntactical unit ends here, where *siluas* is also encapsulated between, and emphasized by, the penthemimeral and ephthemimeral caesurae – instead of continuing on to include *artus*, with which all other editors’ *proceros* would agree: in their *proceros decorat siluas hirsuta per artus*, the phrasal connection between *proceros* and *artus*, while visible, would

¹³ Ellis obelizes *decorat* (and timidly proposes “*fort. superat uel superans*” in *apparatu*: his is the only participial conjecture I have been able to track) but still accepts *ac petit* in the foll. l.

¹⁴ To be noted is also that with *decorat ac petit* the adv. *hic* would modify both verbs whereas the logic of the sentence does seem to require that *hic* rather modify *appetit* alone. This alone would not be a sufficient argument against *decorat*, but that would seem to befit a context wherein the one governing verb is *appetit*.

¹⁵ Among recent editors, only A. Salvatore, 1999, prefers *proceras*. F. Leo, 1891, had *proceras* but not as a result of choice among manuscript readings, as he rather considered *addita* and *proceros* conjectures of Heinsius’s. C. Plésent, 1910, had *proceras* but ignored the reading *proceros*.

¹⁶ For the phrase *proceras siluae* cf. Ov. *her.* 16.109 *ardua proceris spoliantur Gargara siluis* (also cf. *TLL* 10.2, 1520, 11, mentioning Plin. *epist.* 5.6 *procera nemora*). The adj. *procerus* is used for the tallest trees (see *TLL* 10.2, 1519, 75ff.), and specifically for the pine-tree in the (metapoetic) *silua* at Enn. *ann.* 179 *pinus proceras peruortunt*.

be lost to the articulation of the syntax. The other element to this reasoning is the second half of the line, *hirsuta per artus*, which must be taken as a hypallage standing for *hirsutos per artus*: “the pine-tree adorns the forests *with its prickly branches*”.¹⁷ With *proceros* agreeing with *artus*, and thus filling its adjectival slot, *hirsuta* would be self-standing and absolute, way too far from its noun, *pinus*.¹⁸

To conclude with 139 *appetit aeriis contingere montibus astra*, as mentioned above, I retain transmitted *appetit* whereas all other editors follow Heinsius’s emendation *ac petit*, in order to avoid a lack of coordination with their preferred reading *decorat* in the previous line.¹⁹ However, with my conjecture *decorans* (see above), *appetit* remains the one finite verb governing not only *contingere*²⁰ but the whole period.²¹

Whatever the verb, one final problem lies in the transmitted reading *montibus*, which a few editors (among whom W.V. Clausen, 1966) have changed into *motibus* (Scaliger’s conjecture).²² The interpretation with *motibus* is that the pine-tree “attempts to touch the sky (*appetit/petit contingere astra*) through its *movements* up in the air,” i.e. the tip of the tree, shaking in the open air ‘near’ the sky, tries to reach it. However, there are no parallels for such imagery or phrasing (including the phrase *aerii motus*).

¹⁷ Also C.E. Murgia, 1971, p. 211 n. 16, argues *proceras* should be preserved “if the poet is cultivating a Lucretian rhythm” (i.e. if he imitates such Lucretian *clausulae* as *concita per artus*, *concuissa per artus*, *commixta per artus* etc.). The self-standing clausula *per artus* is indeed very frequent in Lucretius (25x) and also found in the hexameters of Vergil (3x), Ovid (3x), Manilius (2x), Lucan (2x), Statius (7x), Valerius Flaccus (3x), Silius (4x). For *artus* figuratively describing tree branches, see *TLL* 2, 719, 38ff. A similar verse ending is at *Culex* 70 *gemmae picta (tellus) per herbas*.

¹⁸ The phrase *hirsuta pinus* only elsewhere occurs at *Ov. met.* 10.103 *et succincta comas hirsutaque uertice pinus*, which is probably a direct model (see above) and has in *uertice* a parallel to the local determination required by *hirsuta*, here realized through *per artus*. The adj. *hirsutus* can be otherwise used to describe plants: see *TLL* 6.3, 2825, 53f.

¹⁹ One further possibility would be taking this clause *κατὰ παρένθεσιν* before the following: 137 *decorat siluas* / 139 (*appetit*) / 140 *ilicis et nigrae species nec laeta cupressus* etc.

²⁰ For *appeto* + inf., see *TLL* 2, 286, 43 ff., and especially cf. *Cic. Pis.* 75 *aut non appetentem aut etiam recusantem bellum suscipere*, *fin.* 5.55 *ut appetat animus agere semper aliquid*, *Stat. Theb.* 1.234f. *gremium incestare parentis* / *appetiit* (sc. *Oedipus*).

²¹ Against *ac petit* leads also the consideration that there are no parallels for hexameters beginning with *ac pet*, whereas many are found beginning with *appet-*: cf. *Verg. Aen.* 11.277, *Ov. her.* 20.227, *Stat. Theb.* 1.235, *Sil.* 9.384. In later literature, cf. *Avien. Arat.* 1841, *Aus. urb.* 55, *Claud. Pros.* 3.188, *Prud. psych.* 45, *Mar. Vict. aleth.* 3.382, *Cypr. Gall. Ieu.* 287, *Paul. Pell. euch.* 164, *Drac. laud.* 1.75, *Romul.* 10.170, *Alc. Avit. carm.* 6.375, 561 (also 3.38), *Coripp. Ioh.* 1.78, 6.48. Other meters: (pentameter) *Ov. her.* 21.198, *Mart.* 9.26.6, *Aus. epigr.* 100.6, *Claud. Pros.* 2, *praef.* 38, (trimeter) [*Sen.*] *Herc. Oet.* 1754.

²² Such a corruption did indeed take place at l. 167, where the correct reading *motibus* is wrongly transmitted as *montibus* by **V**, **F**, and **L**.

With *aeriis montibus*, instead, we see the pine-tree attempting to reach the sky “from the mountains”,²³ which are the ones rising towards the sky in a phrase (*aerii montes*) which does indeed occur elsewhere in Latin verse.²⁴

With *montibus*, also a rhetorical effect of visual *gradatio* is achieved whereby the focus proceeds up from the water on which Argo sails, to the top of the forests, on to the mountains, the last earthly height under the *astra* which they try to reach. Through the conflation of all these realms here around the ship may even be an allusion to Argo’s catasterism,²⁵ in which case *contingere* may have not only its etymological meaning of “touching” or “trying to touch” (conative), but also, figuratively, that of *adipisci*, i.e. “to (try to) conquer.”²⁶

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²³ For such a use of the abl., here governed by *contingere*, see *LSH* 2.103. Another possibility is to understand “on the mountains” (giving not the origin of the trees’ movement, but rather the area to which it is limited), for which see *LSH* 2.146.

²⁴ Cf. Catull. 68b.57 (also 64.240 *aerium ... montis ... cacumen*), Verg. *ecl.* 8.59, *Aen.* 6.234, 8.221, Stat. *Achill.* 2.139, Sil. 4.740, *Ciris* 302 (alluding to Verg. *ecl.* 8.59; see R.O.A.M. Lyne, 1978, pp. 228f.), Rutil. 2.16, Merob. *paneg.* 17 (with A. Bruzzone, 1999, pp. 105f.). For other phrases with *aerius* similar to *aerius mons*, see *TLL* 1, 1063, 17ff. The adj. is also used at *Culex* 124 to describe poplars: for *aerius* describing plants, see P. Bernardini Marzolla, 1951, p. 32, who on that basis proposed the conjecture *frondibus* (independently from Heinsius, to whom this same conjecture is attributed by other scholars’ works, e.g. W.A. Baehrens, 1925, *in apparatu*, with no further indications), most recently accepted by T. Gärtner, 2010 (who adds a comparison with Alc. Avit. *SHG* 4.50 *steriles diffundit in aera frondes*). To this writer, however, this seems very unlikely and unidiomatic. Finally, Ellis’s attempt (*in apparatu*) at *morsibus* is the one literal *bite* that is worse than these trees’ bark.

²⁵ Cf. Erat. *catast.* 35 (with A. Santoni, 2009, pp. 235f.), HYG. *astr.* 2.37; also see *LGRM* 6.1005-1008.

²⁶ For a similar concept, cf. Verg. *Aen.* 11.136 *actas ad sidera pinus*. More generally, for *contingere* in such phrases about “reaching out” to the sky, the *TLL* (4, 713, 16f.) cites our passage along with Prop. 1.8.43 *nunc mihi summa licet contingere sidera plantis* (with P. Fedeli, 1980, pp. 228f.), Ov. *fast.* 3.34 *contigeratque (sc. palma) sua (v. l. noua) sidera summa coma* (with F. Ursini, 2008, p. 96), Tib. 1.7.15f. *aetherias (vv. ll. aetherio, aerio) contingens uertice nubes | ... Taurus*.

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