

Ovid and the Ass (*Fast.* 1.391-440, 6.319-346)

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Abstract The focus of this paper is the double aetiology of the very first sacrifice of the ass in Ovid's *Fasti* 1 and 6. I explore Ovid's sources, in particular Hyginus' *Astronomica* and Eratosthenes' *Catasterismoi* and argue that the two Ovidian episodes look back to two Eratosthenic aetiological variants, both of which pertain to the catasterisation of the Asses. Regarding the significance of Priapus' episode in the sacrificial list of Book 1, the sacrifice of the ass is programmatic for Ovid's elegiac project: the donkey deserves to be sacrificed, since through its actions it undermines Priapus' elegiac love and so poses a serious threat to the generic identity of the work. In Book 6 the ass is endowed with a national dimension, which was already inherent in Hyginus' Eratosthenic version of the myth.

Keywords Priapus. Ass. Sacrifice. Hyginus' *Astronomica*. Eratosthenes' *Catasterismoi*. Programmatic.

As a coda to his explanation of the festival of the Agonalia (*Fast.* 1.317-456), Ovid gives a list of animals, so he can offer us a mythological explanation of how they were sacrificed for the very first time, a deed which brought the Golden Age to its end. Given the importance of the practice of sacrifice as integral part of the Augustan ideology, scholars have considered this passage to be a manifesto by Ovid against sacrifice with anti-Augustan undertones. There is also agreement that it looks back to the so-called Ovid's Pythagorean account in Book 15 of the *Metamorphoses*, in which the poet also expresses his repulsion at the sacrificial slaughter of animals and at carnivorousness



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(*Met.* 15.75-142).¹ However, while in his epic poem, the corresponding list of animals is somewhat brief, including only four species (pig, goat, sheep and ox in *Met.* 15.111-142; cf. *Fast.* 1.349-352 about the pig, 1.353-360 about the goat, 1.363-380 about the cow and 1.381-382 about the sheep), in his elegiac poem Ovid both elaborates his discussion of these four animals and adds the horse (1.385-386), the hind (1.387-388), the dog (1.389-390), the ass (1.391-440) and finally the birds (1.441-456), thus significantly increasing their number.

When comparing these two accounts of sacrifice, scholars have discussed these additions and have also examined various alterations in the focus of the narrative. In particular, they have stressed the fact that, in contrast to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which the responsibility for the sacrifice rests with men (*Met.* 15.127), in his *Fasti*, the gods, rather than simply being the passive recipients of sacrifice, actually instigate the very first slaughter of animals and rejoice in it (*Fast.* 1.349 *prima Ceres avidae gavisa est sanguine porcae* "the first to joy in blood of greedy sow was Ceres").² In other words, the gods appear on the elegiac stage, where they play an energetic role in the sacrificial process. Apart from these preliminary remarks, however, there has not been any systematic study of Ovid's sacrificial list in the *Fasti*.³

Here, in this paper, in order to shed some new light on Ovid's expanded account of sacrifice in the *Fasti*, I will focus upon the longest aetiological story in the list, the *first sacrifice of the ass*, which comes as a conclusion to the account of the attempted rape of the Nymph Lotis by Priapus, the guardian of the gardens whose rude wooden image was placed in gardens as a scarecrow to protect them against the ravages of birds and thieves. (*Fast.* 1.415 *at ruber, hortorum decus et tutela, Priapus* "But crimson Priapus, glory and guard

I first met Professor Ettore Cingano in Venice in 2004, when he was co-organiser with Professor Lucio Milano of the very first *Advanced Seminar in the Humanities*, which took place for two consecutive years (2004-2005) at the Venice International University. This memorable intensive seminar, during which I had the unique opportunity of meeting eminent scholars as well as fellow graduate students from the most prestigious institutions around the world, was a personal landmark in the early years of my academic career. This paper is therefore dedicated to Professor Cingano with deep gratitude, sincere esteem and fond memories of San Servolo in snow and in blossom. Special thanks are due to my colleague, Sophia Papaioannou for her valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1 Green 2008; Garani 2013. For preliminary remarks regarding sacrificial ritual in Roman poetry see Feeney 2004.

2 Contrary to Ceres' bloodthirsty desire in *Fast.* 1 and hence the termination of the Golden Age period, in Ovid's account of Cerealia (*Fast.* 4.393-416) the Goddess appears to be reluctantly accepting animal sacrifice (cf. especially *Fast.* 4.407-408, 4.412-414).

3 For some preliminary remarks on the list see Gladigow 1971. See also Bömer 1958, *ad loc.*

of gardens).⁴ As the story goes, Pans, Satyrs, Silenus, Priapus and several Nymphs come as guests to a Bacchic festival that overflows with wine. Ovid offers a detailed description of the Nymphs: he presents us with a catalogue of their sexual attractions, their appearance and their gestures (1.405-410). He then turns to the reaction of the male viewers (1.411-418), which culminates with Priapus' nocturnal attack on Lotis (1.421-432). Still, thanks to the ill-timed braying of Silenus' donkey, Priapus is discovered and humiliated (1.433-440). As a punishment for braying at the wrong moment, the donkey is sacrificed by the inhabitants of Lampsacus, so as to propitiate Priapus.

Given the fact that the *Fasti* narrative is our only source for this story,⁵ scholars have been particularly puzzled regarding both the place of this episode within Ovid's elegiac poem and its sources. As Green puts it, "What is Priapus doing within a Roman, nationalistic and religious poem?"⁶ Green also notes that (along with Faunus' failed rape of Omphale and Priapus' foiled attempt on Vesta) "these are the only tales in all Augustan poetry which take a light-hearted look at the specific theme of sexual frustration".⁷ Barchiesi also draws attention to potential "generic" unease caused by the inclusion of the satyrs in the poem.⁸

Priapus reappears in Book 6. This time the prospective victim of the would-be rapist is Vesta, the national Roman Goddess and ancient guarantor of Roman safety (*Fast.* 6.319-346).⁹ Much ink has been spilled about the significance of this double aetiology of donkey sacrifice, the relationship between the two episodes and whether the second episode was written prior to the first one, which would then have been added to Book 1, when Ovid revised his work in exile.¹⁰ In connection with all this, scholars have pointed out several differences between the two episodes.¹¹ In Book 6, despite the sacrifice of the ass in Lampsacus, which is the punishment for its braying

⁴ Frazer 1929, 2, 170. For discussion of rape narratives in Ovid's *Fasti* see Murgatroyd 2005, 63-95; Hejduk 2011.

⁵ *Ov. Met.* 9.340-362 in which Ovid briefly describes the attempted rape and the transformation of Lotis into a lotus tree. Cf. *Myth. Vat.* III.6.26 (ed. G.H. Bode, Celle 1834, *Script. rer. myth. Lat. tres*); cf. also *Myth. Vat.* I.126, II.179.

⁶ Green 2004, 184.

⁷ Green 2004, 181.

⁸ Barchiesi 1997, 241-2.

⁹ Littlewood 2006, 101-12. Garani 2017 and Γκαράνη 2018 with particular focus upon the role of Vesta in Book 6.

¹⁰ Lefèvre 1975, 50 ff. believes that the episode is a revised version of the story based on the Priapus and Vesta episode. Cf. Fantham 1983, 201-9; Williams 1991, 196-200; Newlands 1995, 124-45; Frazel 2003, 76-84; Green 2004, 182-3.

¹¹ Newlands 1995, 125: "Book 6 provides a negative mirroring of the themes of Book 1"; and in particular 127-30; Williams 1991, 196-200; Littlewood 2006, 103-5.

ing at the wrong moment, Vesta honours donkeys with a necklace of loaves during the festival of Vestalia. This was held on 9 June in celebration of Vesta. During the festival, bakers and millers decorated their millstone with garlands and their donkeys with wreaths (*Fasti* 6.249-460).

To return to the Priapus and Lotis episode, scholars have also been particularly puzzled over Ovid's sources. Given the association of this episode with Bacchus, phallic display and the laughter that the failed, comic rapes arouses,¹² and even the pornographic elements involved in the episode,¹³ scholars stress that Ovid's passage has generic associations with new comedy, mime and satyr plays. In fact, for Green Ovid's story is a "literary version of classic satyr drama" and adds that "Ovid structures his story as if it were a verse-equivalent of a mime show".¹⁴ The passage suggests to Fantham - who quotes Herter - some now lost Alexandrian aetiological narrative poem.¹⁵

The focus of this paper is, however, the intriguing *presence of the ass* within the context of the history of sacrifice. Since sexual excitement and foolishness typify donkeys (Arist. [*Phgn.*] 808b 35, 811a 26)¹⁶ and since therefore donkeys have been even used as a metaphor for the bestial human lust,¹⁷ scholars have been puzzled by the fact that it is a donkey that hinders Priapus from his licentious behaviour. Scholars are also puzzled by the point that, in contrast to the guilt of the pig and the goat, which deserve their punishment, because of the destruction they have wrought (*Fast.* 1.361 *culpa sui nocuit, nocuit quoque culpa capellae* "The sow suffered for her crime, and the she-goat suffered, too, for hers"; see also 1.353, 359), the ass is sacrificed, although it is completely innocent and furthermore saves Lotis from being raped (*Fast.* 1.439 *morte dedit poenas auctor clamoris* "The author of the hubbub paid for it with his life").¹⁸ From this point of view, the ass as a *guiltless victim* [my emphasis] is associated with

¹² Fantham 1983.

¹³ Frazel 2003; Richlin 1992.

¹⁴ Green 2004, 182 who quotes McKeown 1979; Wiseman 2002; Fantham 1983, 187 ff.; Barchiesi 1997, 238-51. Along the same lines, Littlewood 2006, 105 suggests that "The story of Vesta and Priapus arose from Ovid's desire for a narrative which would combine Vesta and the donkey depicted with her in the bakers' *lararium*, a cult drama for the Bakers' Guild".

¹⁵ Fantham 1983, 202; Herter 1932, 88.

¹⁶ Gildhus 2006, 234 also adds that "In the anonymous Latin physiognomic treatise that sums up the catalogue of faults of the ass, the animal is described as lazy (*iners*), dull (*frigidum*), unteachable (*indocile*), slow (*tardum*), insolent (*insolens*) and with an unpleasant voice (*vocis ingratae*) (119)".

¹⁷ Green 2004, 200. Cf. *Priap.* 52.9 in which the lustful donkey (*salax asellus*) is used as an euphemism for human penis during intercourse.

¹⁸ See also Green 2004, 184.

other such victims in Ovid's sacrificial list, in particular oxen and pigs, which are presented as man's dedicated victims (*Fast.* 1.362 *quid bos, quid placidae commeruistis oves?* "But the ox and you, ye peaceful sheep, what was your sin?"), and augural birds (*Fast.* 1.447). Pieper has argued that, in underlining the innocence of the victims, Ovid is implicitly criticising the legal system of the late Augustan period and the increasing arbitrariness of the emperor's judgments.¹⁹ In other words, since Ovid induces us to sympathise with the innocent sacrificial victims, his poem therefore has political anti-Augustan political implications.²⁰ However, is this also the case with the donkey? Even if from Lotis' point of view the donkey's behaviour is irreproachable, is this also the case, if we view it from Priapus' perspective?

In order to answer this question, I will first reconsider Ovid's sources focusing in particular upon Hyginus' *Astronomica* and Eratosthenes' *Catasterismoi*, two intertexts the value of which regarding our comprehension of Ovid's *Fasti*, has been only recently explored by Robinson.²¹ On the basis of the information to be extracted from these two intertexts, I will then discuss the significance of Priapus' episode within Ovid's sacrificial list, so as to demonstrate that the sacrifice of the ass is *programmatic* for Ovid's elegiac project: as it turns out, in fact the donkey *deserves* to be sacrificed, since through its actions it undermines Priapus' elegiac love and so poses a serious threat to the *generic identity* of the work. I will then turn briefly to the 'mirror' episode in Book 6, in which Vesta is the protagonist, in order to demonstrate further the differences between the two episodes and to underscore the shift in the role of the ass, which is now both *punished* and *honoured* for its deed; at the same time I will delve further into what is in my view the common source of the two episodes. Thus I hope to show that we should have no doubts that Ovid intended from the beginning to incorporate both these episodes within his aetiological scaffolding. More importantly, however, I also want to demonstrate that these episodes look back to two different versions of the myth, both of which the poet draws from the Eratosthenic tradition and accordingly absorbs into his elegiac poem.

¹⁹ Pieper 2012.

²⁰ Regarding the implications of Ovid's questioning of augury see Green 2009, 163: "Ovid, then, sets out a new and disturbing type of augural system in Book 1 which is not directly confronted elsewhere in the poem: he does not deny that the birds may give true signs; he does not deny that some mortals may be able to interpret these signs correctly; but the crucial difference now is that the birds may be operating against divine wishes". See also Garani 2013 who argues that despite the fact that innocent cattle and sheep do not deserve to take part into animal sacrifice, and hence the poet's lamentation, bougonia turns out to be the necessary precondition for life; hence sacrifice is endowed with positive expectations.

²¹ Robinson 2013.

According to the sources, Aphrodite gave birth to Priapus on the banks of the Hellespont at Lampsacus, subsequently disowning him because of his monstrosity (*schol.* ad Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.932 Wendel; *Scholia* on Pseudo-Nonnus 147.29 Brock). The inhabitants of Lampsacus worshipped Priapus above all other gods and sacrificed the ass in his honour (Paus. 9.301, Catull. fr. 2 Cornish = Terentianus Maurus 2755-2758, p. 406 Keil).²² Yet, apart from Ovid's story of Priapus' attempted rapes, the braying of the donkey and its subsequent sacrifice, can we track down any other association of Priapus with the ass?

This is the moment to turn to *De Astronomica*, an elementary manual of astronomy of uncertain date usually divided by editors into four books, which may have been compiled by the Augustan librarian C. Iulius Hyginus.²³ In Hyginus' *Astronomica* Book 2, which is of interest for our present discussion, there is a series of catasterism myths, many of which are of Eratosthenic origin and many of which are explicitly ascribed to Eratosthenes, along with much extra material.²⁴ For the sake of the discussion that follows, we should note that Eratosthenes was a 3rd century BC Alexandrian poet-scholar and polymath. His *Catasterismi* consists of a prose catalogue of more than forty aetiological tales that expound the mythical origins of the constellations, the planets and of the Milky Way. Of particular significance in regard to Ovid's *Fasti*, which bears a close intertextual association with Aratus' *Phaenomena*, is the fact that Eratosthenes' text is usually found alongside Aratean material.²⁵ As Martin argues, the *Catasterismi* was meant to be an elementary astronomical and mythological companion to Aratus' *Phaenomena*.²⁶ It would be beyond the scope of the present study to explore the thorny Eratosthenic tradition, but as Robinson emphatically notes, what matters in the present case is the ancient perception which is "once again more important than actual truth".²⁷ And in fact, as he argues, Ovid's *Fasti* is a case study of the extended engagement of a literary work with an extant mythological handbook.

Bearing in mind such Eratosthenic implications, among other stories of Hyginus' Book 2, we read one in which Priapus and two asses figure as the protagonists (*Hyg. Poet. astr.* 2.23 Viré):

In eius deformationis parte sunt quidam qui Asini appellantur, a Libero in testa Cancri duabus stellis omnino figurati. Liber en-

²² On Priapus' cult at Lampsacus and throughout the Hellespontic region see Herter 1932, 264-7. See also Parker 1988, 12.

²³ Robinson 2013, 448 with an overview of the scholarly debate.

²⁴ Martin 1956, 95-102.

²⁵ Robinson 2013, 446.

²⁶ Martin 1956, 37-126; Robinson 2013, 449.

²⁷ Robinson 2013, 447.

im ab Iunone furore obiecto, dicitur mente captus fugisse per Thesprotiam, cogitans ab Iovis Dodonaei oraculum pervenire, unde peteret responsum, quo facilius ad pristinum statum mentis perveniret. Sed cum venisset ad quandam paludem magnam, quam transire non posset, quibusdam asellis duobus obviam factis dicitur unum eorum deprehendisse et ita esse transvectus, ut omnino aquam non tetigerit. Itaque cum venisset ad templum Iovis Dodonaei, statim dicitur furore liberatus asellis gratiam retulisse et inter sidera eos collocasse. Nonnulli etiam dixerunt asino illi, quo fuerit vectus, vocem humanam dedisse. Itaque eum postea cum Priapo contendisse de natura et victum ab eo interfectum. Pro quo Liberum eius misertum in sideribus adnumerasse; et ut sciretur id pro deo, non homine timido, quia Iunonem fugerit, fecisse, supra Cancrum constituit, qui eius beneficio fuerat adfixus astris.

“In a certain part of this figure, there are the stars known as the Asses, which have been depicted by Dionysos on the shell of the Crab in the form of two stars in all. For Dionysus, after he was sent mad by Hera, is said to have fled through Thesprotia in a state of frenzy, with the intention of reaching the oracle of Zeus at Dodona to ask how he might recover his normal state of mind. On arriving at a huge swamp which he was unable to cross over, he encountered two asses, and catching one of them, he managed to get across without getting wet in the slightest degree. And so, when he reached the temple of Dodonian Zeus, he was immediately delivered from his madness, so the story goes, and he expressed his gratitude to the asses by placing them among the stars. According to some accounts, he granted a *human voice* to the ass that had carried him, and it later entered into a *contest with Priapos with regard to the size of its sexual organ, and was defeated and killed by him*. Taking pity on it for this, Dionysos placed it *among the stars*; and to make it known that he had done so as a god, rather than as a timorous man fleeing Hera, he placed *the Ass on the Crab*, which had been fixed in the heavens as a favour from that goddess. (transl. Hard 2015, 67)

In Hyginus’ account, Dionysus in a state of frenzy, inflicted on him by Hera. He is travelling to Dodona to consult Zeus’ oracle, in the hope of finding a means of recovery. On his way, he arrives at a swamp which he is unable to cross. He, then, however, comes across two asses, one of which carries him safely across the swamp. After Dionysus has been cured, he rewards the ass that carried him across with the possession of a human voice. This ass later quarrels with Priapus over which of them has the biggest penis. Priapus is defeated and so kills the ass. Out of pity for the slain ass, Dionysus installs him as one of the stars in the constellation of Crab. Notably, this myth, to which

Ovid very probably knew, involves Priapus and an ass, but more to the point it involves the pair in an *antagonistic relationship*. If we now look at Lactantius' testimony regarding the very same mythical material, we may glean an even more interesting piece of information regarding the Ovidian intertexts (Lactant. *Div. inst.* [*De falsa religione deorum*] 1.21.28-30):

Num ergo illud est verius, quod referunt ii, qui Φαινόμενα conscripserunt, cum de duabus Cancris stellis loquuntur, quas Graeci ὄνοις vocant? asellos fuisse, qui Liberum patrem transuexerint, cum amnem transire non posset; quorum alteri hoc praemium dederit, ut humana voce loqueretur: itaque inter eum, Priapumque ortum esse certamen de obsceni magnitudine; Priapum victum et iratum, interemisse victorem. Hoc vero multo magis ineptum est; sed poetis licet quidquid velint: non excutio tam deforme mysterium, nec Priapum denudo, ne quid appareat risu dignum. Finxerunt haec sane poetae; sed necesse est alicuius maioris turpitudinis tegendae gratia ficta sint. Quae sit ergo quaeramus. At ea profecto manifesta est. Nam sicut Lunae taurus mactatur, quia similiter habet cornua, et "Placat equo Persis radiis Hyperiona cinctum, Ne detur celeri victima tarda Deo". Ita in hoc quia magnitudo membri virilis enormis est, non potuit ei monstro *aptior victima*²⁸ reperiri, quam quae ipsum, cui mactatur, posset imitari.

28. Then is there more truth in the story told by the **authors of *Phaenomena***, when in speaking of the two stars of the sign of the Crab which the Greeks call Donkeys they say they were the donkeys ridden by father Bacchus when he could not cross the river, and as a reward he gave one of them the power of human speech? And so a competition developed between him and Priapus over the size of their members, and Priapus lost, and killed the winner in his anger! 29. That is a much sillier story. Oh, but the poets can do what they like, they say. Well, I am not going to open up so ugly a mystery, nor strip Priapus naked, in case something worth a laugh shows up. Let's call it poetical fancy then. Yes, but contrived of a necessity, to cover up some greater nastiness. 30 So let's find out what it is. Oh, it's plain enough, surely. A bull is sacrificed to the Moon because it has horns like the moon, and (*Ov. Fast.* 1.385-86) "Hyperion girt with sunbeams is given a horse by Persis so that a speedy god is not offered a laggard victim". So, because a don-

²⁸ Cf. *Ov. Fast.* 6.346 "*apta*" *canens* "*flammis indicis exta damus*" ("saying: 'We fitly give to the flames the innards of the tell-tale"). Littlewood 2006, 111 remarks that "these words of the pentameter represent the formulaic expression of the Lampsacenes, who apparently did sacrifice donkeys to Priapus, uttered as they flung the ass's entrails onto the altar fires".

key has a sexual organ of enormous size, no fitter victim could be found for the prodigy Priamus than one which could mimic the god to whom it is sacrificed. (transl. Bowen, Garnsey 2003, 110-11)

Although in general terms Lactantius narrates the same version of the myth as the one we have just looked at in Hyginus, nevertheless Lactantius associates what precedes the myth in his text with Ovid's aetiological version of donkey's sacrifice. In this connection, while Lactantius underlines the ass's suitability as Priapus' victim, he quotes from Ovid's sacrificial list the example of the horse, which is sacrificed by the Persians in honour of the Sun as Hyperion, since a swift god deserves a swift animal (*Fast.* 1.385-386). This emphasis placed on the suitability of the donkey as a sacrificial victim, because of the enormous size of its sexual organ which is a key-element of the myth, may perhaps account for the fact that instead of referring to Priapus' reaping hook, which usually terrifies birds, Ovid weirdly refers to his *inquen* (*Fast.* 1.400), his traditionally huge phallus, thereby alluding to the initial mythological cause of the antagonism between him and the donkey, which Ovid had probably read in the mythological handbook that he had beside him.²⁹ Whatever the case may be, Lactantius strikingly associates the Priapus myth with the poets that wrote *Phaenomena*, i.e. Aratus, Germanicus, Cicero, all of which are inextricably linked in intertextual terms not only with Eratosthenes, but also with Ovid's *Fasti*.³⁰ In other words, it seems conceivable that, while Ovid is assembling his story of Priapus and Lotis, he responds to mythical material about Priapus' sacrifice of the ass that he had at his disposal, the gist of which is reflected in Lactantius' narration. We cannot tell whether this version of the myth bears Eratosthenic origin, as is certainly the case with the second myth, to which we will come back below.

Let us now look at another piece of evidence with regard to the mythical story involving Dionysus' donkeys and the contest with Priapus. In the scholia to Germanicus' *Aratea* we read (*Scholia Basileensis in Germanicum Arat.* 70.6-71.20 Breysig 1867; cf. *Scholia Stroziana* p. 129 Breysig):

...sunt in hoc signo in eius testa aliae stellae, quas asinos appellat. Graeci enim ὄνων dicunt. quos Liber astris intulit, quod cum a Iunone insania obiecta fugeret ad occasus, ut in Dodonaei Iovis templo responsa peteret, ut *Philiscus refert*, et magnis imbris

²⁹ Green 2004, 188.

³⁰ For Ovid's debt to Aratus' *Phaenomena* see Gee 2000. Note that Aratus refers to the presence of the sub-constellation of the Asses in the sky as a weather sign, but without any hint at the aetiological myths (*Phaen.* 894-904); cf. also Theophr. *Sign.* 23.

cum grandine ortis stagna, quae transiturus erat, inundata detinerent iter eius, asini ex contrario transeunt per aquas. ex his uno insidens et ipse transvectus est sine periculo insaniaque liberatus dicitur. uno itaque in his fecisse, ut voce humana loqueretur. qui cum sensum accipisset, post paucum tempus cum Priapo de membro naturali condendere coepit.

In this sign, in its shell there are other stars, called the donkeys, whereas the Greeks call them ὄνοι. Liber raised them to the stars when, driven insane by Juno, he had fled west to Dodona, to seek a response from the oracle in Jupiter's temple, as Philiscus reports, and when, on account of the great rainfall with hailstones, the marshes he was to cross were flooded and rendered impassable, donkeys came across the water from the other side. They say he got through safely, mounted on the back of one of these and was thus delivered from his madness. And he also made one of them able to speak in a human voice. And when it gained the capacity to think, it soon began to contend with Priapus on the subject of the male member. (transl. Kotlińska-Toma 2015, 69)

Although there are immense difficulties involved in interpreting Germanicus' scholia,³¹ for the purposes of study we only need to note the very significant reference to a certain Philiscus. In the view of Kotlińska-Toma this late scholiastic testimony displays traces of a literary piece by the Hellenistic tragic poet, Philiscus of Corcyra, who was a member of the Pleiad, i.e. the group consisting of the seven most outstanding writers of tragedy and satyr plays associated with Alexandria. In fact, Kotlińska-Toma raises the highly interesting possibility that Philiscus was ridiculing a new-fangled cult.³² She also adds that "this subject was also ideally suited to the plot of a satyr play".³³ It seems thus likely that in addition to Hyginus' version (whether its ultimate intertextual origin lies in Eratosthenes himself or simply Eratosthenic), the same myth may have been also used in a Hellenistic satyr play. This satyr play would then had been the ultimate intertextual predecessor of the now-lost Roman mime, which has so far been commonly considered Ovid's source for the Priapus and Lotis episode.

What, then, are the Ovidian implications of Priapus' sacrifice of the donkey in the first book of his aetiological poem? Green has drawn our attention to Priapus' *elegiac characteristics*, which echo the imagery of Ovid's earlier love poetry. Priapus pursues Lotis in the

31 About the scholia to Germanicus see Zetzel 2018, 269-70. See also Dell'Éra 1979.

32 For Philiscus or Philicus of Corcyra see Kotlińska-Toma 2015, 66-74.

33 Kotlińska-Toma 2015, 73. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1924, 550 had classified it as the work of a lyric poet.

conventional manner of an elegiac lover who is chasing his beloved mistress (*Fast.* 1.415-418).³⁴ In the same fashion, Priapus' repulsive behaviour merely amuses Lotis and her fellow nymphs (*Fast.* 1.419-420, 437-8). In other words, Lotis is somehow presented as "co-conspirator", as a "willing victim", as Frazel puts it.³⁵ Furthermore, according to Macrobius (*Sat.* 6.5.6), as early as the second century BC the comic poet Afranius Priapus was somehow *identified* with the ass, which may hint again at their antagonistic relationship and strengthen the hypothesis that Ovid ultimately drew on a satyr-play tradition: Afranium sequitur, qui in prologo ex persona Priapi ait:

nam quod vulgo praedicant
aurito me parente natum, non ita est.

"he follows Afranius, who said in one of his prologues, speaking in the character of Priapus,
As for the widely circulated claim that I was born from an *auritus* (eared) father, it's not true". (transl. Kaster 2011, 89)

In his earlier amatory poetry, Ovid himself had already made metaphorical use of the donkey, to describe the behaviour of the lover (*Am.* 2.7.15-16):³⁶

adspice, ut *auritus* miserandae sortis *asellus*
adsiduo domitus verbera lentus eat!

"Look at the long-eared, pitiable ass, how slowly he moves,
broken by never-ending blows!" (transl. Showerman 1914, rev. Goold 1977, 403)

In his address to Corinna, in order to deny that he has had an affair with her maid, Cypassis, the poet points to the behaviour of the donkey, which goes even slower when it is constantly beaten. Thus he warns Corinna that her endless nagging will only result in him being indifferent in her verbal lashings.

Last but not most importantly, asses are present in Callimachus's *Aitia* (*Callim. Aet.* 1.29-32 Harder):³⁷

³⁴ Green 2004, 182.

³⁵ Frazel 2003, 93.

³⁶ Mills 1978. Cf. the use of donkey as a metaphor for human sexuality in Juv. 9.92; Petron. *Sat.* 24; Gell. 15.7.3.

³⁷ Harder 2012, 2: 71 underlines the fact that Callimachus uses animal metaphors in a context of literary criticism. Scholars also discuss Callimachus' allusion to Aesop's fable of the ass and the cicada (184 Perry), according to which the donkey asked the ci-

τῶι πιθόμη]ν· ἐνὶ τοῖς γὰρ ἀείδομεν οἱ λιγὺν ἦχον
 τέτιγγος, θ]όρυβον δ' οὐκ ἐφίλησαν ὄνων.
 θηρὶ μὲν οὐατόεντι πανεῖκελον ὄγκήσαιτο
 ἄλλος, ἐγ]ῶ δ' εἶην οὐλ[α]χύς, ὁ πτερόεις,

I obeyed him; for we sing among those who love the clear sound
 of the cicada, but not the noise of asses.
 Let somebody else bray exactly like the long-eared animal,
 let me be the small one, the winged one.
 (text and transl. Harder 2012, 1: 119)

Callimachus opposes the clear voice of the cicada, which “stands for the clear, subtle sounds of the Callimachean poetry” to the braying of the unmusical ass, which stands for the “poetry characterized by bombastic noise”.³⁸ It is not clear whether Callimachus is referring only to the production of poetry or also to its reception and there may be deliberate ambiguity here. Nevertheless, asses in Callimachus possess vivid programmatic connotations, which Ovid may have carried over to his aetiological poem. Furthermore, in Callimachus’ fragments (fr. 186.9-10 and fr. 492 Pfeiffer) we also come across the sacrificial donkeys of Pindar’s Hyperboreans at whose braying Apollo laughs (*Pyth.* 10.36). As Acosta-Hughes and Scodel point out, “Callimachus’ Apollo, however, is not amused by their braying, but delighted by the sacrifice. For Callimachus then the ass is an exotic θύος”.³⁹

I would therefore like to suggest that the Priapus’ episode should be read in *programmatic terms*. Given the fact that Ovid may implicitly allude to the old rivalry between Priapus and the ass that we read of in Hyginus, an antagonism that brought about the latter’s death and then its catasterisation, in the first book of the *Fasti* the donkey challenges Priapus’ elegiac role as a lover and thus the poem’s generic identity. As a consequence, by means of the sacrifice, Ovid’s Priapus strives to vindicate his elegiac voice.

If we accept the existence of this meta-poetic dimension to Priapus, we are prompted to consider his relationship with Janus and Janus’ programmatic connotations. To quote Green once again, “Janus’ ‘double form’, which is constantly brought to our attention, can be read as a complex stylistic manifesto. It anticipates the polyphony of the poem as a whole –for example, the fusion of the serious and the humorous,

cadas what they ate that they could sing so well. The donkey tried to emulate them by living only on dew and starved to death. Scodel 2011, 370-1, 380-2.

³⁸ Harder 2012, 2: 70.

³⁹ Acosta-Hughes, Scodel 2004, 6. For the presence of donkeys in iambos, comedy and proverbs or in elegy in satirical quasi-iambi contexts see Acosta-Hughes, Scodel 2004, 6.

the panegyric and the subversive-and asks of the reader a ‘bifocal’ approach”.⁴⁰ Priapus’ intra-textual association with Janus is strengthened, if we call that, while Janus was identified at least by the Neo-Pythagorean Nigidius Figulus with Apollo (Macrob. *Sat.* 1.5-9), Priapus himself was also assimilated, at least in Lampsacus, to Apollo.⁴¹

In fact, this is not the only generic resonance that can be spotted within the context of the sacrificial list. Just briefly to draw an outline of the generic patchwork that Ovid pieces together, let us point to the fact that the sacrifice of the pig (*Fast.* 1.349-352) has been considered a “narrative of epic dimensions”.⁴² By contrast, in his account of Bacchus’ sacrifice, the so-called “tragedy” of the goat (*Fast.* 1.353-360), Ovid structures his narration according to the stages of tragedy, but at the same time he toys with both tragedy and epigram.⁴³ Regarding Aristaeus’ epyllion of bougonia and the Ovidian narration of the regeneration of bees from the carcass of a bull (*Fast.* 1.363-380 about the cow), while Ovid does not describe a sacrifice, but rather a slaughter, he builds his account upon Empedoclean philosophical ideas and somehow sanctions the sacrificial process, by pointing to the fact that sacrifice, albeit atrocious in itself, is the necessary precondition for the attainment of peace.⁴⁴ Last but not least, in the Priapus and Lotis’ story under discussion here, Ovid assimilates elements from new comedy and satyr, whence the scholars’ characterisation of the episode as “the comedy of the ass”.⁴⁵ In other words, Ovid appears to be shaping his sacrificial narrative by injecting it with a variety of generic elements, so as to foreshadow his poetic strategy in the poem as a whole. The sacrifice of the donkey allows him to make a strong statement regarding his manipulation of *elegy*, namely that he was initially reluctant to abandon amatory elegiac themes in favour of aetiological ones.

The Ovidian allusion to the Eratosthenic mythological tradition, which possesses vivid programmatic connotations, becomes yet

⁴⁰ Green 2004, 71; see also 70: “Janus is also closely associated with the workings of the poem and its poet. At times, he seems to operate in a manner which recalls a poet composing poetry. [...] Janus’ behaviour encourages us view him as a personification of the poem itself. The most compelling example of this is when, at one point, Janus is said to be articulating himself in an elegiac couplet (162n.)”. See also Hardie 1991.

⁴¹ Krappe 1947, 225 who refers to the cult of Ἀπόλλων Πριαπαιῖος. See Ant. Lib. *Met.* 20 about Apollo and the sacrifice of the ass among the Hyperboreans.

⁴² Cf. the use of the compound adjective *saetigeræ* in Ov. *Fast.* 1.352 with Green 2004, 168.

⁴³ Green 2004, 168 points to the hallmarks of a tragedy: “The initial reproach by a wiser being (353-4), prophetic words unheeded by the perpetrator of a crime (355-8), inevitable disastrous ending (359-360)”. Cf. *Anth. Pal.* 9.75 in which the vine speaks with Green 2004, 169.

⁴⁴ Garani 2013.

⁴⁵ Fantham 1983.

clearer, if we recall the fact that, while in Hyginus' story the catasterised donkeys form part of the constellation of the Crab, this constellation is the *very first* astronomical observation in the Ovidian poem. At the beginning of *Fast.* 1 Ovid makes a significant reference to the setting of the constellation of the Crab (*Fast.* 1.313-314), a reference which has been considered as a sign that Ovid is now beginning his aetiological project.⁴⁶ Taking for granted the intertextual allusion to Propertius' 4.1.150, Green points out that "the malign astronomical force which prevented Propertius from a sustained aetiological elegiac poem is absent at the start of his poem. [...] The potential poetic / generic significance of the Crab in *Fasti* is further evidenced by its reappearance at 6.727 as a visibly bright star (*Cancris signa rubescunt*): coming close to the end of the extant poem, its presence might be interpreted as a sign that Ovid's aetiological elegiac poem is no longer sustainable".⁴⁷ In other words, despite the sacrifice of the donkey, the setting of the Crab somehow heralds Priapus' defeat in his amatory quest and the official launching of the aetiological poetry.

Let us now briefly turn to the second Ovidian myth, in which Priapus makes an entrance once more on the elegiac stage, where he plays once again a leading, albeit revolting, role, in order to evaluate anew its significance within the poem and its intra-textual connection with the Priapus and Lotis story. Ovid himself characterises this episode as "a short story, but a very merry one" (*Fast.* 6.320 *multa fabula parva ioci*). In the context of Book 6, Priapus fails to rape Vesta rather than Lotis, which this time occurs without any kind of sexual provocation on Vesta's part.⁴⁸ Given the fact that Vesta is relative of the emperor, the donkey's deed in saving her has direct *political connotations*. And significantly, in contrast to the corresponding episode in Book 1, in this case the ass is both *punished* and *rewarded*. That is, whereas outside Rome it is sacrificed so as to propitiate Priapus, in Rome it is honoured and dedicated to the Goddess.

This is the moment to turn to the second part of Hyginus' account, which is explicitly attributed to Eratosthenes (*Astronomica* 2.23 Viré):

Dicitur etiam alia historia de Asellis. Ut ait Eratosthenes, quo tempore Iuppiter, bello gigantibus indicto, ad eos oppugnandos omnes deos convocasset, venisse Liberum patrem, Vulcanum, Satyros,

⁴⁶ Green 2004, 148-51: the constellation of the Crab sets during the night of the 2nd or 3rd January. Newlands 1995, 35-6 (quoting Barchiesi 1994 chapter 6), 126. Cf. also Gee 2000, 30-4 for objections. Cf. in *Ov. Fast.* 6.727 the Crab reappears as a visibly bright star

⁴⁷ Green 2004, 149.

⁴⁸ Green 2004, 190. Littlewood 2006, 109.

Silenos asellis vectos. Qui cum non longe ab hostibus abessent, dicuntur aselli pertimuisse, et ita pro se quisque magnum clamorem et inauditum gigantibus fecisse, ut omnes hostes eorum clamore in fugam se coniecerint et ita sint superati.

Another story is also recounted about the Asses. According to Eratosthenes, at the time when Zeus declared war on the Giants and summoned all the gods to attack them, Dionysus, Hephaistos, and the Satyrs and Seilenoi arrived mounted on asses; and on finding themselves at not great distance from the enemy, the asses, so the story goes, were overcome by panic and brayed very loudly one and all, letting out such a sound as the Giants had never heard, so that the enemy all took flight in response to their braying, and were thus defeated. (transl. Hard 2015, 67)

According also Eratosthenes, the asses on which Dionysus, Hephaestus and the Satyrs are mounted in the great battle of the gods against the Giants were the key to victory, because their *braying* frightens the enemy. In contrast to explicit sacrifice of the asses in Ovid, in Eratosthenes' account the donkeys, instead of being killed, are said to have been honoured. This is also the story that we read in Eratosthenes' Καταστερισμοί 11 (92-93 Robert, text by Pàmias).⁴⁹

Καλοῦνται δὲ τινες αὐτῶν ἀστέρες Ὀνοί, οὓς Διόνυσος ἀνήγαγεν εἰς τὰ ἄστρα. Ἔστι δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶ Φάτνη παράσημον· ἡ δὲ τούτων ἱστορία αὕτη· Ὅτε ἐπὶ Γίγαντας ἐστρατεύοντο οἱ θεοί, λέγεται Διόνυσον καὶ Ἥφαιστον καὶ Σατύρους ἐπὶ ὄνων πορεύεσθαι· οὐπω δὲ ἑωραμένων αὐτοῖς τῶν Γιγάντων πλησίον ὄντες ὠγκήθησαν οἱ ὄνοι, οἱ δὲ Γίγαντες ἀκούσαντες τὴν φωνὴν ἔφυγον· διὸ ἐτιμήθησαν ἐν τῷ Καρκίνῳ εἶναι ἐπὶ δυσμᾶς.

Some of the stars in this constellation are called the Asses [Asini]. These were placed among the stars by Dionysus. Their distinguishing sign is the Manger [Praesepium], and their story is the following. When the gods were attacking the Giants, it is said that Dionysus, Hephaestus, and the Satyrs rode [to battle] on asses. As they approached the Giants, who were not yet visible, the asses brayed, and the Giants, hearing the noise, fled. For this reason the asses were honored, being placed on the western side of the Crab. (transl. Condos 1997, 61)

⁴⁹ Greek text by Pàmias 2004a, 117-18. Cf. Pàmias, Zucker 2013 *Epitome* 34-35, *Fragmenta Vaticana* 36-37. For the difference between Eratosthenes' *Epitome* and *Fragmenta Vaticana* see Robinson 2013, 448 fn. 10.

In fact, this is not the only time that donkeys assume such a seminal role, one which regulates the course of political events, albeit mythological ones. In an episode recorded by Pausanias (10.18.4), the braying of an ass enables the Ambracians to escape ambush by the Molossians. Whatever the case may be, Pàmias claims that the version of the myth that we read in Eratosthenes' *Catasterismoï*, which assigns such an eminent role to humble donkeys, was possibly Eratosthenes' own fabrication and in Ptolemaic Alexandria already had specific political significance. This myth ridiculed Dionysus, who was closely associated with Alexander the Great, who defined himself as the new Dionysus. Furthermore, both Dionysus and Alexander the Great were associated with the Ptolemies, so that Eratosthenes was also undermining Ptolemaic power. As Pàmias remarks, "This bricolage of motifs turns the legendary exploits of Dionysus into a satirical and ironic episode, insofar as the god's triumphal and warlike aspects, intensively promoted by the Ptolemies, are overshadowed and neutralized by the donkeys".⁵⁰ Pàmias and Zucker also argue - similarly to what we have discussed above in connection with Philiscus - that Eratosthenes' original may well have been a *Hellenistic satyr play*.⁵¹ In his turn, Ovid substitutes Vesta for Dionysus, but maintains the role of saviour assigned to the donkey, whose deed possesses political implications, so integrating Eratosthenes' myth into Roman national mythology. Still, if we recall the possible negative significance of Eratosthenes' mythological intertext to which Ovid may be alluding, according to which Dionysus' power was undermined by his association with the donkey, accordingly Vesta's eminent place within the Roman Pantheon as well as her close relationship with the emperor is ironically questioned.⁵²

To conclude, Ovid's double aetiology for the very first sacrifice of an ass in both the first and the last book of his *Fasti* may very well look back to two Eratosthenic aetiological variants, pertaining to the catasterisation of the Asses. In the sacrificial list of animals of Book 1, Ovid presents Priapus as the elegiac lover who strives to claim his role within the poem and for this purpose kills the ass who hinders him from accomplishing his erotic objectives. Through this episode, the poet infuses the history of sacrifice with further programmatic connotations and completes what I have called above "generic patchwork" of the sacrificial list. In Book 6 the ass returns to the poem, as if descending from its constellation, although this time endowed with

⁵⁰ Pàmias 2004b, 196.

⁵¹ Pàmias, Zucker 2013, 182-4.

⁵² For the interplay between the two facets of the Goddess, i.e. the popular and the Augustan in association with her temple in the forum and the newly founded one on the Palatine hill see Garani 2017.

a new, national dimension, which was already inherent in Hyginus' second – certainly Eratosthenic – version of the myth. The ass now offers its service to the Goddess Vesta and her protégé, the emperor, which is why it receives special honours yearly during her festival, despite its sacrifice outside Rome. Yet its lascivious nature seems to challenge the emperor's power. Last but not least, it seems conceivable that Eratosthenes' ultimate intertextual targets were Hellenistic satyr plays, to which Ovid may have had access either directly or through their Roman equivalents.

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