
Acknowledging that there have been several lines of approach to the text of the *Fasti* through astronomy—as a scientific or ‘practical’ text; as a manifestation of dialogue between Greece and Rome; and as an artefact reflective of cultural and political conditions outside itself (1)—Gee states that her primary purpose ‘has been to deal with Ovid’s astronomy not on the level of technical error or exactitude, but on that of literary history and poetic structure’ (208). For her, the issue of accuracy, or its absence, in Ovid’s treatment of the celestial backcloth to his work on the calendar is of less importance than the question of the symbolic value of the astronomical material.

In adopting this approach, Gee explicitly distances herself from the approaches of Ideler, Frazer and their followers, among whom the aim was to correct Ovid’s inaccuracies, as far as the astronomy in the *Fasti* was concerned. This attempt to use the poem as a practical astronomical text Gee accepts is understandable, but she believes it misses the point of the astronomy of the poem, which she takes to be thematic and allusive, not scientific. Gee allies herself with more recent attempts to provide “‘programmatic’ or literary readings of individual passages, ... which look for connections with the surrounding material or with the programme of the poem as a whole”, although she thinks these readings ‘seek thematic connection with surrounding material at the expense of the autonomous function, and particular literary history, of the astronomical material’ (2, n.2). She seeks to re-establish the literary history of the astronomical material, focussing particularly on its debt to the *Phaenomena* of Aratus, with a double aim: ‘to unpick the scholarly assumption ... that the astronomy in the *Fasti* is indebted to Aratus’, and ‘to build a theory on Ovid’s relationship with this particular model ... that the debt to the *Phaenomena* which is evident in the *Fasti* adds another register of meaning to Ovid’s poem’ (4).

The book falls into two parts: the first (chs.1-3) ‘explores the generic and literary orientation of the *Fasti* and the *Phaenomena*’; and the second (chs.4-6) ‘modulates the literary, scientific, and philosophical tonality of the first part into a political key’ (4). Gee seeks to combine
genre-based or 'programmatic' readings with the more general cultural-historical approach of work now being done on ancient astronomy and astrology by scholars such as Tamsyn Barton (5).

Chapter 1, ‘Calendrical Astronomy?’, questions whether the Fasti is like a Roman calendar, and whether the Roman calendar in Ovid’s time had room for astronomy. While allowing that astronomy might underlie the Roman calendar, especially in Caesar’s astronomical work, Gee claims that ‘the Julian calendar had the effect of doing away with the need to observe the stars, and this is perhaps why they do not appear in its inscribed manifestation. This in turn functions to remove astronomy from the sphere of practicality and place it in the realm of fiction’ (20).

Chapter 2, ‘Astronomy and Genre’, explores the generic fluidity and the poetic models for the Fasti. Gee sees a synthesis by Ovid of two otherwise divergent strands of post-Hesiodic Greek poetry: aetiological elegy (derived from Callimachus’s Aetia), and didactic epic (derived from Aratus’s Phaenomena). Her aim is to redress the balance of scholarship, which has hitherto emphasised the Callimachean strand in the Fasti, by focussing on the Aratean. She works her way back to Aratus through the works of Propertius, Lucretius, Virgil, and Manilius, and in the process reveals an implicit Stoicism in the Fasti—a character which connects it also with Aratus. Chapter 3, ‘Verse and Universe in Aratus’ Phaenomena’, argues that the Phaenomena of Aratus derives its unity of language, imagery and themes from Stoic cosmology. For Gee, Aratus’ poem is underpinned by the Stoic notion of a unified cosmos which is divinely governed. The Stoic understanding of a relationship between cosmos and ‘the word’ or language works at every level, she contends, in the Phaenomena—from individual etymologies to the very structure of the poem.

This overarching interpretation of the Phaenomena as a Stoic phenomenon leads Gee to investigate through a series of case-studies the Phaenomena’s symbolic value in Rome, and particularly Ovid’s transformation of his model when he transposes it into a poetic version of the Roman calendar. In ch.4, ‘Vesta and the Architecture of the Fasti’, Gee examines that transformation through the particular example of Ovid’s treatment of the Vestalia (Fasti 6.249-460). In the process she demonstrates the replacement by Ovid of his model’s unified approach to
aetiology with the Roman penchant for polysemic fluidity: there is no one explanation for the cult and its paraphernalia. Chapter 5, ‘Roman Aratus’, then investigates the symbolic value of the *Phaenomena*. Gee uses the myth of Capella (Fasti 5.111-28) to exemplify the way in which Ovid interweaves non-Aratan elements into his Aratean model so that the astral myth is interlocked with Augustan political imagery and panegyric. The stars, she suggests, ‘are there in the Fasti to bridge the gap between Hellenistic kingship and Augustan Rome’ (153).

Chapter 6, ‘The Metamorphosis of Time’ sets out to show ‘how Aratean star myths ... may modify panegyric if mythological considerations are allowed to dominate’ (158). The chapter focusses on Caesar’s comet (*sidus Iulium*) and the myth of Callisto (Fasti 2.153-92 and *Metamorphoses* 2.401-530). The comet is not directly mentioned by Ovid in the *Fasti*, but Gee uses Ovid’s references to Caesar’s apotheosis (Fasti 3.155-64, 3.697-710) and other references to the comet identified with Caesar (especially Pliny, *Historia naturalis* 2.93-94) to argue that Ovid aligns himself with the language of the Julian dynasty. The myth of Callisto, on the other hand, is taken as related to the comet because Callisto is catasterised into the Great Bear, near which the comet was seen, and Gee uses the myth to illustrate how Ovid may undermine and destabilise both the imperial panegyric and the unified Stoic/Aratean world-view, replacing them with mutability. As Gee concludes,

> If Augustus is Jupiter, ... Jupiter is also responsible for the rape and catasterism of Callisto. ... Most importantly, should the negative catasterism of Callisto affect the way we approach imperial catasterism ...? Was there for a Roman reader a possibility of confusion between astral myth and astral encomium? (186).

The Epilogue underlines this finding of Ovid’s coincident subscription to and destabilisation of the imperial world-view, through the vehicle of the stars.

Two Appendices follow, one on Aratean echoes in the *Fasti*, the other on technical problems of Ovid’s astronomy. The book concludes with an index of passages discussed, a general index and a bibliography (which omits [Eratosthenes], mentioned at 140 n.44 and 158; and should
probably have made reference to Jörg Rüpke, *Kalender und Offentlichkeit*, Berlin–New York, 1995). A list of abbreviations would have been useful.

Within the parameters that Gee establishes, this book works well. It moves from an aesthetic analysis of the *Fasti* in the first half, which usefully summarises current scholarship, through to a nuanced political reading of the poem derived from a selection of case studies. Only the final chapter’s interlocking of Caesar’s comet with the myth of Callisto seemed to this reviewer to overstretch the evidence, since Ovid does not explicitly refer to the comet. This renders the chapter’s methodology tendentious, since its purpose is to prove that Ovid spoke with forked tongue, both subscribing to the Julian dynasty’s aspirations and yet undermining them by reminding readers of its rapacity, and yet the first fork is not explicit in the *Fasti*.

On the practical level of astronomy and the calendar, Gee perhaps overestimates the immediate impact of the introduction of the Julian calendar. It seems simplistic to say that ‘for practical (agricultural) purposes, the Julian calendar rendered astronomical observation obsolete: one no longer needs to look at the stars if the written calendar is in line with them’ (5; see also 14: ‘The Julian calendar superseded astronomical time ...’). It may well be that the literary agricultural star-calendar had been rendered obsolete and was a fiction by Ovid’s time, if it ever had a practical function in the form it has come down to us from Hesiod onwards. But a practical function did exist for parapegmas, which had established, over a long period, a solar calendar based on star and sun observations. In lapidary and painted form in the Greek and Roman worlds parapegmas provided a public, physical means of demonstrating the solar calendar’s regularity and hence its usefulness, a role which Caesar’s reformed calendar could not dismiss overnight since that calendar needed first to be understood and accepted (and the leap-year mistake shows that it was not understood by its practitioners at the start). Parapegmas also served political purposes, being set up in cities, where their ostensible uses as weather-forecasters and navigational aids were, to say the least, blunted (see R. Hannah, ‘Euctemon’s Parapegma’, in C. Tuplin, ed., *Science and Mathematics in Ancient Greek Culture*, Oxford, 2002 forthcoming, 112-32). Augustus’ own Horologium, which Gee says 'served as both clock and calendar' (7, n.19) exemplifies the survival of a...
need for star-based time on either the political or the practical level beyond the time of Julius Caesar’s reform.

The apparent unreliability of Ovid’s astronomical notices in the Fasti has been a refrain of scholarship on the poem ever since Ludwig Ideler’s work on the subject in the early nineteenth century, and was forcefully perpetuated by J.G. Frazer a century later (see L. Ideler, ‘Über den astronomischen Theil der Fasti des Ovid’, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, 1822-23, 137-69; J.G. Frazer, Publīi Ovidīi Nasonīs: Fastorum libri sex III, London, 1929, 141-2). A more sensitive approach to Ovid’s use of the calendar is apparent in more recent work, such as Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, ‘Time for Augustus: Ovid, Augustus and the Fasti’, in M. Whitby, P. Hardie, M. Whitby (eds.), Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble (Bristol, 1987), 221-30, and J. Rüpke, ‘Wann feierte Ovid die Feralia? Zu Ov. Fast. 2,567f.’ Museum Helveticum 51 (1994), 97-102. More eccentric in their outcomes, but still relevant, are L. Magini, Le Feste di Venere: fertilità femminile e configurazioni astrali nel calendario di Roma antica (Rome, 1996), and now L. Magini, Astronomy and Calendar in Ancient Rome: the Eclipse Festivals (Rome, 2001). Nevertheless there is still much to be done in reassessing the poet’s use of astronomy. Gee’s own case studies demonstrate how much can be gleaned from a close analysis of the literary and political contexts of sections of the Fasti. A greater sympathy for the actual astronomy, and an openness to the possibility that we do not have access to everything that Ovid had available, may reveal more.

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