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## Politics and the stars : elements of Augustan ideology in Germanicus' "Aratea"

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Scripta Classica 6, 99-110

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2009

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## Politics and the Stars Elements of Augustan Ideology in Germanicus' *Aratea*

**Abstract:** Germanicus' *Aratea*, an astronomical poem from 1<sup>st</sup> century CE is one of the earliest Latin translations of Aratus of Soli's *Phaenomena*, a work well-known in antiquity. Germanicus brought a new value to the topic, not only translating a Greek poem, but in fact transferring it onto Roman ground by following great literary traditions.

Being a favourite of the princeps, the young poet thoroughly changed the Greek model's main theme from worshipping Zeus' power to praising a head of state and his arrangements. *Aratea* is filled with traces of Augustus' ideology: encouraging bringing back the "Roman virtues" (*pietas*, *clementia*, *iustitia* etc.), the princeps' idea of *pax* and shaping a new approach to religion. The purpose of the article is to find these traces and examine their role in the poem.

**Key words:** Germanicus, Augustus, *Aratea*, stars, propaganda

Stars seem to have no interest at all in any aspect of human life, even in things as important as politics. It is a purely human idea to make stars care about events taking place on Earth, and it is not difficult for a vivid imagination to enliven the human-like shapes that appear on the night sky and involve them in a story, design or ideology of some kind.

Germanicus Julius Caesar, a politician and a poet, left an example of such approach in his astronomical didactic poem, *Aratea*. He managed to mix politics into what we would expect to be a catalogue of stars in a form of a dactylic hexameter. Combining politics with poetry was not a new idea Germanicus' times<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. Zagórski: *Bogowie mieszkają na Palatynie*. Kraków 2006, p. 26ff.

The decline of augustan epoch was full of art involved in re-building Rome's best qualities from the olden days. But even this type of poetry being well-known, does it not seem too artificial to 'embroid' an astronomical poem with such a down to earth topic? Did Germanicus' *Aratea* serve only the purpose of praising Augustus' order or were the stars actually the main subject of the poem, with only a small trace of politics?

A brief description of Germanicus' poem is necessary. Firstly, because *Aratea*, as well as its source, is of minimal recognition, sometimes even to readers familiar with classical literature, not to mention wider public. Secondly, because understanding the peculiar character of the poem and its composition is important to comprehend the meaning of its ideological components and to place them properly in the poem's construction as a whole.

*Aratea* is based on an astronomical work *Phaenomena* by Aratus of Soli written in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, a work very popular and respected throughout the antiquity. This fame was well-deserved, as *Phaenomena* was a masterpiece which used poetry to present a topic that did not seem very attractive: a description of the constellations appearing on the sky and their constant movements. Aratus, a true Hellenic *poeta doctus*, managed not only to make the style smoother and the subject lighter<sup>2</sup> by adding some mythological tales, but more importantly, he added new meaning to the description of the Universe by making stars appear as the signs of Zeus, who was presented as a guardian of the human kind and as the one who established the principles of the world<sup>3</sup>. The *Phaenomena*'s popularity was long-lasting also due to the fact that it was thought of as an astronomy textbook, although its scientific value was very low. But, even the great astronomer Hipparchus, who wrote a critical commentary on the poem, correcting most of the errors, held Aratus in high esteem<sup>4</sup>. *Phaenomena*, a poem of 1154 verses written in dactylic hexameter, was later divided into two parts: proper *Phaenomena*, which contained the description of the constellations and *Diosemeiai*, the weather prognoses, based on the appearances of the stars throughout the year.

As far as Rome is concerned, "it seems difficult to be able to name any real astronomer"<sup>5</sup>, yet all the educated people were familiar with the *Phaenomena*. And

<sup>2</sup> Aratus based his poem on some tractate, probably on Eudoxus' *Phaenomena*. There is a legend which explains the origins of Aratus' work: king Antigonos II Gonatas (Aratus' patron) ordered the poet to compose a poem based on the tractate. Cf. J. Rostropowicz: *Król i poeta, czyli o „Fajnomenach” Aratosa z Soloj*. Opole 1998, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> C. Santini: "Il proemio degli »Arati Phaenomena« di Germanico. In: *Prefazioni, prologhi, proemi di opere tecnico-scientifiche latine*. Ed. C. Santini, N. Scivoletto. Roma 1990, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Possanza (*Translating the Heavens: Aratus, Germanicus, and the Poetics of Latin Translation*. New York, Oxford 2004: 90) has indicated an irony in the fact that nothing was left from the works of Hipparchus, one of the greatest astronomers of antiquity, except his commentary to a poem of a non-astronomer. Germanicus, in his attempt to make some scientific corrections to the original texts, used Hipparchus' commentary as a guide.

<sup>5</sup> *L'astronomia a Roma well'eta Augusta*. Ed. D. Liuzzi. Galatina 1989, p. 13.

as Romans might not have had inclinations to make scientific discoveries or create original literary works, their talents for transferring achievements of other nations onto local ground are doubtless. In case of Aratus' work this meant translating *Phaenomena* to Latin. The authority of the Greek poet can be measured by great names that appear in respect to these translations. The first known *Aratea* (or *Aratus* as D.B. Gain suggested)<sup>6</sup> was composed by young Cicero, but has been judged as a work of no great artistic value. Only about 400 verses are left of Marcus Tullius' early work. A lot less, 5 verses, were preserved from the *Aratea* by Ovid.

Nothing is certain about the third attempt to transpose Aratus' poem into Latin. This *Aratea* is believed to be composed by Germanicus Julius Caesar, son of Drusus. Many discussions were held concerning two basic problems of this translation: firstly, the date<sup>7</sup>, and secondly, the authorship of the poem, of which the latter leads to another question: who was the poem dedicated to? For the purposes of this article there is no need to engage in the first two matters<sup>8</sup>, and as for the last one, I am convinced by the reasoning of most of scholars<sup>9</sup> that Germanicus' *Aratea* were dedicated to Augustus.

The preserved verses of Germanicus' *Aratea*, in the number of 725, are based on the first part of *Phaenomena*<sup>10</sup>, and consist of a proem, a description of the constellations of northern and southern hemisphere and also a depiction of celestial circles (i.e. the equator, the tropics of Capricorn and Cancer, the ecliptic and the Zodiac). This is parallel not only to the contents, but also to the number of verses of the original *Phaenomena*, for Germanicus' purpose was apparently to make his poem structurally as close to the original as possible. However, the essence of his

<sup>6</sup> D.B. Gain: *The Aratus Ascribed to Germanicus Caesar, Edited with an Introduction, Translation & Commentary*. London 1976, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> The most commonly stated date is around year AD 17 (Cf. A. Le Boeuffle: *Germanicus, Les Phénomènes d'Aratos, texte établi et traduit*. Paris 1975, p. XI; C. Lausdei: "Sulla cronologia e sul proemio dei Phaenomena Arati". In: *Germanico. La persona la personalita, il personaggio: nel bimillenario dalla nascita: atti del convegno, Macerata-Perugia, 9-11 maggio 1986*. Roma 1987, p. 174), when Germanicus had been staying at Rome before his journey to the East. Another theory speaks of the *Aratea* being a work of a young man at the end of his education (Cf. M. Possanza: *Translating the Heavens: Aratus, Germanicus, and the Poetics of Latin Translation*. New York—Oxford 2004, p. 233).

<sup>8</sup> I follow the general tendency to ascribe *Aratea* to Germanicus, as the arguments to support this theory are much stronger than for example those in favor of Tiberius' authorship. Cf. D.B. Gain: *The Aratus...*, p. 17; M. Possanza: *Translating...*, p. 218.

<sup>9</sup> D.B. Gain: (*The Aratus...*) is the most sceptical about the authorship of Germanicus, others like Le Boeuffle (*Germanicus...*) and most recently Possanza (*Translating...*) think that it was Germanicus, son of Drusus, who wrote the *Aratea*. They base their theories on the testimonies of Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* 1.21.28 and 5.5.4) and of Hieronymus (*Comm. ad Ep. Pauli ad Titum* 1.12). But as these testimonies come from late antiquity, there are still many doubts on this view.

<sup>10</sup> There are about 100 verses in 6 fragments, which are believed to be the another part of Germanicus' work. These are called *Prognostica* and their main subject is astrology, although they are not based on the second part of Aratus' poem, the *Diosemeiai*, which were mentioned earlier.

*Aratea* is quite far from the precursor<sup>11</sup>. With the same subject, description of the night sky, there are many alterations, most important of which is changing the role of Aratus' Zeus: the god-protector is not the main theme any more. Also, more mythological tales can be found there<sup>12</sup>, as well as elements of Latin literary traditions<sup>13</sup>.

Discussing the political elements of Germanicus' poem cannot be limited to analysing the poem itself. As its creator's life was inextricably intertwined, *Aratea* must be regarded as a poem written by a man closely connected to the princeps, who was a statesman first and then a poet<sup>14</sup>.

The presence of the head of state is noticeable from the beginning, since the poem starts with an announcement of moving the main theme from Jove to an earthly ruler (v. 1—4):

Ab Iove principium magno deduxit Aratus  
carminis; at nobis, genitor, tu maximus auctor;  
te veneror, tibi sacra fero doctique laboris  
primitias. Probat ipse deum rectorque satorque<sup>15</sup>.

The four verses abound with meaning. Firstly, it is an announcement of changing Aratus' main topic, as has been said above: Germanicus states: "Aratus [...] at nobis" and then introduces a new recipient, "genitor", who is surely a head of state, as it is said further. Another opposition is formed: "Iuppiter (magnus) — genitor (maximus)", and because the "genitor" was defined as "greater" this may suggest rivalry between the ruler on Earth and the one in heavens. However, the phrase "Probat ipse deum rectorque satorque", where Jove accepts his sovereign, seems to suggest a united rule of the world<sup>16</sup> of both god and human. Thus, the beginning of the *Aratea* clearly announces that the poem is going to become one of many politically-engaged literary works, the ones which were greatly represented in augustan times. Literature reflected reality vividly then, in the epoch of great changes, more vividly perhaps than in earlier times of Rome; it also became a medium of augustan propaganda.

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<sup>11</sup> Perhaps Germanicus considered it a kind of challenge, trying to fit some more contents into an imposed number of verses.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Possanza (*Translating...*, p. 180) noticed that Germanicus followed here Ovid's way of narration, the one that Naso established in the *Metamorphoses*.

<sup>13</sup> It is also due to the augustan literature's poetics that Germanicus decided to reformulate Aratus' poem.

<sup>14</sup> Germanicus' father was Drusus. In AD 4 he became an adopted son of Tiberius by the orders of Augustus. He was a favorite of the Roman people, the historians have praised him for his placidity and qualities of character. Cf. Suet. *Vitae* 4.3.

<sup>15</sup> All the fragments of *Aratea* quoted here come from André Le Boeuffe's 1975 edition, *Germanicus, Les phénomènes d'Aratos*.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. C. Santini: *Il proemio...*, p. 24. This dividing of power appeared also in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* XV, pp. 858—860. Cf. M. Possanza: *Translating...*, p. 229.

Augustus' political programme was connected with an ideology that covered all aspects of human life, cultural and religious included, and it is noticeable in *Aratea* that Germanicus, the princeps' relative and favourite fully accepted his program. The purpose of this article is to find traces of augustan ideology among the stars depicted in Germanicus' poem.

Augustus has defined the virtues of an ideal Roman citizen. They were based on what was called the *mores maiorum*, *mores* of ancestors, believed to be cultivated by Romans of the olden days, and were supposed to heal the degenerated post-republican society. These virtues were *pietas*, *clementia*, *iustitia*, and *virtus* and greatest poets of augustan epoch, such as Vergil and Horatius, glorified them in their masterpieces — there was Vergil's *Aeneis* and Horatius' *Carmina*<sup>17</sup>.

Germanicus' subject, the figures appearing on the sky, proved to be very suitable when talking about morality: all the catasterisms (mythological transfer of a human or creature into the stars) lean on a personage's merit or fault.

Germanicus searched for augustan virtues most diligently of all the poets presenting the subject of the stars<sup>18</sup>. Let us look at some of the constellations that had earned their place on the sky for their merits towards the gods (*pietas*). At the beginning of the poem (vv. 24—47) there is an description of two Ursae (Bears), which are presented as new-born Jove's guardians, and because of this great merit they were made immortal as stars in the night sky. Germanicus sums up this contribution in few words: "Meritum custodia fecit" (v. 33) as he presents the infancy of the mightiest god. Later on, the poet names another constellation showing Jupiter's guardian, and ascribes her the same gratitude of the god<sup>19</sup>. It is the constellation of the She-Goat (*Capra*) (vv. 165—168):

[...] putatur  
nutrix esse Iovis (si vere Iuppiter infans  
ubera Cretaeae mulsit fidissima Caprae),  
sidere quae claro gratum testatur alumnum

One more creature represents the main virtue, *pietas*, in the starry sky: the Dolphin. The description of this small but beautiful shape is not as graceful as in Ovid's *Fasti*, it is only said to have been Neptune's helper in courtship when the god of the sea tried to make advances to Amphitrite:

Delphin inde brevis lucet iuxta Capricornum  
paucis sideribus; tulit hic Atlantida nymphen  
in thalamos, Neptune, tuos, miseratus amantem.

<sup>17</sup> Especially *Carmen* III 2 and III 24.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. M. Hermann: *Obraz nieba gwiazdzistego w literaturze rzepuskiej epoki augustowskiej*. Kraków 2001, p. 141. Those other poets were Cicero, as was said above, the first translator of *Phaenomena*, Ovid with his *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* and Manilius, the creator of *Astronomica*.

<sup>19</sup> Describing two versions of the same mythological tale is characteristic to Germanicus' narration, he tends to present as many versions of a story as possible.

Perhaps these few verses (321—323) were sufficient for the poet and he did not want to ornament the constellation with a particularly sophisticated description as it is enough beautiful aesthetically all by itself, however, he might have wanted to add moral beauty to it. And thus he did, enriching the Dolphin with a virtue which made the short tale more interesting.

The *pietas* was not represented on the night sky by animal-like shapes only. There are also characters which, according to legends, were once people, but have earned such respect among the gods that were granted the permission to transform into stars and live eternally. One of them is the Bear Watcher, believed to be a worshipper of Bacchus, who was revived being accidentally killed by people whom he taught to grow grape-vine. After this event Bacchus gave him a place in the stars as a recompense for the harm

sive ille Arctophylax, seu Bacchi ob munera caesus  
Icarus ereptam pensavit sidere vitam.  
Non illi obscurum caput est, non tristia membra [...]  
(vv. 91—93)

A half-human half-horse shape, the constellation of Centaur, is also a figure, which can be put among those characters, on whom Germanicus bestowed the “augustan virtues”:

[...] Dextra  
seu praedam e silvis portat seu dona propinquae  
placatura deos, cultor Iovis, admovet Arae.  
Hic erit ille pius Chiron, iustissimus omnis  
inter nubigenas et magni doctor Achillis.

As a *cultor Iovis*, who brings the prey to the Altar, the Centaur is another character to represent *pietas* towards Jupiter (Germanicus described him as *pius*) and, what is more, the poet describes him using the epithet *iustissimus*, but not among humans: the Centaur is the most righteous of “those who were given birth by the clouds”, the centaurs. But even if *iustitia* was a concept intended only for people (and gods, as we will see later), use of this epithet suggests that the Centaur is a respectable creature, “almost human” through his virtue, who deserved his cathasterism *honoris causa*.

But Germanicus, a true moralist, has not only used positive examples: many of the creatures presented on his sky are supposed to be miserable because of their faults. Verses 193—200 describe Cassiopeia, and although the poet is silent at first about her position in the sky and enigmatic about the cause of her being amongst the stars, he points at the expression of pain on her face and her pitiable gesture:

[...] Ipsa horrida vultu  
sic tendit palmas, ceu sit planctura relictam  
Andromedam, meritae non iusta piacula matris.



She is crying over her daughter, who was sacrificed to a sea monster. The reason of the sacrifice and Cassiopeia's horrid pain is explained later. Germanicus seems to gradate the tension, at first he calls her *sublimis* and *clara*, which pictures her as a dignified queen. Later he says:

[...] certaverat olim  
qua senis aequorei natis, cum litore Cancri  
Doridos et Panopes spectasset stulta choreas.

This merciless *stulta* shows that the fault was rightfully punished, because a human dared to compete with goddesses, committing the crime of *impietas* along with *superbia*, and so she not only suffers from the sacrifice of her daughter again, but is also dragged through the sky with her head down (“in caput atque umeros rapit orbis Cassiepiam, declinemque trahunt aeterni pondera mundi, corruptaque cadit forma” vv. 662—665). There is no place for dignity where there is no virtue.

Another recognizable mythical creation in the night sky as well as in ancient literature, whose fault was also *impietas*, is Orion. He shines brightly, and the constellation is enormous<sup>20</sup>. The first description of Orion in *Aratea* points to his brightness and great stature (vv. 328—332). Repeated preposition *sic* expresses the admiration for the aesthetical beauty of the shape: “sic balteus ardet, sic vagina ensis pernici sic pede lucet” (vv. 331, 332). The collection of terms signifying brightness allocated close to each other: “flammae” (v. 330), “ardet” (v. 331) and “lucet” (v. 332) emphasize the beauty of the constellation. Similarly to how Cassiopeia is described, also here a strong condemnation of the giant is shown later in the text (vv. 648—651):

[...] virginis intactas quondam contingere vestes  
ausum hominem divae sacrum termerasse pudorem.  
Devotus poenae tunc impius ille futurae  
nudabatque feris ambusto stipite silvas [...]

Orion's fault was more horrid than Cassiopeia's: not only did he offend the goddess Diana, he also dared to try to violate her virtue. Germanicus defines him as *impius*, but the giant's fault was also *superbia* and his sin seems to terrify the poet so much that he begs the goddess to forgive him for even speaking about this event. He only takes liberty of mentioning it, because some poets before him did it already:

Sis vati placata, precor, Latonia virgo;  
non ego, non primus, veteres cecinere poetae [...]  
(vv. 646, 647)

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<sup>20</sup> Orion is one of the largest and brightest constellations on the sky. His stars are placed on the celestial equator, thus they are visible from any place on Earth. The constellation contains a characteristic element – Orion's belt, consisting of three stars.



It is thus well noticeable that in Germanicus' poem morality not only completes visual beauty, but even exceeds it: aesthetics is nothing, if it is not fulfilled by virtues. A conclusion rises here: Germanicus' understanding of beauty is closely connected to stoical doctrine, which is considered to be the official philosophy of Augustus' politics.<sup>21</sup>

There is one more extended mythical tale in *Aratea* worth noticing, where the most moralistic contents have been placed together — the tale of the constellation Virgo, whom Germanicus identifies with Roman goddess Iustitia. Augustus introduced her cult in the year AD 13. Germanicus gives her the features of Hesiod's Dike<sup>22</sup> and binds her with the tale of the four ages of human kind (golden, silver, bronze and iron). Many elements can be found in this description, that respond to augustan moral ideology. Let us bring up a few fragments of the long myth (vv. 96—139): it is the most meaningful, if regarding the subject of augustan ideology in the *Aratea*:

Virginis inde subest facies, cui plena sinistra  
fulget spica manu maturisque ardet aristas.  
Quam te, diva, vocem? [...]  
Aurea pacati regeres cum saecula mundi,  
Iustitia inviolata malis, placidissima virgo [...]  
[...] mediis te laeta ferebas  
sublimis populis nec dedignata subire  
tecta hominum et puros sine crimine, diva, penatis [...]  
Nondum vesanos rabies nudaverat ensis  
nec consanguineis fuerat discordia nota [...]  
At postquam argenti crevit deformior aetas [...]  
nulliusque larem, nullos adit illa penatis.  
Tantum cum trepidum vulgus coetusque notavit,  
inrepat: "O patrum suboles oblita priorum,  
degeneres semper semperque habitura minoris,  
quid me, cuius abit usus, per vota vocatis?" [...]

The tale of a new goddess, purely augustan, we could say, let Germanicus develop the problem of morality, and he followed the instructions of Augustus' propaganda. The goddess herself is a personification of one of the virtues, the justice, as her name indicates. The poet addresses her with respect and in further verses shows that she was the only being who was granted the permission of choosing for herself a location on the sky ("deseruit prope terras iustissima virgo et caeli sortita locum [...] v. 137—138). The other important issue is evoking *mores maiorum*:

<sup>21</sup> As far as *Aratea* is concerned, traces have been found not only of stoicism, but also of neopythagorean doctrine. Cf. A. Le Boeuffle: *Germanicus...*, p. XXVIII.

<sup>22</sup> *Dike* appeared in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. Transl. D.W. Tandy, W.C. Neale. Berkeley 1996, v. 256.

the golden age humanity represents the Roman ancestors, who were the model of morality for Augustus, an example which should be followed by everyone. But along with mentioning the progenitors, a harsh reproach towards the people of the iron age is formed, and this is a reproach to be heard by Germanicus' fellow citizens: he as well as Augustus considered contemporary Romans as degenerated; they forgot all about the morals of their ancestors ("O patrum suboles oblita priorum, degeneres semper semperque habitura minoris"). He mentions things familiar to the Romans as to ensure who is to be condemned: he speaks of Lares and Penates, the household gods of early times.

Moral renewal of Roman society was one of the most important issues in Augustus' political programme, and Germanicus, perhaps pointed by the princeps to be his successor and a continuer of the politics' foundations, showed his approval of Augustus' ideas in his literary work, as had done many before him. He is believed also to be accepting the plan of replacing great Greek literature with great literature of Romans<sup>23</sup>. With Vergil as the new Homer and Horatius as the new lyrical poet in the place of Alcaeus and Sappho, Germanicus was to be a Roman Aratus (for the early work of Cicero was not well received). This of course cannot be regarded as the only reason for undertaking such a work by a young "prince", but must have been encouraged by the princeps himself<sup>24</sup>.

Besides the renewal of *mores maiorum*, Augustus' propaganda was deeply involved in renovation and shaping a new approach towards religion, cults and perception of the gods. One of the princeps' aims was to strengthen the authority of old sacerdotal collegiums and restore traditional religious festivities, build new temples and renovate the old ones. The concept of *pietas*, that had been depicted earlier in this article, was of great importance in the new Roman religiousness. We could see that Germanicus held this value in high esteem. He shows his respect to the gods several times. His way of addressing Diana, when he recounts the myth of Orion's unfortunate attempt to violate her dignity, shows not only this deep respect, but may also be a way of indicating the importance of this goddess in recently formed cult. Augustus considered Apollo and his sister to be his protectors and was trying to make them more important in the renovated Roman religion, which was made clear during the Ludi Saeculares in AD 17, of which the culmination was making sacrifice to Apollo and Diana<sup>25</sup>.

Germanicus' gods are dignified and just, although the poet allows himself to mention some of Juppiter's questionable behaviors: the kidnapping of Europe ("Corniger hic Taurus, cuius decepta figura Europe, thalamis et virginitate relicta, per freta sublimis tergo mendacia sensit litora [...]"), vv. 536—539) and of Ganymede ("Iovis ales (i.e. the Eagle)... unguibus innocuis Phrygium reput Gany-

<sup>23</sup> Cf. R. Piętka: *Kaliopie i Urania. Rzymskie poematy astronomiczne*. Poznań 2005, p. 109.

<sup>24</sup> If we assume that he was aware of the making of the new poem, or maybe it was published even before Augustus' death (cf. M. Possanza: *Translating...*, p. 233).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. M. Jaczynowska: *Religie świata rzymskiego*. Warszawa 1987, p. 118.

meden”). However, these tales do not speak of Jupiter as the kidnapper directly; the guilty ones are the animals, yet still they are being rewarded by the king of gods and have their place in the sky *honoris causa*. However, there are few phrases, which could be read as a sign of mythological scepticism. The first one is included in the tale of the two Bears (vv. 31—32): “Veteris si gratia famae Cresia vos aluit”, the other also concerns Jupiter’s guardian, the She-Goat (vv. 166—167): “[...] si vere Iuppiter infans ubera Cretaeae mulsit fidissima Caprae”. The last example can be found in the part describing the Pleiads and concerns Atlas’ work as the sky bearer, (vv. 264—265) “[...] si vere sustinet Atlas regna Iovis superosque atque ipso pondere gaudet”: this picture of the Titan supporting the sky seems to have an ironical tone, although Mark Possanza<sup>26</sup> is convinced that Germanicus used this poetical expression to show the indescribability of the events reconciled by the poet. It may also signify that there are other versions of the narrated story. Germanicus, aspiring to his predecessor’s title of *poeta doctus*, might have used the sophisticated formula “[...] si vere”. But if it is a manifestation of true scepticism, it can be another sign of augustan ideology: the gods should not be a subject of frivolous tales any more, they should be worshipped with a solemnity that they deserve. The gods in Germanicus’ poem are noble and people need to fear them, as he warns after he had described Orion’s punishment: “Parcite, mortales, numquam levis ira deorum” (v. 656).

All of the aspects of Augustus’ political programme and his propaganda which was used to convince Romans of the necessity of changes and reminded them of the princeps’ essential merits in building a better Rome, were bound together: the social, cultural, religious ideology were joined by the idea of *pax*, freedom from war, especially civil war, although there were repeated battles on the verges of Roman territories. Octavian was considered as the one who liberated the republic from the fratricidal war, the greatest misfortune for the Romans.<sup>27</sup> Germanicus evoked *pax* in the proem of *Aratea*:

Quantum etenim possent anni certissima signa,  
 qua sol ardentem Cancrum rapidissimus ambit  
 diversasque secat metas gelidi Capricorni  
 quave Aries et Libra aequant divortia lucis,  
 si non tanta quies, te praeside, puppibus aequor  
 cultorique daret terras, procul arma silerent?  
 Nunc vacat audacis in caelum tollere vultus  
 sideraque et mundi varios cognoscere motus [...]

Not only is the idea of peace important as a political achievement, it also gives freedom — especially to the poets.

<sup>26</sup> M. Possanza: *Translating...*, p. 120.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 229; C. Lausdei: “Sulla cronologia...”, p. 181.

Germanicus' approval of the princeps' politics and ideology has been presented above, but what does the poet say about Augustus himself? Tacitus and Suetonius depicted the young son of late Drusus as a well-educated, respectable man<sup>28</sup>, devoted to his family, a favourite of Augustus, loved by the people of Rome, a man who could have, but would not cause a *coup d'état*<sup>29</sup>. From this we do not expect that he would have offended Augustus in any way, and indeed he did not. He praised his relative in the *Aratea*, although he did not do that directly: a straightforward apostrophe appears only once (in the proem Augustus' name does not occur), when he describes the constellation of the Capricorn, the one which princeps chose to be his protector in the stars<sup>30</sup>. This piece was written after Augustus' death and there are certain difficulties in establishing the date of composing the poem:

Hic, Auguste, tuum genitali corpore numen  
attonitas inter gentis patriamque paventem  
in caelum tulit et maternis reddidit astris.

The poet substitutes what should be “animus” with “numen”, shows the divinity of Augustus' soul, and points out his origins, suggesting that he had come down from the stars to the Earth and after death was brought back where he belonged. This also is a trace of Augustus' constant and systematic path to divinity, which begun with announcing his “father”, Julius Caesar, a god<sup>31</sup>. However, Germanicus does not call him a god yet.

The young poet's attitude towards augustan ideology was wholly approving, as the examples above illustrate. Again, Germanicus' situation was different from Vergil's, Horatius' or even Ovid's, firstly because he was the princeps' relative and a member of his court, secondly because his poem was created at the end of the epoch of great changes — he did not need to manifest his support of new ideas, which was the task of earlier poets, because in Germanicus' times the political system that Augustus had created was already well functioning. So this could have been either a *captatio benevolentiae* of the princeps or an attempt to follow the new literary tradition of Rome. The third possibility, and a very probable one, is that the young poet truly believed in all the ideas, among which he had been brought up, as his life of brave soldier and an honest man certainly proved. Besides, the younger generation of poets was still involved in politics<sup>32</sup>. Germanicus' idea of placing

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Tacitus: *Annales...*, II, 73 and Suetonius: *De vita Caesarum...*, IV, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Suet. IV, 3.

<sup>30</sup> The fact that Germanicus mentions the Capricornus as Augustus' Zodiac sign once again indicates that he follows the propaganda. Octavian was born under the sign of Libra, but apparently as far as astrology was concerned, Capricornus was more appropriate for the head of the state. Cf. Germ. v. 560, Le Boeuffle *ad loca*.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. M. Jaczynowska: *Religie...*, p. 120.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. M. Hermann: *Obraz nieba...*, p. 94.

political ideology in an astronomical poem seems inadequate at first, but as works of earlier great poets had shown, this combination does not have to be unbearable. On the contrary, Germanicus managed to put ideology into a poem in a way that neither Horatius nor Vergil would be ashamed of, for there is nothing insolent or artificial. The moral, religious and social ideas of augustan times are carefully embroidered onto the cloth of the night sky. It seems that the stars, although distant and appearing as indifferent, can be after all slightly involved in human lives.