NOTES • KORT BYDRAES

THE ETYMOLOGY OF AMNIS IN HORACE’S ARS POETICA

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The dynamism of etymological studies in general is exemplified by the recent appearance of Marangoni’s supplement to Maltby’s Lexicon.1 Marangoni’s own contribution is likewise lacunose;2 in particular Marangoni fails to take proper account of the etymological matter preserved by the scholiastic tradition. Such is especially the case with the scholia to Horace.3 The use of etymology in Horace himself similarly calls for closer investigation.4 Gini’s unpublished monograph on etymological jeux de mots in Horace’s Epistles does address the passage of the Ars Poetica (67-68) which includes the straightening of an amnis among feats of engineering (seu cursum mutavit iniquum frugibus amnis / doctus iter melius);5 however, Gini has nothing to say about any etymological intent in Horace’s treatment of the particular term amnis. Rudd’s commentary on the Ars Poetica is totally silent about the line containing amnis.6 Exactly fifty lines earlier in this poem Horace again has occasion to speak of a river, which he now includes among possible topics

4 Cf. the remark which concludes the article on ‘Etimologia’ by V. Viparelli in Orazio: Enciclopedia oraziana (1997) 2.833-35, at 835: ‘e. e accostamenti etimologici hanno un ruolo fino ad oggi quanto meno sottovalutato nella lingua di H.’
6 N. Rudd, Horace: Epistles, Book II, and Epistle to the Pisones (‘Ars Poetica’) (Cambridge 1989) 162. On the next line (doctus iter melius) he merely discusses the use of the accusative with the passive of doceo and then observes: ‘The river, like the swamp and the sea, is personified’.

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for a ‘purple patch’ (17: et properantis aquae per amoenos ambitus agros). Here Rudd merely notes: “The largely dactylic line echoes the speed of the swift-flowing water.” The aim of the present note is to argue that in both passages Horace is providing an etymology of amnis.

In the first passage (properantis aquae ... ambitus) ambitus is an odd word to use in conjunction with properantis, since the resultant collocation is close to being self-contradictory; the point of this incongruence between properantis and ambitus is evidently to draw attention to the use of the latter. Ambitus is the etymon of amnis; evidently, therefore, we have here a case of etymologizing in which the etymologized term amnis has been suppressed. An additional pointer to the suppression of amnis is provided by the immediately ensuing occurrence of the synonymous flumen at the start of the next line: aut flumen Rhenum. Besides ambitus, the other etymon of amnis is amoenitas. It is therefore noteworthy that Horace should choose to have ambitus immediately preceded by amoenos per amoenos ambitus agros. Here the two etyma of the suppressed amnis have accordingly been directly juxtaposed. Such resort to

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7 It may be observed that both of these texts are an exemplum in a synathroismos; for the latter cf. H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik* (4th edition, Stuttgart 2008) 336.
8 Rudd (note 6) 152. Neither text is discussed by K. van der Heyde, ‘Flumen, fluvius, amnis’, *Mnemosyne* 60 (1932) 135-46.
9 Ambitus in this line is glossed by Ps.-Acron as circuitus, which is explicitly associated with mora (cf. Cassian, *Conf. 10.8.4: circuitius mora*). Morari is, however, the ‘opposite’ of properare (cf. TLL 10.2.1978, lines 58-60 [s.v. propero]: ‘fere opp. ... [de]morari’).
12 For flumen as a synonym of amnis cf. TLL 6.1.967, lines 58-71 (s.v. flumen). In the present passage Horace has contrived to invest flumen with particular prominence. Firstly, Augustan poetry supplies no other instance of such use of flumen with ‘Rheine’. Secondly, on all the other occasions on which Horace himself employs flumen in this way in conjunction with the name of a river, the name does not, as here, follow flumen, but always stands in front of it; cf. *Carm* 2.6.10-11; 2.9.21; 4.4.38; 4.15.24; *Epist.* 1.11.4; *Epod.* 13.14.
an alternative etymology can be paralleled elsewhere:¹⁴ it would seem to make the present passage especially significant.

This significance would appear to be further enhanced by the antiphrastic repetition of the same double etymology fifty lines later in the other fluvial text adduced at the start of the present note. Here the term amnis is employed explicitly: cursum mutavit iniquum frugibus amnis / doctus iter melius (67-68). This time, however, amnis is not associated with amoenitas and ambitus; on the contrary, it is juxtaposed with iniquum frugibus and doctus iter melius. These two syntagms in the second passage correspond antithetically to amoenos ... agros and ambitus in the first. Amoenus is etymologized from amor,¹⁵ which is also the etymon of amicus and its antithesis inimicus;¹⁶ the latter is frequently associated with Horace's term iniquus.¹⁷ Similarly the first text's ambitus is echoed in the iter of the second;¹⁸ both ambitus and iter are etymologized from ire.¹⁹ However, this amnis has now been improved: it is no longer a ‘going around’ (ambitus),²⁰ but has learned a better ‘going’ (doctus iter melius).

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¹⁴ Cf. O’Hara (note 11) 92-93 (‘suggesting two different etymologies for the same word’).
¹⁵ Cf. Maltby (note 1) 31.
¹⁷ Cf. TLL 7.1.1640, lines 12-82 (s.v. iniquus), where a large number of passages are adduced in which iniquus is synonymous with inimicus and opposed to amicus. It may be noted that Horace’s antithetic terms iniquum and amoenos are both bacchiac words occupying exactly the same sedes before the fifth foot. Finally, C. Fca, Q. Horatii Flacci opera 2 (Heidelberg & Speyer 1827) 358 glosses the frugibus in iniquum frugibus as ‘agris frugiferis’, which accordingly matches the agros in amoenos ... agros.
¹⁸ It may be noted that the second passage carefully reproduces the order of the first: iniquum ... iter / amoenos ambitus.
¹⁹ Cf. Maltby (note 1) 28 and 314. For further evidence of the etymology of ambitus cf. Adkin (note 3) 262; id. (note 16, ‘Differentiae’) 408.
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