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UDC 73.027.2:7.045

**"UTQUE MANU PENDENTIA NUBILA PRESSIT."
A MARBLE RELIEF OF *AQUARIUS* BY AGOSTINO
DI DUCCIO, PETRARCH'S *AFRICA*,
AND OVID'S DESCRIPTION OF NOTUS**

The Chapel of the Sacrament in the Church of San Francesco at Rimini (alias the Tempio Malatestiano) is better known as *La Cappella dei Pianeti* owing to the lavish sculptural decoration of its entrance arch raised between ca. 1453–1454 by the exiled Florentine sculptor Agostino di Duccio¹. Figural reliefs on its piers include representations of the seven planetary gods along with their associated Zodiacal signs, and thus inadvertently bring to one's mind the famous invective of Pope Pius II against Agostino's patron, Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta: "edificauit . . . nobile templum Arimini in honorem diui Francisci, uerum ita gentilibus operibus impleuit, ut non tam christianorum quam infidelium demones adorantium templum esse uideretur."²

Of course, Pius' accusation should not be taken at its face value but must be considered in its proper historical context as part of a well calculated and very effective campaign of defamation³. And yet, from a strictly iconographical point of view, the reliefs in question undoubtedly represent one of the most ambitious early-Renaissance attempts to visualize the fabulous beings of pagan mythology by relying on a

¹ See for example C. Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano* (Milan and Rome, s.a. [1924]), 455–479; P. Meldini, "Il Signore e il Granchio: Cultura e iconografia astrologiche," in P. Meldini and P. G. Pasini, *La Cappella dei Pianeti del Tempio Malatestiano* (Milan and Rimini, 1983), 3–32; P. G. Pasini, "Lo Zodiaco di Agostino: Le sculture della cappella dei Pianeti," *ibid.*, 33–50; idem, "La cappella dei Pianeti," *ibid.*, 51–91.

² *Commentarii 2. 32*. See *Pii II Commentarii rerum memorabilium que temporibus suis contigerunt*, ed. A. van Heck, *Studi e Testi*, 312 (Vatican City, 1984), 1: 154. For an English translation see *The Commentaries of Pius II*, trans. F. A. Gragg, *Smith College Studies in History*, 25, nos. 1–4 (Northampton, Mass., 1939–1940), 167.

³ See for example F. Gaeta, "La 'Leggenda' di Sigismondo Malatesta," *Studi Malatestiani*, Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo, *Studi storici*, nos. 110–111 (Rome, 1978), 159–196.

wide-ranging assortment of predominantly classical literary sources. Also for that reason it has been often assumed that their sculptor was following the detailed instructions of a learned humanist advisor. The latter has been convincingly identified with Basinio of Parma (1425–1457), a prominent Neo-Latin poet active between 1449 and 1457 in Rimini, where he wrote his *Astronomica*: the first Renaissance poem that consciously strove to revive the polished elegance of the *docta poesis* of Aratus⁴.

Elsewhere I have argued that the reliefs in the Chapel of the Planets were not conceived as cryptic allegories but rather as pleasing "figments" conceptually akin to ornamental mythological digressions in ekphrastic poetry and epideictic oratory⁵. In this short study I wish to expand and supplement my analysis with respect to one particularly instructive example.

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In the lower tier of the left entrance pier the viewer's attention is caught by a curious image of Aquarius, represented as a seminude youth standing in wavy stream while his head is set against layers of clouds muffling his raised right arm. From the petal-like cumuli he is squeezing water, which falls down in a dense undulating shower from behind his back (Fig. 1). To the best of our knowledge Agostino's relief is the only known representation of the Water-bearer which lacks the latter's distinctive attribute, the proverbial *amphora* (or *urna*)⁶. This omission is all the more striking in view of the fact that

⁴ A. Campana, "Basinio da Parma," in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* vol. 7 (Rome, 1965), 89–98 (with bibliography). See also P. Simoniti, "Eine unbekannte Elegie des Basinius Parmensis," in *Acta conventus neo-Latini Turonensis*, ed. J.C. Margolin, (Paris, 1980), 2: 1059–1075; G. Resta, "Vegio, Basinio e l'Argonautica di Apollonio Rodio," in *Miscellanea Augusto Campana*, Medioevo e umanesimo, 45 (Padua, 1981), 2: 639–669; and D. Coppini, "Basinio e Sigismondo: committenza collaborativa e staturamento epico dell'elegia," in *Città e Corte nell'Italia di Piero della Francesca*, ed. C. Cieri Via (Venice, 1996), 449–467, esp. 455–456. The likelihood that Basinio was "in charge" of the Cappella dei Pianeti was – to my knowledge – first recognized by Ricci, *Tempio*, 485. The text of the *Astronomica* was published in *Basinii Parmensis poetae Opera praestantiora*, ed. L. Drudi (Rimini, 1794), 1: 293–242. For an analysis of its content and its principal sources, see in particular B. Soldati, *La poesia astrologica nel Quattrocento* (Florence, 1906), 74–104; and Campana, "Basinio," 92, 95.

⁵ S. Kokole, "Cognitio Formarum and Agostino di Duccio's Reliefs for the Chapel of the Planets in the Tempio Malatestiano," in *Quattrocento Adriatico: Fifteenth-Century Art of the Adriatic Rim*, ed. C. Dempsey, Villa Spelman Colloquia, 5 (Bologna, 1996): 177–206.

⁶ The well-known medieval mnemonic distich runs "Sunt Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo / Libraque, Scorpius, Arcitenens, Capre, Amphora, Pisces" (F. Boll and C. Bezold, *Sternglaube und Sterndeutung: Die Geschichte und das Wesen der Astrologie*, ed. W. Gundel [Leipzig and Berlin, 1926], 51). For the iconography of *Aquarius*, see, for example, F. Boll and W. Gundel, "Sternbilder, Sternglaube

Basinio himself repeatedly referred to it in his poems.⁷ Indeed, in some of the surviving fifteenth-century manuscripts of the *Astronomica* a detailed description of the said constellation is accompanied by a drawing showing a naked youth who, in perfect accordance with the accompanying text, pours water from an amphora-like vase (as in Fig. 2)⁸. Evidently omission of the vase in the relief, presumably carved under the close supervision of the poet when he was still writing his astronomical poem, could not have been simply due to ignorance or indifference: the choice was no doubt deliberate.

On this evidence it stands to reason that Basinio drew his inspiration from an alternative textual source. We know that – in addition to Hyginus' *Poetica Astronomica* – he would have had an opportunity to consult at least Manilius' *Astronomica* and Germanicus' adaptation of Aratus' *Phaenomena*, for both works are quoted in the treatise *De re militari* written between 1446 and 1455 in Rimini by Roberto Valturio (1405–1475), the young poet's senior protector, mentor, and friend⁹.

und Sternsymbolik bei Griechen und Römern," in *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, ed. W. H. Roscher et al., vol. 6 (Leipzig and Berlin, 1937), 974–976; and most recently H. G. Gundel, *Zodiakos: Tierkreisbilder im Altertum, kosmische Bezüge und Jenseitsvorstellungen im antiken Alltagsleben* (Mainz, 1992), 74 and passim (with bibliography). The uniqueness of Agostino's representation has been frequently stressed, most recently by Meldini, "Il Signore e il Granchio," 6: "L'Acquario . . . col capo tra le nuvole e i piedi nell'acqua e senza l'urna, non ha – ch'io sapia – riscontri altrove."

⁷ Basinio, *Astronomica* 1. 496, 1. 526, 1. 542–543; and *Liber Isottaes* 3. 7. 81: ". . . obliqua fundebat Aquarius urna." (*Basinii Parmensis Poetae Liber Isottaes*, ed. F. Ferri [Città di Castello, 1922], 65).

⁸ For example in the manuscript now in Bologna (Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, A. 173, fol. 21v), for which see P. McGurck, *Catalogue of Astrological and Mythological Illuminated Manuscripts of the Latin Middle Ages IV: Astrological Manuscripts in Italian Libraries (other than Rome)* (London, 1966), xxvii, 9–10. The illustrated passage of the *Astronomica* (1. 665–680) refers twice to the urna (*ibid.*, 1. 665–666): ". . . Sequitur sed Aquarius urnam / Qui tenet inversam, . . .," and (*ibid.*, 1. 679): "Sex [scil. stellae] Urnam atque decem cingunt a parte sinistra." Basinius' source was Hyginus (*Poetica astronomica* 3. 28). For the list of illustrated copies of Basinius' *Astronomica* see McGurck, *Catalogue*, xxvii.

⁹ For Valturio see A. F. Massera, Roberto Valturio. "omnium scientiarum doctor et monarcha", 2d ed., (Faenza, 1958). In the chapter on astronomy Valturio calls Manilius "praecellentissimus testis" and quotes in full three verses from the first book (i.e. Manilius, *Astronomica* 1. 215–217); see R. Valturius, *Ad illustrem heroea Sigismundum Pandulfum Malatestam Ariminensium regem de re militari lib[ri] XII*, ed. C. Wechel (Paris, 1532), 47. A verse from Germanicus' *Aratea* is quoted in the first chapter of the first book of *De re militari* (ed. cit., 2: "Nam 'non dum vesanos rabies nudaverat enses' ut Germanicus Caesar in Arateo carmine loquitur" [cf. *Aratea* 112]). A manuscript of Manilius' *Astronomica* was discovered by Poggio already in 1417; see R. Sabbadini, *Le scoperte dei codici latini e greci ne' secoli XIV e XV*, 2d ed., ed. E. Garin (Florence, 1967), 2: 234. For the reception of Manilius in the mid-Quattrocento see also K. Lippincott, "The Astrological Decoration of the Sala dei Venti in the Palazzo del Te," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 47 (1984):

In fact Aquarius' youthful physique, his nudity and the undulating waves covering his shanks and feet (Fig. 1) find potential correspondences in Manilius,¹⁰ while the "rain-bringing Aquarius" is frequently invoked by Germanicus¹¹. Most suggestive are perhaps the concluding verses of the fourth fragment of the latter's *Prognostica* (frag. 4. 159–161):

Frigidus at rapidis horrebit Aquarius euris
brumalesque dabit pluvias atque igne perenni
cum sonitu quatiet imbres . . .

Needless to say, Germanicus' invocations of Aquarius as har-binger of winter rains and windy thunderstorms rehearse a poetic commonplace familiar also from non-astronomical literary texts¹². But even though these and other reminiscences in classical poetry provided sufficient motivation for the flooding waters and fluttering drapery, to my knowledge no ancient author paid particular attention to the clouds, at least not in a sense that would call for the omission of Aquarius' water jar. Albeit one could argue that replacement of the habitual *urna* by the clouds was inevitable once it had been decided to show Aquarius as *imbrifer* rather than as *urnifer*, this is put in doubt by Basinio's own verses: "Nec quos obliqua fundebat Aquarius urna / obstabant imbres . . ." ¹³

Charles Mitchell sought to account for the anomalous iconography of our relief by drawing attention to Macrobius' *Saturnalia* (1. 21.

217–218, nn. 4–6; and eadem, "The Iconography of the Salone dei Mesi and the Study of Latin Grammar in Fifteenth-century Ferrara," in *La corte di Ferrara e il suo mecenatismo 1441–1598*, eds. M. Pade, L. Waage Petersen, and D. Quarta (København and Ferrara, 1990), 95–96, 105–106, n. 5. For the diffusion of Germanicus and Hyginus see Sabbadini, *Le scoperte*, 2: 226. The Quattrocento manuscripts of Germanicus normally contained *Aratea* 1–430, and *Prognostica* frag. 4. 52–163 (see McGurck, *Catalogue*, xviii–xix, 26–28). It is possible that Basinio was familiar also with the Greek original of Aratus' poem; the posthumous inventory of his personal belongings made in 1457 lists "uno libro di astronomia cum una opera greca;" see A. F. Massera, "I poeti isottei," *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana* 92 (1928): 55.

¹⁰ Manilius, *Astronomica* 4. 260: "iuvenilis Aquarius"; *ibid.*, 2. 511: "nudus . . . Aquarius;" and *ibid.*, 4. 797 ". . . iuvenis nudo formatus mollior artu." For the wavy waters see *ibid.*, 4. 345: "Aquarius cui nomen ab undis" [italics mine].

¹¹ Germanicus, *Aratea* 567: "imbrifer;" *Prognostica*, frag. 3. 18–21: "Qui fundit latites coelo quoque permovet imbres / . . . aspera ventis / Aequeora turbatos volvunt ad sidera fluctus; / imbribus incumbit caelum solemque recondit;" *ibid.*, frag. 4. 107: "Haec eadem fundens praedicet Aquarius imbrem;" *ibid.*, frag. 4. 28: "imbris fusor."

¹² Here it may be sufficient to give a sample from Lucan's *Bellum civile* (1. 653–654: "Deucalionaeos fudisset Aquarius imbres / Totaque diffuso latuisset in aequare tellus"), likewise quoted by Valturio (*De re militari*, ed. Wechel, 33).

¹³ *Liber Isottaes* 3. 7. 79–80. For the presence of the heavy clouds, see, for example, Germanicus, *Aratea* 4. 28–29: ". . . aut imbris fusor habebit, / spissatis caecus nebulis hebetabitur aer."

27): "Aquarius nonne ipsam vim solis ostendit? Unde enim imber caderet in terras nisi solis calor ad supera traheret umorem, cuius refugio pluvialis est copia"¹⁴. Macrobius speaks of the humid vapors and would hence indeed seem to provide a clue for the presence of the clouds. However, on the whole the correspondences between the text and the image are in this case not so specific as to warrant unequivocally a direct connection.

In search for an alternative source my attention was caught by the *ekphrasis* of the imaginary "Palace of Syphax" in the third book of Petrarch's *Africa*¹⁵. In the section dedicated to a sculptured cycle of Zodiacal signs (*Africa* 3. 111–136), Petrarch imagined Aquarius as follows (*Africa* 3. 132–134):

Post ingens nudi effigies; nimboque nigranti
frons velata hominis, velut ethere pronus ab alto
fundat aquas; . . .

A number of reasons strongly suggest that these verses provided the principal textual source for Agostino di Duccio's relief¹⁶. Not only do they agree with Aquarius' outward appearance – a nude giant is reclining down from the sky (Fig. 1) – they also describe a "blackening rain-cloud veiling his head"¹⁷. Moreover, Petrarch's verses were written with the explicit intention of conjuring up a fictive work of

¹⁴ C. Mitchell, "The Imagery of the Tempio Malatestiano," *Studi Romagnoli* 2 (1951): 79.

¹⁵ For the structure, sources, original meaning and function of the passage (*Africa* 3. 87–264) see F. Petrarca, *L'Africa*, ed. N. Festa (Florence, 1926), lxxv–lxxviii; A. S. Bernardo, *Petrarch, Scipio and the 'Africa': The Birth of Humanism's Dream* (Baltimore, 1962), 128–140; E. Fenzi, "Di alcuni palazzi, cupole e planetari nella letteratura classica e medievale e nell' 'Africa' del Petrarca," *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana* 93 (1976): 12–59, 186–229. For the diffusion of the text see in particular V. Fera, *Antichi editori e lettori dell'Africa* (Messina, 1984); idem, "Editori e postillatori dell' 'Africa' fra tre e Quattrocento," *Studi petrarcheschi* n.s. 4 (1987): 33–45.

¹⁶ There is at least circumstantial evidence that Petrarch's *Africa* was probably available in Rimini. One of the surviving manuscripts (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham 1014) was already in 1398 written for a certain Margherita Malatesti, possibly a daughter of Galeotto Malatesta (see *Codici latini del Petrarca nelle biblioteche fiorentine*, ed. M. Feo [Florence, 1991], 41–44, cat. no. 17, with bibliography). Moreover, in 1560 an inventory of the library of the convent attached to the *Tempio Malatestiano* listed a manuscript entitled "Franciscus Petrarca, Àphricum Carmen;" see G. Mazzatinti, "La biblioteca di San Francesco (Tempio Malatestiano) in Rimini," *Scritti vari di filologia dedicati a Ernesto Monaci* (Rome, 1901), 351, no. 9; Ricci, *Tempio*, 595.

¹⁷ *Nimbus* could be appropriately visualized as a cloud from which water is being shed; see, for example, Servius on Virgil, *Aeneid* 1. 51: "nimbi nunc ventos significant plerumque *nubes vel pluvias* . . . proprie tamen *nimbi vocantur repentinae et praecipites pluviae* . . ." [italics mine].

art¹⁸. Accordingly they were almost bound to attract the attention of a humanist poet faced with the task of advising a contemporary artist on specific points of iconography¹⁹.

It is important to note, however, that Petrarch did not explicitly state that Aquarius was shedding water from the clouds. He merely invoked their conspicuous presence. As for the remaining particulars, his poetic description calls upon the perceptive reader to exercise his or her own imagination.

In his *volgarizzazione* of the *Africa*, published in 1570, Fabio Marretti resolved the question of the missing attribute by simply adding the conventional water jar²⁰. Nevertheless, the imagination of a *poeta doctus*, such as Basinio, could have been easily swerved in a different direction by the fleeting resemblance of Petrarch's waterman to another mythic being that was no less closely associated with storms and floods: the south wind *Notus*, or *Auster*, as described by Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 1. 264–269)²¹.

¹⁸ Petrarch, *Africa* 3. 111–112: "Hec supra horrificis diversa animalia passim / vultibus et variis cernuntur sculpta figuris;" and *ibid.*, 3. 263: "Hec variis insculpta modis atque ordine miro." According to Petrarch the images were created by a mythic "artist," the Titan Atlas (*ibid.*, 3. 96–97). See also A. Frey-Sallmann, *Aus dem Nachleben antiker Göttergestalten: Die antiken Gottheiten in der Bildbeschreibung des Mittelalters und der italienischen Frührenaissance* (Leipzig, 1931), 55–56.

¹⁹ As is well known, the core section of Petrarch's description of the "Palace of Syphax" (*Africa* 3. 138–263) played an important formative role in the evolution of the early-Renaissance representational types for the principal classical deities; see in particular H. Liebeschütz, *Fulgentius Metaforalis* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1926), esp. 41–43; E. Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege und andere antike Bildstoffe in der neueren Kunst* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1930), 11–18, esp. 15–16; Frey-Sallmann, *Aus dem Nachleben*, 56–59; E. H. Wilkins, "Descriptions of Pagan Divinities from Petrarch to Chaucer," *Speculum* 32 (1957): 511–522; E. Leube, "Petrarca und die alten Götter: Zum Bild der antiken Mythologie in der 'Africa' und im übrigen lateinischen Werk des Dichters," *Romanistisches Jahrbuch* 11 (1960): 89–107; and Fenzi, "Di alcuni palazzi," esp. 15–20 (with bibliography). Thus, in the words of J. Seznec (*The Survival of the Pagan Gods* [New York, 1953], 174), Petrarch's epic was "likely to be of immediate use to the artist who might turn to it for inspiration." On this ground it would seem natural that, apart from the descriptions of gods and goddesses (*Africa* 3. 138–264), the cycle of zodiacal signs (*Africa* 3. 111–135) would attract some attention as well.

²⁰ "Dopo d'huom nudo è una effigie grande, / E col uaso, che versa, tien la fronte / A se uelata, e qual da l'alte bande Celesti con le mani humide e pronte / le liquid'acque ogn'hora in copia spande;" see *L'Africa del Petrarca in ottava rima insieme col testo latino. Fedelissimamente tradotta da M. Fabio Marretti Gentiluomo Senese* (Venice, 1570), 71.

²¹ . . . madidis Notus evolat alis,
terribilem picea tectus caligine vultum:
barba gravis nimbis, canis fluit unda capillis,
fronte sedent nebulae, rorant pennaque sinusque;
utque manu late pendentia nubila pressit
fit fragor; hinc densi funduntur ab aethere nimbi.

Though, unlike Agostino's Aquarius, Ovid's *Notus* is not a dreamy ephebus but a horrid winged wind-god with soaked grey beard, his head is likewise enveloped in humid mists (*Metamorphoses* 1. 267: "fronte sedent nebulae"), a trait that may have incidentally – along with *Metamorphoses* 1. 265 ("picea tectus caligine vultum") – inspired the emphatic interjection "nimboque nigranti / frons velata" in the *Africa* (3. 132–133). But while Petrarch simply stated that Aquarius "sheds water" (*fundat aquas*), Ovid described literally how *Notus* "presses the widely hanging clouds with his hand," whereupon "a crashing sound goes forth; and next the dense clouds pour forth their rain" (*Metamorphoses* 1. 268–269)²².

On this evidence it appears more than likely that – in a conscious effort to come up with a novel poetic invention that would not only attract attention of the literati, but would also evince a creative response from the sensitive sculptor – Basinio conflated a fictitious image from Petrarch's model *ekphrasis* with two visually no less suggestive verses from the *Metamorphoses*:

Utque manu late pendentia nubila pressit,
fit fragor; hinc et densi funduntur ab aethere nimbi.

* * *

By curious coincidence, in his elegant Slovenian translation of Ovid, Professor Kajetan Gantar – to whom I gratefully dedicate this brief postil – rendered the same pair of hexameters as if he were looking at a polished marble relief of Agostino di Duccio in the *Tempio Malatestiano* (Fig. 1):²³

Kadar pa stisne s pestjo oblake, ki z njega visijo,
grom zagrmi, z nebá se vlijejo gosti nalivi.

The Ovidian description of *Notus* is echoed already in Basinio's early *Carmina varia* 17. 42: "... illinc gelidis *Notus* effluit alis ..." (cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1. 264); and in the *Liber Isottaus* 3. 6. 25–26: "... *Notus* horridus auras / iactat in aethereas ..." The last line quoted above (*Metamorphoses* 1. 269) was possibly imitated in Basinio's *Hesperis* (9. 253: "effusus ... in aethere nimbis"). Moreover, the passage (*Metamorphoses* 1. 264–266) was also quoted almost integrally by Valturio, *De re militari* (ed. Wechel, 302). Basinio appreciatively wrote of Ovid's poetic skill in his epistle to Pope Nicholas V (*Carmina varia* 20. 92–94; see *Le poesie liriche di Basinio (Isottaus, Cyris, Carmina varia)*, ed. F. Ferri [Turin, 1925], 124). The *Notus* passage was kindly drawn to my attention by Professor Charles Dempsey, The Johns Hopkins University.

²² English translation slightly revised after Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. F. J. Miller (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 1: 21.

²³ ["When in his fist he clenches the overhanging clouds, it thunders; and dense showers rush down from the skies."] See P. Ovidij Naso, *Metamorfoze. Izbor*, trans. K. Gantar (Ljubljana, 1977), 13.



Fig. 1. Agostino di Duccio, Aquarius.
ca. 1453–1454. Rimini, San Francesco.

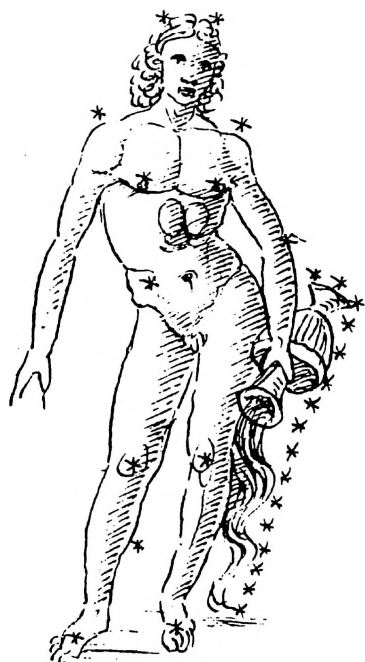


Fig. 2. Aquarius. Basinio da Parma,
Astronomica. 1467. Bologna, Biblioteca
Comunale, A. 173, fol. 21v.