

Manilius, *Astronomica* 1.926¹

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Astrology is insufficiently discussed in Latin texts of the earliest years of the Roman Principate (27 BC-AD 37).² Of ancient works in Latin treating astral phenomena, Manilius' *Astronomica* is the *novum organum*. Lucid in his descriptions, fully conscious of the varied tributaries of thought³ necessary for the structuring of his poem, Manilius composed a metrical poem suffuse with figural concepts. It is toward the enucleation of a few words that the verse below is considered.

¹ I am grateful to G.L. Huxley and J.T. Ramsey for their munificent but critical advice, and to the shrewd, anonymous referees of *Scripta Classica Israelica* for pointing out other weaknesses in my arguments; even though I adopted most of their suggestions, the ones that I failed to admit do no discredit to their genius.

² Ovid (43 BC-c.AD 17) was a primary shaper of opinions regarding astrology during the early principate. Shorter passages of his refer discriminately to astrological things: e.g., *Ov. Fasti* 6, 785-790 where stars are misinterpreted by an inebriated person. In addition, among others, Persius (AD 34-AD 62) remarked on astrology in his satires (cf. 5.46).

³ Cf. *Juv.Sat.*6.553 where Chaldeans are noted as trustworthy astrologers. Although written later in time, Juvenal's texts (c.AD 55 – AD127) illustrate a common belief in Augustan and Post-Augustan times that Babylon was a site of origin for astrology; Jewish and Armenian diviners existed, but not as authors of long treatises on stellar incidents; (see also *Juv.Sat.*VII.200). Fragmentary texts shed some light on various branches of astrology in antiquity. *The History of Egypt* by Manetho the priest (c. 3rd BC), although it cannot be taken on trust, offers criticisms of Herodotus' "facts" regarding Egyptian history (fr. 88, Eusthatus). However, since it was thought at one time that Egypt was the oldest of all kingdoms (*egyptiorum regnum invenimus vetustimum omnium regnorum*, fr.4 Latina Barbari), Egypt's importance in the development of the zodiac in calendrical cycles was assumed with prejudice: cf. *Aegyptiaca* (fr. 2 Syncellus). G. Fowden (1993, p. 91) states that 'the fundamental presupposition of astrology — namely a belief in a direct and calculable connection between planetary movements and human actions — first emerged in the aftermath of Alexander's conquests, through a fusion of Greek with Egyptian and Babylonian ideas principally effected by the Stoics'. That notion is not entirely sound, and only a diminutive amount of evidence can be brought to support his thesis. He seems unaware of published astronomical/horoscopic tablets from Uruk, a few of which were issued through the years in the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* (also see Steele, 2000 and Rochberg, 1998) or of texts preserved in the Levant: e.g., one ancient Hebraic text (*Jud.*5.20) c.1200 BC displays a Levantine seer who held an obsolete view of 'the fundamental presupposition of astrology' which he believes surfaced post-Alexander III of Macedon (356 BC-323 BC). For a recent investigation on astrological links between Greeks and Babylonians in the archaic period, see F. Rochberg (2010). Manilius' familiarity with the wide-ranging rites and ritual of select priests of Egypt and Babylon could be known from direct readings of Greek writings and near eastern inscriptions or through secondary material resources.

1.922 *iam bella quiescent*
Atque adamanteis discordia vincta catenis
Aeternos habeat frenos in carcere clausa;
Sit pater invictus patriae, sit Roma sub illo
 1.926⁴ *Cumque deum caelo dederit non quaerat in orbe*

926 – Quaerat **GL**; quaerit **M**.

“May wars now cease and, fettered with bonds of adamant, may discord, prisoned fast, be curbed evermore! Unconquered be the father of our fatherland; may Rome serve none but him; and for all that she has given a god to heaven, may she miss him not on earth!”

So translates Goold.⁵ Explicit in his rendering, Julius Caesar is given divine glory; implicit is the possibility that his presence may be desiderated. I aver the words ‘may she miss him not ...’ do not echo Manilius’ sense. Romans, in general, were the main focus, not an emperor. Entering fully upon this theme, illustration is given to validate this proposal. Subsequent to the treatment of comet theories (1.817-73), Manilius discussed war and revolt (1.895f.). The heavens were ablaze, corresponding to varied and vicious insurrections on earth (1.901-7). He stressed to what extent Rome’s destiny lay in the balance; yet they were unable to believe heavens’ portents — *nescimus credere caelo* (1.905). Manilius personalizes Rome’s collective status-in-disbelief through his use of the first-person plural. He wished for the end of such violent intrusions, and *iam bella quiescant...* (1.922f.) seems to be a plea for the cessation of all hostilities.

Dissatisfied with rampant discord (1.923), Manilius believed it would be advantageous for Rome to be subjected wholly to Augustus — *sit Roma sub illo*. Not without reason Goold places emphasis on *illo*, believing ‘*pater patriae*’ to be its antecedent. In my judgment, though, the setting shows that *Roma* deserves prominence. In addition, *deum* is taken by Goold to be the direct object of *dederit* for the reason that its proximity to it is evident. He assumes that *deum* refers to Julius Caesar, whose apotheosis is undeniable.⁶ He became a demigod during his lifetime;⁷ even so, Goold’s assumption that *deus* is Julius Caesar is unwarranted.⁸

A claim can be made that *deum* holds a unique position, corresponding to both *dederit* and *quarerat*.⁹ An opposing view might suppose that *deum* was not a term utilized in any dual sense in this context; but a twofold use of this sort is aptly designated

⁴ I cite readings from two editions: A.E. Housman, *editio maior* and G.P. Goold, Loeb edition; I have studied the standard critical editions of the *Astronomica* published since 1579.

⁵ Goold’s footnote for 1.926 reads: “May Rome not miss the deified Julius, seeing that she has Augustus, still alive, to take care of her”.

⁶ E.g., *Ov.Met.*15.745-870.

⁷ Julius Caesar’s attainment to divinity purportedly was heralded by a comet. Cf. J.T. Ramsey and A.L. Licht (1997).

⁸ Goold likely found support for his assumption at 1.7: *tu, Caesar patriae princepsque paterque...*

⁹ This view makes possible another translation: ‘In as much as Rome already has given a god (Julius Caesar) to heaven, may she not (yet) be yearning for a god on earth’.

amphibolē.¹⁰ In Manilius' style of writing the arrangement of 1.926 is an anomaly, and I am unaware of similar poetic diction in his texts. If Augustus was perceived to be divine during his lifetime, he is now old, taken aback by the *Clades Variana* (1.899), his embarrassing defeat in 9AD. Clearly the end was near since Tiberius had succeeded him when book 4 was composed.¹¹

It is also true that Manilius' invincible *patris patriae*, at 1.913 and 1.925, is lauded; but Augustus is not considered *divine* in either of those two texts. Thus Goold's depiction is inexact; commentators have failed to perceive the complexities of the syntax of line 1.926.¹² Housman did not harbor any suspicions, although he noted that Tiberius succeeded to Augustus' position: by official decree¹³ Augustus ultimately was made divine (1.799-804). Housman's comments on 1.926 contain attractive parallels; none of his points of interest proceed along the lines of Manilius' portrayal of cosmological effects on the fate of Rome and the brutality of war.

I propose an alternative reading of 1.926. In Manilius' style of constructing a sentence, it is unexceptional to find a noun with syntactic relations to one verb but also with syntactic relations to another that is farther away; Manilius was adept at typology and a master of allusion¹⁴, and his point is subtle: he desires optimal circumstances for Rome's prolongation.¹⁵ Perhaps he is attempting to direct a prospective reader to change

¹⁰ For reliable treatment of *amphibolē*, see A. Bell (1923), who defines it as '...the use of a single word in two different relations in the same clause or sentence', 293. As well, for one other example see E. Kenney (1958) who observed a reference to *Ov.Am.2.14.9-10*, where Burman noted that '*hominum*' is to be understood twice in *gens hominum utio deperitura idem*.

¹¹ For a better perspective on the time of the poem's composition, fairly and impartially given, see R. Steele (1931).

¹² Scaliger (1600), Bentley (1739), Ellis (1891), Breiter (1908), Scarcia, Flores and Feraboli (1996) do not offer any aid toward the elucidation of the [*deum*] language of 1.926. There is no hyper-inflation of primary and secondary literature on the *Astronomica*; although the work of L. Moscadi (cf. 1981) and K. Volk (cf. 2009, 145-146) on Manilius has been exemplary on several points, they put forward arguments and issue verdicts regarding the contextual interpretation of *Man.1.926* with which this writer cannot agree.

¹³ Cf. *Fasti Amiterni*, II.13.2: *... divo Augusto honores caelestes a senatu decreti*. Yet M.P. Charlesworth (1939, 2) so eloquently acknowledged that Augustus 'never countenanced officially any worship of himself alone...'. His was a savvy political move; Augustus was not so reluctant as to prevent the 'worship of himself only if it were in conjunction with that of Rome' loc. cit., i.e., acceptable Roman customs of devotion.

¹⁴ To cite several examples: at 5.495, *ipse sibi lex est*, Manilius had Cicero in mind (*De Rep.* III.22) when he penned his nuance on individual conscience; and at 1.149, does not the ascending fire, *ignis*, of Manilius echo Lucretius' rising flames at *DRN* 5.458? Moreover K. Volk (2001, 85) notes Manilius' adaptations of 'Callimachean images of the path and the stream'; A. Macgregor (2004, 143, n.3) believed Housman's antipathy toward Plato prevented him from using Plato as a resource for understanding various concepts exploited by Manilius in his editing of Manilius' texts. On the basis of *sequiturque sequentem*, W. Hübner (2010, 32) alleged that Manilius 1.304 was modeled on Verg. *Aen.* 11.695: believing 'the riding Camilla and Orsilochus both pursuing and fleeing one another'.

¹⁵ Quite naturally, *sit Roma sub illo* expresses a desire for Rome's continuance under its unconquerable leader (1.925). In a stoic sense, Manilius' text puts forward with delicacy a

his or her mind on the topic of Roman, soldierly sacrifice during warfare. At any rate, a solution may be ascertained by a new approach. *Deum* should be reordered, employed as the direct object of *quaerat*. The temporal indicators in *dederit* remain; the dative recipient, *caelo*, retains its use as beneficiary of what is supplied, and the dependent subjunctive mood of the subordinate clause is not concealed. This new interpretation modifies considerably how the lines came to be construed.

New rendering:

*Cumque deum caelo dederit, non quaerat*¹⁶ *in orbe*.

And when she¹⁷ has made her gift [i.e., offered it]¹⁸ to the heavens, let her not long for a god on earth.

The restatement now is precise. Rome's sacrifice of her soldiers to eternity's embrace on fields of battle was real (1.896-903).¹⁹ They strove for honor and glory, but they were

fine point on '*providentia*', which was specifically a foresight designed to secure an unbroken peace of the Roman state.

¹⁶ MS M holds much that is reliable, but *quaerit* [pres. ind. act.], does not drastically alter the need for an optative-of-wish nuance.

¹⁷ I.e. Through his use of the feminine onomastic *Roma* (1.925), Manilius indicates that the term designates the empire of Rome, that it is implicit as the subject of *dederit* and *quaerat*. For similar connotations between *Roma* and its "imperial" gist, see e.g., Prop.*El.* 2.15.46 and 3.1.15-16.

¹⁸ I.e. of the many slain in bloody battles to which he had previously referred. But also cf. 4.27-60.

¹⁹ One should not overlook the ancient principle of *devotio pro principe*, 'the phenomenon that soldiers or private persons were willing to sacrifice their life for the health of the Roman emperor'. See J. Bremmer (2008), 204. The king often imported the regal claims of God into his office, thereby integrating his rulership and deity in one head of state; it was a fact of common knowledge that ancient Roman soldiers were fated to die, pledging their fealty to the ruler. Their training was intense, designed to teach them to face death in a manly fashion; but marriage was proscribed by officials who did predicate these things of them. Connections between customs and literatures of ancient Greece and Rome are everywhere in antiquity around Mediterranean districts; similar links between ancient Greece and their Anatolian, and other near eastern neighbors, too, are ever-present (cf. J. Puhvel 1983). The expectation of soldierly sacrifice is extant in Hittite literature. E.g., in a text, *KBo* 4.14 ii 50-57, of the last Hittite king Suppiluliuma II, whose precise nature is debated (because we have neither the beginning nor the end), but which generally appears to be a text instructing some official (likely military) about how he is to behave when the King's personal safety is imperiled by enemies, we find this expressed in rather colorful language: *KBo* 4.14 ii 22-29: 'Also this enemy, the King of Assyria who has risen for me, if he comes into my country, let death be your bourne (limit)! Or if he wages armed hostilities against me or comes into my country, die for the soul/person of the King! § Or if a country turns away from me, or a rebellion takes place among my internal or external servants, as weighs on (the mind of) kings, *you* at that time bite the dark earth! Let death be your bourne!' The phrases about biting the dark earth and death being the servant's limit occur repeatedly in the text. In the famous bronze tablet treaty between Tuthaliya III and Kuruntiya of Tarhuntassa, there is also a sentence that says 'K[uruntiya] at that time (would have) died for me'. Hittite has very limited means of expressing contrary to fact, but since we know that K. did not actually die,

fated to die,²⁰ compelled to surrender themselves to death in accordance with luminary arrangements.²¹ [*Deum*] *non quaerat in orbe* reveals a moment of deep reflection on Manilius' part. Indeed the character of the text is preceptive, even monitory.²² Manilius did not believe the Romans possessed an exact understanding of god at all (1.904-5). In the world of the *Astronomica* this sort of error is injurious to one's intellect.

There was a time when mankind's power of reason was unimpeded; but it was a time when human ingenuity was given to misapprehending the fixed laws of fate (1. 66-111). The Roman person was too ignorant even to understand Jupiter's procedures in fixing constellations (1.337-8): misattributing his almighty acts to blustery weather:

1.103-5

*pervidit, solvitque animis miracula rerum;
eripuitque Iovi fulmen viresque tonandi
et sonum ventis concessit, nubibus ignem.*

Reason freed their minds from pondering the incredible;
it wrested the bolt and power of thunder from Jupiter
and assigned its noise to the winds, and its fire to the clouds.

Astrologically, his precursors had been ignorant (*rudis* – 1.66; 1.74). The angst Manilius felt in this regard is apparent. Therefore, his ending was an attempt to remind readers that divine assistance in Roman conflicts arrived from heavenly spheres, not earthly ones.²³ The five books of *Astronomica* are programmatic. The reader is warned plainly not to crave a god or deity on earth. The corrected translation ensures Manilius' remarks cohere with previous verses regarding Rome's plight, and it accents his main theme: the hope of each human being lies above, in the signs of the sky, and in the one who controls their display (2.701ff.), not in the senseless strife of combatants on earth. This idea is a crucial literary bridge over which one must pass when entering book two's discussion of tutelary deities and descriptions of the signs of the zodiac.

one has to read it as 'was prepared to die for me' [I am grateful to Dr. H. Craig Melchert (Prof. Em. UCLA), for the preceding statements on the Hittite text].

²⁰ The concept of 'Fate' ruling the affairs of mankind (for good or ill) is ubiquitous in ancient Latin poetry: e.g., *Hor.Od.* 1.28.

²¹ According to Manilius strife and war on earth reflect celestial hostilities: 2.606-607.

²² Rarely does Manilius put forward principles of conduct; but another occasion is found at 4.1-118 where he treats of the futility of a misguided life in pursuit of wealth. Previously he had remarked on the many that worship, or delight excessively in, wealth: 2.145-149.

²³ Select parts of Manilius' poem are derivative of south-west Asian and ancient Near Eastern lore. Portents at the time were believed by many to signal war. Sargon II (c.721-705 BC) begins his 8th campaign account with notice of one such augury [here I express my thanks to Dr. B.R. Foster (Prof. Yale), for alerting me to the previous point on Sargon II]. Diviners accompanied military forces, and at times were themselves killed. All earthly deities were denounced, being deemed the fabrication of human ingenuity. So Manilius instructed his readers to venerate *Deum*, God of heaven (e.g., 1.48-50).

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