Sparrows and Apples: The Unity of Catullus 21

Stephen Harrison

Catullus 2: Passer, deliciae meae puellae,
quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenere,
cui primum digitum dare appetenti
et acris solet incitare morsus,
cum desiderio meo nitenti
carum nescio quid lubet iocari
et solaciolum sui doloris,
credo ut tum grauis acquiescat ardor:
tecum ludere sicut ipsa possem
et tristis animi leuare curas!

2b: tam gratum est mihi quam ferunt puellae pernici aureolum fuisse malum, quod zonam soluit diu ligatam.

These lines (cited here from Mynors' Oxford Classical Text) are presented as two separate poems, or at least as two parts of the same poem with a lacuna intervening, in almost all the major modern editions of Catullus.² In the archetype from which all our extant manuscripts descend, conventionally known as V,³ poems 2, 2b and 3 seem to have been presented as a unit with the editorial title *Fletus passeris Lesbie*, a unit which persisted into the early printed editions until separated into 2 (still including 2b) and 3 by Marcantonio Sabellico at the end of the fifteenth century.⁴ The further separation between 2 and 2b emerged a little later: in 1521 Alessandro Guarino reported finding a lacuna in a *codex antiquissimus* after 2.10,⁵ while in 1566 Aquiles Estaço (Achilles

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The main exception is perhaps the best edition, G.P. Goold, *Catullus* (London 1983); the most recent and detailed advocate of separation is D.F.S. Thomson, *Catullus* (Toronto 1997) 205-6.

For a convenient summary of the textual transmission of Catullus see R.J. Tarrant in L.D. Reynolds (ed.), *Texts and Transmission* (Oxford 1983) 43-5.

⁴ Cf. Julia Haig Gaisser, Catullus and his Renaissance Readers (Oxford 1993) 49.

Alexandri Guarini In C. Valerium Catullum Veronensem per Baptistam patrem emendatum expositiones (Venice 1521) 26: post hoc carmen in codice antiquissimo et manuscripto ingens sequitur fragmentum; nos tamen coniecturis omissis quae scripta sunt interpretabimur. This comment is not wholly clear (cf. T. Wirth, 'Catullus c.2: passer und malum als Zeichen der Liebe', RhM 129 (1986) 36-53, at 39-42), and the mention of a codex antiquissimus is suspicious, but the detail seems specific enough to be genuine.

Statius) argued that 2.11-13 did not cohere with 2.1-10,6 but the first editor to print the two pieces with a lacuna intervening seems to have been Karl Lachmann in 1829.7 Baehrens' suggestion after the rediscovery and close collation of O that this key manuscript has an (undatable) critical sign after 2.10 which indicates that a reader separated 2.1-10 from 2.11-13 (which in fact matches another sign in the manuscript which separates 2.13 from 3.1) is not as helpful as it seems, since an inspection even of the facsimile shows that O is marked with the same critical sign after 2.7, which is a distinctly improbable point of poem-division.8

The complex and gradual way in which the accepted modern poem-divisions of the Catullan collection emerged in the post-printing era⁹ demonstrates that divisions between sequential poems in the same metre in the manuscript tradition of Catullus are essentially editorial; modern editors must make such divisions on the basis of internal and stylistic evidence rather than transmission, which is dangerously unreliable. Lachmann's separation of 2 and 2b has been followed by editors for several reasons. Even those who want 2 and 2b to be part of the same poem are deterred by the considerable difficulties of syntax from reading 2b as a sequential consideration of 2, while for those who want to separate 2b off as part of a different poem argue that 2 is formally complete and thematically unified as it stands without 2b, and that the myth of Atalanta and the apple in 2b is incoherent or inconsistent with the picture of Lesbia and the sparrow in 2. In this article I wish to argue that 2 and 2b should be treated as a syntactical and thematic unit, following the inclinations of recent critics but attempting to provide further literary arguments and (I hope) a more satisfactory textual solution than those which have previously been offered in modern scholarship. In this article I wish to argue that 2 and 2b should be treated as a syntactical and thematic unit, following the inclinations of recent critics but attempting to provide further literary arguments and (I hope) a more satisfactory textual solution than those which have previously been offered in modern scholarship. In this article I wish to argue that 2 and 2b should be treated as a syntactical and thematic unit, following the inclinations of recent critics but attempting to provide further literary arguments and (I hope) a more satisfactory textual solution than those which have previously been offered in modern scholarship.

⁶ Catullus cum commentario Achillis Statii Lusitani (Venice 1566) 20: et vero haec cum superioribus usquequaque non cohaerent.

In Q. [sic] Valerii Catulli Veronensis Liber (Berlin 1829). In 1828 C. Spengel, using Guarino's observation, had already argued that 2b was the ending of a second poem on the passer different from 2 ('Specimen lectionum in C. Valerii Catulli carmina', Neues Archiv für Philologie und Pädagogik 3 (1828) 93-127 at 109-10); following this L. Schwabe in his 1866 Giessen edition (Catulli Veronensis Liber), made 2b the conclusion of a six-line poem beginning with the three-line fragment 14b, a notion taken up by Baehrens in his 1885 edition (Catulli Veronensis Liber (Berlin 1885) II.80), but which undervalues the erotic content of 2b, inappropriate to the address to readers in 14b.

E. Baehrens, Catulli Veronensis Liber (Leipzig 1893) 5. For the facsimile cf. R.A.B. Mynors (ed.), Catullus: Carmina. Codex Oxoniensis Bibliothecae Bodleianae Canonicianus Class.Lat.30 (Leiden 1966).

⁹ See Gaisser (n. 4), esp. 401-2.

Cf. S.J. Heyworth 'Dividing poems' in O. Pecere & M.D. Reeve (edd.), Formative stages of classical traditions: Latin texts from antiquity to the renaissance (Spoleto 1995), 117-48, esp. 131-6.

For the most detailed discussion cf. M. Zicàri, *Scritti Catulliani* (Urbino 1976), 160-79; for a full bibliography on the poem cf. Thomson (n. 2) 204-5.

For recent unitarians cf. F. Felgentreu, 'Passer und malum in Catulls c.2', Philologus 137 (1993) 216-22, W. Fitzgerald, Catullan Provocations (Berkeley 1995) 42-4, Heyworth in Harrison and Heyworth (n. 14) 86-7, D. Wray, Catullus and the Poetics of Roman Manhood (Cambridge 2001) 201.

Poem 2 as it stands in Mynors' edition is an address to the sparrow of a quasihymnic kind, ¹³ and though its ten lines have their own textual problems, ¹⁴ it is clear that they speak to the sparrow throughout (1 passer, 9 tecum) in the usual second-person address of the hymnic mode. The abrupt third person of 2b is therefore particularly unwelcome for those who view it as belonging to 2, and indeed seems to provide a syntactical structure which is incompatible with the grammar of 2. Advocates of unity have argued that tecum ludere in 9 could be the implied subject of gratum est, ('to play with you is pleasant'), but the intervening possem makes this very difficult. The indicative est would be an inappropriate construction after the subjunctive possem (we would surely expect esset or foret). In terms of the sense, too, if we read possem, playing with the sparrow is an ambition and not an actuality for the poet/speaker, and it would not be the wish but the fact which would be gratum to him. Gugel, the most extensive modern advocate of unity, fails to deal with this problem: he translates 9-13 as 'Könnte ich mit dir so wie sie selbst spielen und die trauervollen Sorgen meines Herzens zu lindern, ist mir das so lieb wie ...', and the inconcinnity between the poet/speaker's wish ('könnte ich') and the definite statement of gratum est ('ist mir das so lieb') remains in his version.¹⁵ Attempts to defend the transmitted text by citing the parallel of Martial 2.63.3 luxuria est, si tanti dives amares, 'it is pure luxury, even if you were rich, to love at such a price', are unconvincing; 16 Martial's conditional uses an indicative protasis as a vivid construction common in conditional sentences, whereas the combination of this vivid construction and an inverted protasis in Catullus ('should I be able to play ... it is (i.e. would be) pleasant to me') seems very difficult, especially without an overt conditional marker such as si.

Advocates of unity have thus taken one of two courses. On the one hand, they have followed Guarino's report of a lacuna before 2b and used it to explain the move from second to third person: so e.g. Ellis, 'hence it seems probable that some verse like *Tecum ludere sic ut ipsa ludit* has fallen out'. Such a lacuna is adopted by almost all the scholars who argue for 2 and 2b as one poem, mostly with the suggestion that one line or not much more has dropped out. If there is a large lacuna, then of course it is impossible to guess what is lost, and unity is a vain quest. But if the proposed lacuna is short, the switch from second to third person still seems undesirable, and there seems to be no vital gap in content which a short lacuna would supply other than the grammatical means of moving to the third person; the idea of playing with the sparrow as the source of the poet/speaker's pleasure is already in the poem and does not need to be repeated (as it is in Ellis's *exempli gratia* supplement).

J.D. Bishop, 'Catullus 2 and its Hellenistic antecedents', *CPh* 61 (1966) 158-67.

¹⁴ Cf. e.g. S.J. Heyworth in S.J. Harrison and S.J. Heyworth, 'Notes on the text and interpretation of Catullus', *PCPhS* 44 (1998) 85-6.

H. Gugel, 'Die Einheit von Catulls erste Passergedicht', Latomus 27 (1968) 810-22, at 812.

For the most detailed analysis cf. Zicàri (n. 11), 154-60 (who eventually rejects the unity of 2 and 2b). P. Claes, 'Catullus' sparrow uncurtailed', *Philologus* 140 (1996) 353 cites Seneca *Medea* 552-4 *suprema liceat abeuntem loqui / mandata, liceat ultimum amplexum dare: / gratum est et illud*, but the indicative *est* there is a great deal more natural after the more definite jussive subjunctives *liceat* ... *liceat* than after the wish of *posset* in Catullus.
 R. Ellis, *A Commentary on Catullus* (Oxford 1876) 6.

On the other hand, unitarians have tried to emend the text in order to give lines 9-10 a construction which solves the considerable grammatical difficulties created by attempting to join it to 2b.18 To this end, Voss proposed posse for possem in 2.9, giving an infinitive construction governed by gratum est ('to be able to play with you as she does and to relieve the sad cares of my mind is as pleasant to me as ...'). But this, (besides presenting a convoluted construction) would undermine what seems to be a key theme of the poem's emotional drama, the way in which the poet/speaker wishes that he were in the position of the *puella* in dispelling his erotic pain in playing with the bird, rather than as a statement that he already enjoys that same benefit; as I see it, the point of 2b is to say that the poet/speaker's pleasure comes from contemplating the passer in the form of this poem rather than playing with it, which is presented as an unobtainable wish. The same criticism could be made of Housman's otherwise neat suggestion passer for posse, with ludere again governed by gratum est, which at least has the benefit of continuing the address to the bird, or Birt's lamer possum for the same. A further possibility would be to finish the wish immediately after possem and read line 10 as beginning a new sentence and governing tam gratum est: this would require emending et in line 10 to e.g. sic ('to thus relieve the sad cares of my mind is as pleasant to me as ...'), but this again raises the problem that gratum est would express a factual situation rather than the remote possibility expressed in possem, and removes the natural balance of lines 5-8 and 9-10, in which the *puella*'s actual ability to assuage her erotic pain through playing with the bird seems to be set against the poet-speaker's unfulfilled wish to do the same.

If as I believe, *possem* is to be kept in 2.9 and 2 and 2b are to be read as a single poem without a lacuna, a different angle of emendation is required. As so often, this is available in Renaissance work on Catullus. The abrupt third person of *tam gratum est* may be removed by adopting the reading *tam gratum es* in 2b.1:

Tam gratum **es** mihi quam ferunt puellae pernici aureolum fuisse malum, quod zonam soluit diu ligatam.

This reading is found in the second printed edition of Catullus published at Parma in 1473 by Francesco Puteolano, and, given Puteolano's claim to have made extensive corrections of the 1472 Venetian *editio princeps*, ¹⁹ should probably be considered as his own conjecture. *Es* has been neglected by Catullan editors, ²⁰ but solves a number of problems. Above all, it maintains the hymnic second-person address to the sparrow which characterises poem 2 throughout: 'you are such a pleasant thing to me...'. Though Bishop in his analysis of 2 as hymnic in structure²¹ in fact regarded 2b as alien to the hymn-structure and therefore as a separate poem, 2b can in fact now be viewed as a hymnic praise of the bird's attractiveness to the poet/speaker; the idea that a god is

See esp. Heyworth (loc. cit., n. 14).

¹⁹ cf. Gaisser (n. 4) 33-4.

R. Ellis, Catulli Veronensis Liber (Oxford 1878) 7 is the last to mention it in the apparatus criticus.

²¹ Cf. n. 13 above.

gratus to others and therefore deserving of hymnic praise appears in a hymnic context at the close of Horace's hymn to Hermes, *Odes* 1.10 (17-20):

tu pias laetis animas reponis sedibus uirgaque leuem coerces aurea turbam, superis deorum gratus et imis.

The expression gratum es might seem strange, where es refers to a masculine subject, but this can be perfectly acceptable grammar in Latin. First, it is important to note that gratum is substantivised, as for example at Horace Odes 3.3.17-18 gratum elocuta consiliantibus / Iunone divis, 'when Juno pronounced something pleasant to the gods in council'. Second, the substantivised adjective is in a predicative position, with tu (masculine) understood; this usage with nouns of other genders ('you are such a pleasant thing for me') is paralleled in Greek since Homer (Iliad 2.204 οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη), and also in Latin: cf. Plautus Mil. 685 bona uxor suave ductu est, Lucilius fr. 608 Marx nunc ignobilitas his mirum ac mortificabile, Cicero Tusc. 2.31 turpitudo peius est quam dolor, Vergil Ecl. 3.80-1 triste lupus stabulis, maturibus frugibus imbres (cf. [Theocritus] 8.57 δένδρεσι μὲν χειμών φοβερὸν κακόν), Ovid Am. 1.9.4 turpe senex miles, turpe senilis amor with McKeown's note, LHS 2.444-5. All these are of course gnomic third person usages, with est or its equivalent stated or understood, whereas tam gratum es would be second person: but similar uses with the second person can also be found in Latin. We may compare Seneca Con. 2.1.13 O paupertas, quam ignotum bonum es! and Seneca HO 1256 (Hercules addresses the poison that afflicts him) omne es malum nullumque. These are both inanimate ideas where the neuter gender is easier, but neuter gratum is also perhaps eased in Catullus 2b by anticipatory assimilation to the gender of malum and quod.

Once this solution can be suggested to the syntactical problem, we can turn to issues of theme and poetic form. Commentators on Catullus 2 have seldom asked why the puella has a sparrow, 22 except in remarking that the passer is a common pet in antiquity. The erotic characterization of the sparrow in Catullus 2, however, has been much remarked: its biting at 2.4 bears comparison with the erotic biting of 8.18 cui labella mordebis?, and while I side with those who argue that the passer is not a phallic symbol, 23 it is clearly an erotic bird, connected with Aphrodite since Sappho fr. 1.10 L/P and said by Pliny to match the dove in salacitas (Pliny NH 10.109). Since birds were common love-gifts in antiquity, Wirth may possibly be right to suggest that the passer is a persuasive present from the poet-speaker to the puella; 24 though the poem does not openly allude to this provenance for the bird, this would explain the poet's feeling of ownership and hyperbolic grief in the 'lament' for the sparrow in poem 3 (3.15 tam bellum mihi passerem abstulistis) as well as the erotic colour of the passer (whether phallic or not) in poem 2.

Wirth (n. 5) 37 is an honourable exception here.

For the controversy (going back to Pontanus and Politian) see conveniently Thomson (n. 2) 202-3.

²⁴ So Wirth (n. 5) 48-50.

As advocates of unity have suggested, this function of the sparrow as a love-gift in fact argues for the unity of poems 2 and 2b, since it provides a link with the apple of 2b. As commentators have remarked, 2b (though an 'implicit myth'25 without proper names) plainly refers to the erotically slanted version of the Atalanta story in which she fell in love with her victor Hippomenes and was pleased to pick up the golden apples and thus lose the race, a version found famously in Theocritus 3.40-42, Ovid Met. 10.659-61 and possibly in Philetas:²⁶ ferunt (2b.1) is thus an 'Alexandrian footnote' pointing back to known Hellenistic treatments of the theme.²⁷ This clearly evokes the tradition of apples as love-tokens, another Hellenistic topos, found in Catullus at 65.19-24.28 The poem then achieves a neat ring-compositional unity: the love-token of the passer is compared to the love-token of the apple. Indeed, the traditional plural of the apples of the Hesperides picked up by Atalanta (Ovid has three in his version of the story at Met. 10.649-80) seems to have been telescoped to a single apple to aid the comparison.²⁹ This link is reinforced by the symmetrical pairing of affective diminutives: just as the sparrow is for the puella a solaciolum sui doloris (2.7), so for Atalanta the apple is not merely *aureum* but *aureolum* (2b.2). Just as the attractive golden apple provided the way for Hippomenes to Atalanta's love, so the charming sparrow (and the sparrow-poem) are meant to do the same for the poet-speaker Catullus.

The comparison of the two love-tokens implied by this reading involves a transgendered link between Catullus himself and Atalanta. If we follow the interpretation of the *passer* as love-gift, the bird is his gift as wooer to the *puella*, whereas the apple is a gift received (in this version of the Atalanta story) as a love-gift by a *puella*, whose pleasure at receiving it he compares to his own enjoyment of the sparrow's antics; thus in the unified poem of 2 and 2b, the poet/speaker could figure himself as both giver and recipient of love-tokens. This is not necessarily an undesirable contradiction: as recent scholarship has emphasised, the poet/speaker in Catullus' erotic poetry is sometimes presented as oscillating between the traditional 'male' role of the dominant partner and the 'female' role of the subordinate partner.³⁰ This transgendering seems to be especially common in the indirect mode of simile: the famous simile of 11.21-4 compares the poet/speaker's love to the 'female' fragile flower, the indifference of the *puella* to the 'male' ploughshare, that of 65.13-14 compares the mourning Catullus to the mourning Philomela/nightingale, that at 65.17-24 (quoted below) likens the poet/speaker to a virgin, and that at 68.135-40 compares the *puella* to the adulterous

For 'implicit myth' cf. R.O.A.M. Lyne, Further Voices in Vergil's Aeneid (Oxford 1987) 139-44.

²⁶ See now K. Spanoudakis, *Philetas of Cos* [Mnemosyne Suppl.229] (Leiden 2002) 330-2.

For such devices see conveniently N.M. Horsfall, 'Virgil and the Illusory Footnote', *PLLS* 6 (1990) 49-63.

See A.S.F. Gow's note on Theoritus 5.88.

²⁹ Gugel 817-8. The existence of a particular type of quince known as a μῆλον στρουθεῖον (cf. Antipater AP 6.252.1) may also form a subtle link here; — see Felgentreu (n. 12).

E.g. in the work of M. Janan, "When the Lamp is Shattered": Desire and Narrative in Catullus (Carbondale, Ill., 1994) or M.B. Skinner, 'Ego mulier: The Construction of Male Sexuality in Catullus' in J.P. Hallett and M.B. Skinner (eds.), Roman Sexualities (Princeton 1998) 129-50.

Jupiter, the poet/speaker to the wronged Juno. This element clearly co-exists in 2b with some identification between Hippomenes and the poet/speaker: there is surely some sense in which Hippomenes' conquest of Atalanta reflects the poet/speaker's (desired or actual) conquest of his *puella*, and the detail of *diu ligatam* (2b.3), appropriate to the Turandot-style Atalanta myth, may also suggest her initial lack of complaisance, perhaps softened by the gift of the *passer* and the *passer*-poem.

Finally (fittingly) the issue of closure. Literary commentators on Catullus 2 have often stated that 2.9-10, with the wish to play with the sparrow, presents a closure which is both formally and psychologically satisfying; the closing wish would parallel the closing wishes which end poems 1, 28 or 38, and the climax of the poem would be the (unfulfilled) desire to play with the sparrow, not the expression of affection for the bird in 2b. But three elements here suggest that 2b also provides an appropriate closure for a unified poem, though such a closural analysis does not of course exclude the possibility of a lacuna after 2.10.

First, the element of implicit myth. Here we may compare the closing stanza of Catullus 51 (13-15):

otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est: otio exsultas nimiumque gestis: otium et reges prius et beatas perdidit urbes.

Here it is very likely that some mythological narrative underlies these closing gnomic references to the destruction of kings and cities, whether or not the allusion is to the destruction of Troy, as I have recently argued elsewhere.³¹ Another lyric closure through implicit myth can be found at Horace *Odes* 2.5.21-4:

quem si puellarum insereres choro, mire sagaces falleret hospites, discrimen obscurum solutis crinibus ambiguoque vultu.

Here commentators agree that there is a reference to the story of the young Achilles on Scyros,³² whose disguise as a girl amongst the maidens of Deidamia was penetrated only by the tricks of Odysseus (cf. e.g. Statius *Ach.* 1.852-66).

Second, the ending of the poem in a simile; as Svennung has pointed out,³³ Catullan poems often end in such an extended comparison (11, 17, 25), and we may compare especially the already mentioned ending of Catullus 65, a simile again involving an apple (17-24):

ne tua dicta uagis nequiquam credita uentis effluxisse meo forte putes animo, ut missum sponsi furtiuo munere malum

^{31 &#}x27;The Fatal Gaze: Paris, Helen and the Unity of Catullus 51', *Classical Bulletin* 77 (2001) 161-7.

³² See Nisbet and Hubbard's commentary ad loc.

J. Svennung, Catulls Bildersprache: Vergleichende Studien I (Uppsala/Leipzig 1945) 50,
 52.

procurrit casto uirginis e gremio, quod miserae oblitae molli sub ueste locatum, dum aduentu matris prosilit, excutitur, atque illud prono praeceps agitur decursu, huic manat tristi conscius ore rubor.

This pattern of closure by simile is also found extensively elsewhere: we may compare the famous simile comparing Regulus to a lawyer on holiday which closes Horace *Odes* 3.5 (53-6), or the briefer image comparing the handsome Nearchus to Nireus or Ganymede which concludes Horace *Odes* 3.20.15-16.³⁴

Third, the final line of the unified poem argued for here would provide a very appropriate closural element in the idea of the unloosing of the girdle of Atalanta in marriage with Hippomenes. In the formulation of Massimo Fusillo, 'marriage is a biographical event with strong closural force';³⁵ marriage as a form of literary closure occurs most notably in the Greek novels and in the plots of New Comedy. In shorter poems, such closure can be found in mythological narratives such as Moschus' *Europa*, which ends with the following lines (162-66):

φαίνετο μὲν δὴ Κρήτη Ζεὺς δὲ πάλιν σφετέρην ἀνελάζετο μορφήν λῦσε δέ οἱ μίτρην, καί οἱ λέχος ἔντυον Ἦραι. ἡ δὲ πάρος κούρη Ζηνὸς γένετ ἀὐτίκα νύμφη, καὶ Κρονίδη τέκε τέκνα καὶ αὐτίκα γίνετο μήτηρ.

Here we find not only the general resemblance of a climax of sexual union but a particular similarity in the male's loosing of erotically significant female clothing as a euphemistic term for sexual possession ($\lambda\hat{v}\sigma\epsilon$ $\delta\epsilon$ of $\mu(\tau\rho\eta\nu)$). Non-marital sexual consummation can be a sign of closure elsewhere in Catullus: in poem 56 the poet finds a boy already engaged in sexual activity and ends the poem by congress with him (56.5-7), and in poem 59 the promiscuous Rufa from Bologna ends the poem by being penetrated by a half-shaven undertaker (59.5). The point of sexual union is thus an appropriate point of poetic closure. In a unitary poem of 2 and 2b it is also highly coherent with the logic of the poem; the image of sexual fulfilment in the transmitted 2b in the mythological union of Atalanta and Hippomenes forms a suitable sequel to and fantasised climax of the erotic yearning of the *passer*-scene. Lesbia's playing with the sparrow parallels Atalanta's joy in the golden apple, both being preludes to sexual consummation.

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For simile as a mark of closure cf. now I.M. Le M. Du Quesnay, 'Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur: Epode 1' in Tony Woodman and Denis Feeney, Traditions and Contexts in the Poetry of Horace (Cambridge 2002) 17-37 at 27 n. 97.

M. Fusillo, 'How Novels End; Some Patterns of Closure in Ancient Narrative' in D.H. Roberts, F.M. Dunn and D. Fowler (eds.), Classical Closure (Princeton 1997) 209-27 at 218; cf. also B. Herrnstein Smith, Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End (Chicago 1968) 117-21.

On this common symbol cf. W. Bühler, Die Europa des Moschus [Hermes Einz.13] (Wiesbaden 1960) 200.