

# The Art(s) of Didactic Poetry in Antiquity: Observations on Ovid, Arcestratus, and Aratus

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*“Und ich muß sogar zugeben, ich schaue allerhand Leute krumm an, von denen mir bekannt ist, daß sie nicht auf der Höhe der wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis sind, d.h. daß sie singen, wie der Vogel singt oder wie man sich vorstellt, daß der Vogel singt. Damit will ich nicht sagen, daß ich ein hübsches Gedicht über den Geschmack einer Flunder oder das Vergnügen einer Wasserpartie nur deshalb ablehne, weil sein Verfasser nicht Gastronomie oder Nautik studiert hat. Aber ich meine, daß die großen verwickelten Vorgänge in der Welt von Menschen, die nicht alle Hilfsmittel für ihr Verständnis herbeiziehen, nicht genügend erkannt werden können.”*

Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater? Bertolt Brecht, GBA 22.1, 113

Since Plato’s attack on the wisdom and competence of poets in the dialogue *Ion*, there was a growing debate about poetic ‘art’ in ancient Greece. Plato famously argued that when poets compose, they are mad with *enthousiasmós*, possession by the gods that generates inspiration. Thus, they do not possess any knowledge; rather, they are *inspired*. Plato has no interest in considering their versifying skill. The point for him is that poets do not know what they do or what they talk about in their poems. One famous argument of Socrates is that, when Homeric poetry mentions “chariot riding” (*heniocheía*), only charioteers are truly experts of this topic, while poets have no competence about it.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, this argument, to the eyes of many Greeks, might have sounded counter intuitive. Divine inspiration, indeed, is a traditional feature of the Greek imagery about poetry. But so is the idea in Greek culture that poems did convey valuable, truthful information, such as knowledge about myths and the gods, or knowledge about the right behavior.<sup>2</sup> Plato, however, throws a stone into the water. He raised a more fundamental question about the poets’ expertise: what do the poets really know and what makes their work artistic? Does a poem provide knowledge? Or what else should characterize it?

Indeed, at the time of Plato and Aristotle, during the fourth century BCE, it was not just poetry to be under scrutiny in the philosophical circles. Almost any domain of human activity implying knowledge and expertise could be examined with the same tough questions, and many domains indeed were examined in similar way, in Plato’s dialogues.<sup>3</sup> The Greeks posited an idea of ‘art’, *téchnē* (or, from now on, *techne*), which is much broader than the eighteenth-century concept of ‘fine arts’; for *techne* may be applied to any human activity requiring some specific ability, not just the domains of artistic creativity – medicine, shoemaking, and poetry could all be considered ‘art’ alike, in ancient Greece. One perhaps restricting feature of any ancient *techne*, which however depended on certain ideological stands, is that it relates to human ‘making’ rather than abstract doing. In this sense, philosophers tended to

contrast *techne* (the art of making something) with *episteme* (deep knowledge of something), which of course concerned them very much. Yet, *techne* does not belong only to ancient philosophical discourses.<sup>4</sup>

Some didactic poems of Antiquity appear to engage quite directly with the topic of *techne* and take Brecht's exceptional fondness for knowledge (in the opening quote) to the extreme.<sup>5</sup> One thinks, for example, of Oppian's poem *Halieutica* (*On Fishing*), in whose proem the poet declares to be dealing with a battle between the *techne* of fishes and the one of humans who try to capture them.<sup>6</sup> However, the most patent example of didactic poetry featuring *techne* that comes to mind is not Oppian, but Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*. As we will see below, Ovid goes as far as to embed the very idea of *techne* in the title of his poem, possibly for the first time in the history of this genre in Antiquity.

In scholarly discussions, ancient didactic poetry is sometimes considered a 'technical' form of literature. The 'technical' aspect of didactic poems would seem to concern mainly their contents, not the poems' form, which is described instead as literary. And so, didactic poetry appears to be both 'technical' and, at the same time, more than just technical.<sup>7</sup> To what extent were didactic poems considered 'artistic' in our modern sense? Or should we call them simply 'technical' poems in the sense that they deal with *techne* as a form of practical expertise? Was the 'art' of ancient didactic poems one specific domain that ancient audiences easily identified? Or was this somewhat unclear? These are some of the key questions that I am concerned with, as I wish to explore to what extent the ancient poets themselves utilize the idea of *techne* and what is the added value that the concept of *techne* brings to their poetic works.

I will present three authors to address these questions, namely in order: Ovid, whom I take as example of a poet who grandly advertises the presence of *ars* in his poem; then, Arcestratus of Gela, the first, partly extant poet to write 'didactic poems' in Greece in the manner that will impose itself in the following centuries, and an early example of how this poetry engages with what idea(s) about *ars*; and, lastly, Aratus of Soli, the likely most canonical author of this type of poetry in Antiquity. This selection of authors, to be sure, does not provide a full picture of didactic poetry in Antiquity, with all its peculiarities. But it does have some paradigmatic meaning for two reasons. First, Arcestratus and Aratus are significant within the history of didactic poetry, as I anticipated, because the former is a pioneer in this genre and the latter is a widely popular and influential author.<sup>8</sup> Thus, analysis of their poems is useful to understand also certain features of the didactic genre more in general. Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, on the other hand, while perhaps being less influential for the whole history of the genre, becomes paradigmatic in so far as one explores the issue of didactic 'art'. For, this work features the topic of *techne* much more extensively than many other didactic poems.

But before I move to these authors, I wish to make a preamble about ancient didactic poetry as genre. For one might then wonder whether these questions about didactic poetry and *techne* would find an easy solution if one considered first the meaning and category of the 'didactic' – a name that by itself seems to evoke the idea of knowledge and the sharing of a certain form of expertise.

## 1. Premise: the *art* of didactic poems in Antiquity, and the question of genre

The category of the 'didactic' is far from being clear when one considers the ancient texts. With the necessity here of keeping the discussion short, one must first reckon with the apparent lack of explicit theorization about didactic poetry in Antiquity. This strikes us since we are familiar with didactic poetry as a genre of western literature. Indeed, didactic poetry became part of the literary debate in the Eighteenth century and then entered our toolbox of literary criticism. In the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, reception of ancient texts, such as notably Vergil's *Georgics*, Horace's *Ars Poetica*, or Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, contributed to the very establishment of didactic poetry as a (modern) genre.<sup>9</sup> But it is important not to underestimate any differences between Greco-Roman Antiquity and later moments in the history of western literature. Indeed, some ancient Roman poets make more extensive references about their role in providing instruction – one good example being Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* (see below); they sometimes associate themselves with other authors who compose instructional poetry, thus apparently contributing to an idea of 'didactic' genre.<sup>10</sup> Yet, for what we know, the ancients did not define or theorize a 'didactic' genre as we sometimes think of it now in scholarly discussions about literary genres in general terms.<sup>11</sup> This is not to claim that ancient didactic poems did not belong to a genre, in Antiquity. They did, indeed. The point here is that the term 'didactic' might not adequately describe ancient genres.

The first definitions of 'didactic poetry' in Antiquity come from Late Antiquity. These, however, pose some problems in my view, in so far as (1) they do not necessarily aim to convey heavy theorization of the genre, and (2) might stem from a cultural milieu that cannot entirely account for the one in which earlier didactic poems circulated. In commenting on these Late Antique passages, I will argue that the name 'didactic poetry', though appearing to link with the ancient word *didascalicus*, did not necessarily correspond to the latter in cultural meaning.<sup>12</sup> This in turn will suggest that ancient readers did not base their idea of what didactic poems do simply on the term 'didactic'. Ideas about the *techne* of ancient didactic poems were instead one way for ancient readers and poets to shape the meaning of these poems.

The grammarian Diomedes, who lived in the second half of the fourth century CE, employed the term 'didactic' (*didascalicus*) within a theory of poetic genres in his *Ars grammatica*. In the third book of this work, he discusses poetry in more general terms. Diomedes posits three broad "genres" (*genera*) of poetry, which reflect the traditional, Platonic tripartition of poetry. These genres are "mimetic" poetry (like drama), "declarative" poetry (like any poem without internal dialogues), and "mixed" poetry (like epic). Within the macro-genre of declarative poetry (the *enarrativum* or *enuntiativum genus*), Diomedes distinguishes more sub-genres or 'kinds' (*species*), among which we find the *species didascalica*:<sup>13</sup>

"The narrative kinds are three: advisory, historical, and didactic. (...) The didactic kind is the one in which the philosophy of Empedocles and Lucretius is included, also astronomy, like the *Phaenomena* of Aratus and Cicero, the *Georgics* of Virgil, and other poems like these." (Transl. mine)

Though the authors cited by Diomedes are very good examples of what one traditionally considers ancient 'didactic poetry', we should not buy too quickly into such an apparent parallelism between ancient and modern terms (and concepts). First, because the expression *didascalica species*, used for one specific poetic genre here, does not find parallels

in earlier ancient thinking. Note that *didascalice* is the Latin equivalent of a Greek word (διδασκαλική). Diomedes, of whom nearly nothing is known, appears to be active in the East of the Roman empire where Greek influence was stronger.<sup>14</sup>

Besides, Diomedes does not define or explain this *didascalica species* except for providing the list of ancient authors. So, yes, it belongs to the “declarative genre”, and so it shares the feature of having the poet himself speak alone, in the text.<sup>15</sup> But, and this is important too, Diomedes does not provide definitions for the three *species* within this genre. What characterizes an “advisory”, a “historical”, and a “*didascalice*” kind in a way that these three remain separate forms of poetry?

There has been the idea in the scholarship that Diomedes is borrowing this classification of genres from more ancient, even Hellenistic sources.<sup>16</sup> But ultimately, this is pure speculation, in so far as it assumes that Diomedes, being a compiler of authoritative, older sources, does not add any personal perspective to the presentation of his information. But, while indeed it is easy to imagine that ancient grammars of Late Antiquity were not always original works but rather are the result of a long expert-tradition, these works still were cultural products and, as such, were affected by contemporary trends. As scholars have pointed out, Diomedes was a teacher, and his *Ars* was functional to his teaching activity. This is a context that one should not overlook, I think, when we read Diomedes’ pages about ancient poetry. His explanations are quite schematic and contain traditional elements (such as Plato’s tripartite scheme of poetry). They do not seem to be aiming at a deeper theorization of poetry.

Now, I do not wish to argue that Diomedes made entirely up a genre such as the *didascalica species*. As we have seen, his definition of the *enarrativum genus* is in fact traditional, not new. But I wish to argue that his choice of the name *didascalicus*, which we can also translate as “teacherly”, has something to do with the context – Late Antique schooling – in which Diomedes operated, rather than being of much earlier origin. I suggest this possibility due to the following two reasons: (a) one is *ex silentio*, namely that we do not find any discussions of *didascalica species* in Greek or Latin authors prior to Late Antiquity; (b) there is a significant change in the sociology of ancient culture in Late Antiquity, one which sees an unprecedented, greater social prestige and self-awareness that teachers and ‘teacherly circles’ gain in the transmission and production of literature and knowledge, while in earlier periods these realities did not belong to the core of cultural patronage.<sup>17</sup> In addition, there is certainly a link between Diomedes and the context of education. His grammar was designed to have an increasing level of complexity that matched with the different ages of learners of Latin, it belonged to the school context.<sup>18</sup> In light of these aspects, one can entertain the possibility that Late Antique grammarians like Diomedes used the term *didascalicus* to mean ‘instructional poems’ without making any deep point about the genre of these poems.

One last example from this period goes in the same direction. Around the time of Diomedes, another Latin author adopts the term *didascalicus* with the same meaning of ‘teacherly’ and ‘instructional’. Servius, in his commentary on Vergil’s didactic poem *Georgics*, without providing a full theory of poetry, gives us a definition of the genre of the *Georgics*:

“*et hi libri didascalici sunt, unde necesse est, ut ad aliquem scribantur; nam praeceptum et doctoris et discipuli personam requirit: unde ad Maecenatem scribit sicut Hesiodus ad Persen, Lucretius ad Memmium.*” (Servius *In Verg. Georg.* I. pr. 1.)

“And these books (the *Georgics*) are instructional, thus it is necessary that they are addressed to someone; for, a precept requires the person of a teacher and of a student. Hence, Virgil writes for Maecenas, like Hesiod for Perses, Lucretius for Memmius.” (Transl. mine)

Servius makes more explicit the parallelism between the transmission of knowledge in poetry and the schooling context. Since the books of the *Georgics* are *didascalici*, they require an addressee, a *discipulus*, the student, to whom a *doctorgives* his advice (*praeceptum*). Now, even in the case of Servius, the teacherly circle appears to be an important context. The commentary on the *Georgics* was conceived also as a school text, like Late Antique grammars.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Servius, being in the same business of teaching like Diomedes, could use the term *didascalicus* without having any intention of making a high point of literary criticism. He would be adopting the terminology that refers to the school context in which he was active.<sup>20</sup>

I am not suggesting that there is no instruction or teaching in ancient didactic poems. I want to underline that, due to the context in which it is used, the term *didascalicus* does not necessarily tell us the whole story of what this genre does (in relation to knowledge). Due to these gaps between the reality of ancient didactic poems and the label of ‘didactic’ as used in Late Antiquity and in the eighteenth century, it becomes now apparent that the term ‘didactic’ cannot alone provide answers to our questions about the *techne* of ancient didactic poems.<sup>21</sup> If ancient didactic poems were considered ‘didactic’ to mean that there was one patent form of knowledge transmission in the texts – be it an imagined teacherly situation or some other unique and unequivocal form of instructional setting –, we would not understand why the idea of *ars / techne* could be exploited by certain ancient authors in significantly complex ways. We need to look into the ancient poems themselves to understand what their ‘art(s)’ might be.

## 2. Foregrounding art: Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*

Ovid’s poem *Ars Amatoria* is perhaps the clearest example of didactic poetry in which the idea of *ars* takes a prominent position. The author not only put the word *ars* in the title – which is an absolute novelty for a didactic poem – but he also thematizes the role of *ars* throughout the poem. One significant passage where this occurs is, however, the opening of the first book. This passage is full of contradictions, or, better, of productive contrapositions. I have selected some of the most interesting lines that play with ideas linked with *ars/techne*, and I will point out how Ovid exploits the web of ideas that come with this concept.<sup>22</sup>

The first move of Ovid is to make clear from the beginning that *ars* also belongs to the very title of his poem. The very first two lines of the text read as follows (ll. 1-2):

“*Si quis in hoc artem populo non novit amandi,  
hoc legat et lecto carmine doctus amet.*”

“If anyone among this people does not know the art of love,  
let him read this poem and having read it be learned in love.”  
(transl. Goold, adapted)

The poet foregrounds the expression *ars amandi* by placing it in the very first line of the text. The poem is presented then as a material object, with emphasis both on reading that is

indeed required to access it (*hoc legat et lecto carmine*) and on the fact that the poem is a physical thing – a book – that can be pointed at (thanks to the deictic in the expression *hoc legat*).<sup>23</sup>

Ovid, in a later poem from the collection *Tristia* (2,1, 8), will call the poem about the “art of loving” just *Ars* (“Art”). Seneca the Elder, a contemporary author, refers to Ovid as the poet “who filled this age with amatory arts” (*qui hoc saeculum amatoris non artibus tantum... implevit*),<sup>24</sup> in what appears to be a playful allusion to the full title of the poem. Then, the medieval manuscript tradition passes down for us the title *Ars Amatoria*. So, the opening of the poem itself appears to feature the official title of the work. The first two lines create the illusion that we are still dealing with the paratextual dimension. One should not downplay this fact, which must have been surprising to ancient readers, as it was never tried before with the same boldness in this genre of poetry.<sup>25</sup> Titles of didactic poems are typically linked with the topics treated in these works.<sup>26</sup> But it is not common to find plain references to them in the texts. Consider, for example, Aratus’ canonical poem *Phainómena*: the proem does not make any references to the title; an indirect allusion to the title is found first only later, at line 41 (“the Great Bear being visible in its grandeur”, *pollè phainomènē Helíkē*), when the poet first uses the verb *pháinō*, “to be visible”. Examples closer to Ovid are Lucretius who inserts the title but later in the text, at 1.25 (*quos ego de rerum natura pangere conor*); and Nicander’s *Theriaca*, where the end of line 1 (*rheîá ké toi morphás te sínē t’ olofóia thērón*) alludes to the work’s title.<sup>27</sup>

Not just this. There is another significant novelty in Ovid. The title *Ars Amatoria* is new for an ancient reader of didactic poems, which tend to have simpler titles derived from names of their key topics without references to *technē*.<sup>28</sup> Ovid does not however invent his didactic title from scratch but borrows it from other contexts. In Antiquity, titles with the word *ars/technē* were common with prose works, such as those titled *ars rhetorica* or *ars grammatica*. These works belonged to a genre of prose, the ancient ‘handbook’, which is typically a text that fixes some form of *practical* knowledge in writing, including knowledge about love and love making.<sup>29</sup>

Ovid, by choosing an innovative title *for didactic poetry*, puts even greater emphasis on the idea of *technē*, but not without tensions. Already in the lines 1–2, we find a set of opposing ideas: the word *ars*, which as I said could mean practical handbook, is juxtaposed the word *carmen* in line 2, a term of uncertain etymology, which, however, often features the idea of song, elevated poetry, or incantation.<sup>30</sup> In this specific meaning of *carmen*, the *Ars Amatoria* would indeed seem to be quite remote from the reality of ancient handbooks. Besides, the opening of Ovid’s poem tells us about the goal of this work, namely, to instruct unexperienced people so that one becomes a learned lover (*si non novit... doctus amet*). But in what sense ‘learned’? There is, indeed, a clear expectation of knowledge transfer. But the *doctrina* promised by the poet is for now left unspecified. One wonders what science Ovid might impart, whether it is practical knowledge, or rather sophisticated and literary (or both).

In the next lines, *ars* then becomes almost an obsessive word, as the poet repeats it three times (ll. 3-4):

*“arte citae veloque rates remoque moventur,  
arte leves currus: arte regendus Amor.”*

“By skill swift ships are driven with sails and rows,  
by skill nimble chariots are too: by skill Love must be guided.”

The poet’s *ars amandi* is compared to a very practical skill, the *ars gubernandi*, the ability to steer a ship or a chariot: the poem aims to show how to be in control of love and how to steer it in the wished direction. Now *ars* is seen as a skill, the ability to do something practical with competence.<sup>31</sup>

A few lines later, Venus herself appoints Ovid *artifex*, “artist”, “skilled in the *ars*”, “master”; and she makes him “oversee” (*praeficio*) the young and undisciplined Cupid (ll. 7-10):

“*me Venus artificem tenero praefecit Amori:  
Tiphys et Automedon dicar Amoris ego.  
Ille quidam ferox est et qui mihi saepe repugnet,  
sed puer est, aetas mollis et apta regi.*”

“Venus set me over tender Love like a master in the art;  
I shall be called the Tiphys and Automedon of Love.  
Wild is he indeed, and apt often to fight against me;  
But he is a boy, tender his age and easily controlled.”

Ovid presents himself both as one that possesses *ars (amandi)* and as a skilled *gubernator*, an expert steersman, thus bringing together the two strands of expertise. A third aspect is Ovid’s *personal* experience with love, which is implied in the past tense of the verb *praefecit*. Later in the poem, at lines 21–24, Ovid will recall that he had been “pierced” and “burned” by Love. Indeed, Ovid’s experience with love is not just a private one; for, he was an established author of love poetry, by the time of composition of the *Ars Amatoria*.<sup>32</sup> For this reason, we can perhaps read into the word *artificem* here also the meaning of poet-*artifex (technitēs)* / “artisan” of words (about love). Ovid at any rate leaves a good degree of ambiguity in this phrase.

Later in the opening, the fact that Love is traditionally seen as the boy Cupid gives Ovid the excuse to draw on the idea that he can act literally as his ‘teacher’.<sup>33</sup> This is the famous image of the poet as *praeceptor amoris*, at line 1.17 and following:

“*Aeacidae Chiron, ego sum praeceptor Amoris;  
saevus uterque puer, natus uterque dea.*”

“Chiron taught the descendant of Aeacus, I am Love’s teacher;  
A fierce boy each, and each born of a goddess.”

The expression *praeceptor amoris* is no doubt very important to Ovid for more than one reason.<sup>34</sup> I wish to pause here on its literal meaning. In the quoted text, Ovid is comparing himself with Chiron, the wise centaur-creature who instructs young heroes like Achilles. Ovid the author was in his early forties when he composed this poem. Thus, in addressing his *Ars* to the unexperienced *populus* of Rome, the Roman *iuvenes* (the young), he is also counting on some age-difference that would well warrant his role of *praeceptor*. Since a context of *paideia* is being brought up here so openly, one can push it further. Ancient school-goers would traditionally be attending instruction in the *ars*

*grammatica* and *ars rhetorica* (and with instruction derived from *techne*-books). So, if Ovid is to be seen as a *praeceptor*, his lessons, the *Ars Amatoria*, could also be imagined as a sort of grammar and rhetoric of love.<sup>35</sup>

I mentioned that, in the first lines, *ars* and *carmen* might be seen as a contrasting pair. But it is only at lines 25–30 that Ovid exploits the tensions that the idea of *ars/techne* can create in a poetic text. For, the poet now rejects altogether the liberal arts (or so we are made to believe for a moment):

*“non ego, Phoebæ, datas a te mihi mentiar artes  
nec nos aëriæ voce monemur avis,  
nec mihi sunt visæ Clío Clíusque sorores  
servanti pecudes vallibus, Ascra, tuis.  
usus opus movet hoc: vati parete perito;  
vera canam: coeptis, mater Amoris, ades.”* (1, 25-30).

“I will not falsely claim that my art was given by you, Phæbus,  
nor am I taught by the voice of an airy bird,  
neither did Clío and Clío’s sisters appear to me  
while I guarded the sheep in your valley, Ascra.  
Experience inspires this work: give ear to the expert-bard;  
I shall sing true things: mother of Love, support my enterprise.”

Ovid says that he will not pretend to possess the *artes* of Apollo, the god that presides over the Muses; also, there was no epiphany of the Muses that inspired Ovid, like the Greek poet Hesiod who says to have met them on the mount Helicon (in the poem *Theogony*). The strong contrast that the poet creates here (see the repetition of the negation *non... nec... nec*) is between poetic inspiration and *usus*, experience. This is an anti-Platonic move: the poet claims that he is *not* divinely inspired; he has hands-on knowledge of what he talks about; therefore, he is truly an ‘expert’.<sup>36</sup> But he is no less an ‘artist’ for that. And, for this reason, this apparent contrast resolves in two cleverly devised expressions, *vates peritus* and *vera canere*. The first one is a beautiful oxymoron, as Volk points out.<sup>37</sup> Ovid claims to be a “well-trained seer” (or “prophet”), combining the religious and poetic term *vates* with the unpoetic word *peritus*<sup>38</sup> and the domain of *techne*, such as the traditional phrase *iuris peritus*, “man skilled in law”. Poetic inspiration here co-exists with *ars*/expert-knowledge.

Moreover, the expression *vera canere* is no less significant. The domain of Apollo and the Muses is set against the domain of expertise, which deals with *vera*, true things, reality, and knowledge of it; then, the unmentioned opposite domain, the one of *ficta*, “created stories”, is associated implicitly with Apollo and the Muses, and is here rejected. The expression used by Ovid is almost another oxymoron, in that *cano*, like *carmen*, refers to song, performance, and traditional poetry, while *vera* relates to expertise and truth (a type of learning conveyed also by ancient prose works). In the famous scene of poetic initiation that takes place in the Archaic Greek poem *Theogony*, the shepherd and poet Hesiod meets the Muses on the Mount Helicon. The Muses give Hesiod a gift, a “staff” made of laurel, and they “breathed an inspired voice” in him.<sup>39</sup> The goddesses, who are the source of song and inspiration, also claim to “know how to say many false things (*pseúdea*) similar to genuine ones” but they also “know how to proclaim true things”. Unlike Hesiod, Ovid *sings* but without the deities of song, who



(one may recall from Hesiod) also may tell him lies. So, Apollo and the Muses are dismissed. Ovid coherently invokes the goddess of love Venus instead of the Muses, to preside over his 'sung *techne*'.<sup>40</sup>

In conclusion, the opening of the *Ars Amatoria* shows that the idea of *ars/techne* is exploited at many levels by Ovid, in a key programmatic passage. We see references to the *ars*-handbook object, to practical knowledge, to education, to expertise, and to truth. I only discussed here those 'technical' goals of the *Ars* that the author focused on explicitly in these opening lines of the poem; but indeed, one must also consider the importance of this work within the literary discourse about the experience of love, of which Ovid is also a masterly author (e.g., with the work *Amores*). Notwithstanding such specific literary stakes, the *Ars Amatoria* showcases a complex discourse about *techne* in more general terms. It is very astounding that the idea of *ars* still holds such a promise of conceptual depth, in what is a partly ironic, a partly extremely serious discourse about the 'art' of steering love and of transmitting it to younger apprentices. Thus, the poem appears to be placed at a very mature point in the history of ancient didactic poems, three centuries after Aratus' canonical didactic poem *Phaenomena*. Now, I will discuss two earlier poems in the history of this genre and gauge their engagement with the topic of *techne*.

### 3. The many arts of a poet: Archestratus' *Hedupatheia*

At the very beginning of the history of ancient didactic poetry (in the Hellenistic style), a Greek poet named Archestratus faces a very different problem than Ovid. Archestratus wants to look for ways to jump in an ongoing debate about what *techne* is, a debate which might leave out poetry altogether, as philosophers like Plato were discussing this term to define more clearly what their own intellectual pursuits were about. The very fact that Archestratus composed a poem about gastronomical knowledge suggests that he found a solution for poetry to stay relevant with respect to *techne*. The title of this work is *Hedupatheia*, which means "pleasant living", it survives only in a moderate number of fragments. The amount of extant text still allows us to make some considerations about its characteristics.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, the opening of the poem is badly preserved, and my considerations on it will have to remain to some extent speculative. But what survive still is of interest for us. We must imagine that devising an opening for the *Hedupatheia* was no trivial task for Archestratus, given that the genre of Hellenistic didactic poems was yet in the making. So, then, what should a poet say to open such a poem? Let us look at the extant scraps of Archestratus' opening:

"fr. 1 *Making a display of the results of my research to all of Greece*

fr. 2 *†I travelled around Asia and Europe†*

fr. 3 [...] *Where each food*

*{and drinking} is best"*<sup>42</sup>

All fragments of Archestratus are quotations from a later Greek author named Athenaeus (late 2 century CE) who collects evidence on dining in Antiquity. Despite the fragmentary status, these lines clue us in on the role of the speaking voice. Does he claim *ars/techne* about anything? Can he be considered an *artifex* (*technitēs*, in Greek)?

In fragment 1, the author presents himself as a performer of an *epideixis*, “display speech”, which is one form of rhetorical performance in ancient Greece. So, the impression is that the author claims the ‘rhetorical art’ for himself. He would be expert in *delivering speeches*. Epideictic rhetoric is a very complex chapter of Greek culture. But “display speeches” are a specific form of spoken and written rhetoric, by the time of Arcestratus, and a widely popular one. These aim at explaining certain topics effectively and at persuading a broad audience about the legitimacy of the field of knowledge and expertise involved.<sup>43</sup> In referring to these experiences, Arcestratus appears to be making an important point in the opening of his poem about exquisite food. One may speculate that the poem is conceived as a written speech performance (in verse) whose effectiveness Arcestratus’ future readers are expected to judge.<sup>44</sup>

Arcestratus provides yet another aspect of *techne*, namely that he has personal expertise about the poem’s contents. As we learn from fragment 2, the author’s interest and competence in gastronomy is the result of personal travels in the Mediterranean. Whether it is entirely fictitious or not, this claim of *autoptic knowledge* recalls the activity of scientific and historiographical research in Greece, as the term *historia* (in fragment 1) points out.<sup>45</sup> In addition, fragment 3 points out that the author can make judgments about the quality of foods. This is ability based (allegedly) on his personal experience and one which Arcestratus shows pride about, as we see at one point of the poem (fragment 39 O.–S.): “few people know which food is bad and which is excellent.”<sup>46</sup> So, in what we can still read of the opening of the *Hedupatheia*, readers are told that the author aims to deliver an effective explanatory speech (rhetorical ‘art’), and it is implied that he also possesses *techne* about gastronomy. These two types of *techne* – rhetoric and gastronomy – are brought closely together.

Arcestratus regularly assesses the quality of food in the poem. Consider, for example, one of the first topics in his gastronomical tour, namely types of bread:

“First of all, then, my dear Moschos, I will mention the gifts of fair-haired Demeter; and you must internalize all of this. The best one can get and the finest of all, all sifted clean from highly productive barley, are in Lesbos, on the wave-girt breast where famous Eresos is located, whiter than heavenly snow. If the gods eat barley groats, it is from there that Hermes goes and gets them for them. They are also fairly good in seven-gated Thebes and in Thasos and in some other cities, although these resemble grape-stones compared with the Lesbian sort. You should regard this as absolutely certain.” (fragment 5,1-10 O.-S.)

Baked bread was served as appetizer at dinner-parties, so, if the explanation of Arcestratus follows the course of a dinner in the *Hedupatheia*, it is likely that we are here dealing with the beginning of a meal (and of the poem).<sup>47</sup> In this quote, the author comments at length on the excellence of the bread type from Lesbos. Some hyperbolic language is used to this extent, such as the image of the snow, and the idea that this food is worthy of the gods (lines 6–7). These details appear to have a rhetorical effect. Commentators focus mostly on parallelisms with Archaic poetry,<sup>48</sup> but exaggeration is a recommended device also in speeches composed with rhetorical art.<sup>49</sup> Arcestratus then moves to less excellent bread varieties. So, note that

the author has a clear idea of what deserves attention, and he organizes his presentation accordingly. This might underline the author's competence (*techne*) in the field of gastronomy. The topic of the bread sorts is illustrated also with geographical references, which points at Arcestratus' autopsy-claim. One also finds statements of authority in the text ("you must internalize all of this", and "you should regard this as absolutely certain"). The author occasionally employs phrases like these throughout the poem, as far as we can tell from the fragments.

Something is, however, blatantly missing in what is left (not much, indeed) of the opening. Arcestratus does not seem to be interested in talking about the art proper to poetry or in making this aspect stand out in the first lines of the poem. In all the extant fragments, Arcestratus rarely presents himself as poet, notwithstanding any bias of the quoting source who is certainly more interested in gastronomical information. Conceiving poetry as the result of *techne* was a recent development in Greek thinking.<sup>50</sup> Traditional ideas of poetry saw poets as inspired singers and intermediaries of the Muses, not mainly as 'artisans' of words. To think of poems as 'artfully made' objects (i.e. made with words or rhythm) was a new idea that took place in the fourth century BCE, thanks to the very discourse of rhetorical *art*. Rhetoricians were keen on remarking the importance of knowing *how* to speak (for oratorical purposes). This approach to language had a significant impact on what Greeks thought also about literature, in the fourth century BCE when also Arcestratus was active as a poet.<sup>51</sup>

There is however one exception to this apparent lack of emphasis on 'poetic *techne*' in the *Hedupatheia*, which is particularly noteworthy, as Arcestratus makes a sort of 'metaliterary' comment about his poem. Fragment 40 of the *Hedupatheia* reads as follows:

“Βοσπόρου ἐκπλεύσαντα τὰ λευκότεα· ἀλλὰ προσέστω  
μηδὲν ἐκεῖ στερεῆς σαρκὸς Μαιώτιδι λίμνῃ  
ἰχθύος ἀύξηθέντος, ὃν ἐν μέτρῳ οὐ θέμις εἰπεῖν.”

“The very whitest that sail out of the Bosphoros. But let none  
of the hard flesh of the fish that grew up in Lake Maiotis  
be present, a fish it is forbidden to mention in verse.”

Arcestratus says that a certain fish that lives in Lake Maiotis should not be included in the poem's list of delicacies (the verb *proséstō*, line 1, which means 'to be added', refers to this list that the poet is carrying on in the text). The fish in question appears to be the sturgeon from the sea of Azov.<sup>52</sup> One occasionally finds references to foods of poorer quality elsewhere in the poem, which underlines the author's preference for expensive foods.<sup>53</sup> Arcestratus does not just inform us about one type of fish that in his view is undeserving of our attention. He makes a playful comment about this exclusion, which in my view gives us some insight into the issue of 'didactic *techne*'. The main reason for excluding this fish – in Arcestratus' words – would be that its name does not fit into the hexameter (line 3).<sup>54</sup> It is equally significant that this unmentionable fish so happens to be of very low quality, as the unflattering detail of its "hard flesh" (line 2) suggests, and, thus, is not an appropriate topic in a work dedicated to exquisite food. The *metaliterary* nature of this comment lies in the fact that the author here gives emphasis to his *techne* as a poet while making a point about gastronomical *techne*.<sup>55</sup> As it turns out, these two *technai* – poetic *techne* and gastronomy – are closely associated in this fragment of the *Hedupatheia*.

One other way in which the poet shows his technical competence is by providing plenty of cooking instructions.<sup>56</sup> This suggests that the poem has practical purpose, one that would warrant the title of “cooking art” (*opsopoiikè téchnē*), that is, handbook for cooking purposes.<sup>57</sup> Let us consider one example, fragment 14 O.–S., where the author explains how to cook one type of fish (the parrot fish):

“And as for the parrot wrasse, the big one in seaside Kalchedon, roast it after washing it carefully. In Byzantion as well you will see a fine one, nice and big, with a body as large as a circular shield. Prepare the latter whole in the following fashion: after you buy it, as soon as it has been thoroughly coated with cheese and olive oil, hang it up in a hot oven and then roast it thoroughly. Sprinkle it with salt ground together with cumin, and with greyish olive oil, pouring the god-given stream out of your hand down over it.”

Information is presented with a sort of advising style, namely with practical instructions conveyed by exhortative verbs. The cooking operations are succinctly explained and follow a clear temporal order.

Written food-recipes were indeed already part of Greek culture at the time of Arcestratus. We do not have a lot of evidence, since the only extant book of ancient recipes is the later Latin work by Apicius. But some indirect references about the fourth century BCE can be found in contemporary comedies and in Athenaeus. The latter preserves a quotation from one of the oldest known authors of cookbooks, a certain Mithaicus, of whom not much is known. Whether this is an exact quotation from his work or not, Athenaeus (late second century CE) gives us some idea of how an archaic book of recipes would look like (7,325F):

“ταινίαν (...) ἐκκοιλίξας, τὰν κεφαλὰν ἀποταμών, ἀποπλύνας καὶ ταμῶν τεμάχεια κατὰ χειρὸν καὶ ἔλαιον.”

“After you gut a *tainia*-fish and remove its head, washing it off and cutting into steaks, pour cheese and olive oil over it.” (Transl. Olson, adapted)

If we consider the overall format of the text – brevity, paratactic structure, the use of imperatives and participles to convey the information – there is an undeniable proximity to the style of Arcestratus’ ‘recipes’.

On the other hand, important differences emerge, for example at the level of the vocabulary. Arcestratus creates a mixture of different registers: we find, for example, poetic expressions such as the simile of the shield (line 3); the elevated phrase “the stream” of olive oil (line 8). We find also rare and possibly made-up expressions which show the poet’s *techne* with words, such as the compounds *kuminotribois* “cumin-ground-with” and *theodégmona* “god-given”. The fragment, however, contains words that do not belong to a poetic register rather to everyday speech or the language of gastronomy, such as “oven” (*kribanon*, line 6), “to roast” (lines 1 and 6, *katópta/ópta*), “to sprinkle” with spices (*pássein*, line 7); lastly, there are some very technical verbs that come from medical texts, such as *katakrounizō*, “to wet down over something” (here translated with “to pour”, line 8). If the format of fragment 14 would seem to suggest the idea of the cooking handbook, the mixed and elaborated style of the

fragment is one important reminder that Arcestratus does not master just one *techne* but many, in the *Hedupatheia*.

#### 4. Reading *techne*: Aratus' *Phaenomena*

Aratus must be discussed here, as this author became the most influential Greek poet of didactic poems in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. His extant poem *Phaenomena* (ca. first half of the third century BCE) contains around 1100 lines and discusses two complementary topics: the constellations of the sky and meteorological phenomena. The poem deals, as the title itself posits, with *phainómena*, literally a participle which means things “that are visible” or “that appear”. If we want to explain it considering all contents of the poem, it might mean things that appear through the air, whether these pertain to the sky, like the constellations and the stars, or to the atmosphere, like storms and winds. But the title is also tacitly borrowed from an older (now lost) prose work by the astronomer Eudoxus (early fourth century BCE), which deals mostly with stars and constellations.<sup>58</sup> This is already an example of the poem's complexity: the title appears to point to a specific work in prose, and yet it remains more ambiguous.<sup>59</sup>

One interesting feature of Aratus' poem is that it begins with a traditional and solemn invocation of Zeus and the Muses. The author reinstates some characteristics of more traditional poetry (for example, the general hymnic tone, and the invocation of the Muses).<sup>60</sup> The opening of the *Phaenomena* has two key features, first, it presents the topics of the poem as it is customary in ancient poetry, but Aratus does not write with the same clarity as Ovid and Arcestratus;<sup>61</sup> Secondly, unlike Arcestratus (and Ovid), it does not say anything about the poet's *techne* (or *technai*)— and this has interesting consequences, as I will argue.

Aratus does not tell us exactly what the poem will be about. The poet first invokes Zeus as a sort of cosmic and useful principle. Zeus pervades all places where humans traffic and need orientation (ll. 2–4). Next, a much larger portion of the poem informs us that Zeus is extremely useful to humankind (ll. 5–13). For example, this god “kindly gives helpful signs to men, and rouses people to work” (ll. 5–6) because he fixed the constellations in the sky. Aratus explains to us something that was traditional in Greek culture: stars and constellations are pointers that provide helpful time/space information to people for their daily and seasonal activities. The poet does introduce some core ideas of the poem – the usefulness of constellations for humankind – but only indirectly, without presenting a clear statement about the topics of his explanation.<sup>62</sup>

Aratus is not only vague about the poem's contents; he also is reluctant to say anything about what *ars/technem* might be important for him. Unlike Ovid and Arcestratus, the opening of the *Phaenomena* is silent about the author's competence and expertise. We find, instead, a traditional invocation of the Muses with which Aratus presents himself as an archaic poet-singer who can only hope that the goddesses help him in his difficult poetic enterprise. See lines 15–18:

“χαῖρε, πάτερ, μέγα θαῦμα, μέγ' ἀνθρώποισιν ὄνειρα,  
αὐτὸς καὶ προτέρη γενεή. χαίροιτε δὲ Μοῦσαι,  
μειλίχια μάλα πᾶσαι· ἐμοί γε μὲν ἀστέρας εἶπεῖν  
ἧ θέμις εὐχομένῳ τεκμήρατε πᾶσαν ἀοιδήν.”

“Hail, father, great wonder, great boon to men, yourself and the earlier race! And hail, Muses, all most gracious! In answer to my prayer to tell of the stars in so far as I may, guide all my singing.”<sup>63</sup>

The poem is described here with the traditional term *aoidén*, “song”. When Aratus talks again about the poem’s contents, he continues to be very succinct. At line 17, the expression *astéras eipeîn* (“to say the stars”) is a very simple and minimalistic expression and does not convey much sense of novelty, nor does it point to any special *techne* of the poet. Nothing here is said about the poet as expert of any field, he does not claim any *techne* for himself. This does not change in the rest of the poem where the author continues to be a somewhat ‘weak’ authoritative figure.<sup>64</sup>

So, unlike Ovid and, for what we know, Arcestratus, Aratus did *not* foreground *techne* in the opening of the poem, which is the most important, programmatic passage of the work. Can we then conclude that the *Phaenomena* have nothing to do with *techne*? There is evidence that some ancient readers already in the Hellenistic period considered the *Phaenomena* a work that had something to do with *techne*. Let us consider the work *Commentary on the Phaenomena of Aratus and Eudoxus*. This prose text was written by the scientist Hipparchus of Nicaea in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE, less than a century after Aratus. It is, therefore, an exceptional testimony of early reception.<sup>65</sup>

Hipparchus is, on the other hand, no neutral or naïve commentator of Aratus, as scholars have argued. The goal of Hipparchus is to turn the attention away from Aratus’ poem and towards his own expertise about astronomy. To achieve this, Hipparchus discusses the mistakes made by Aratus in the poem *Phaenomena* about stars and constellations. Hipparchus’ Commentary is, therefore, quite critical about Aratus, but spares no criticism to what is claimed to be the poet’s ‘source’, Eudoxus; one last important target of Hipparchus’ critiques is a certain Attalus of Rhodes, roughly a contemporary of the author, who is both a scientist and an enthusiastic reader of the poem.<sup>66</sup> Even though Hipparchus goes to great lengths to establish his own authority at the expense of Aratus’, he appears to move from a culturally shared assumption that there is *techne* in the poem. This is what I want to focus on here, in the remaining of the paper.

In remarking his alleged alterity as reader of Aratus, Hipparchus also comments on how *others* approached the poem. These comments, though part of a self-promoting strategy, also shed some light on reception of the poem in the second century BCE. For example, Hipparchus makes explicit references to the already mentioned Attalus of Rhodes, who, as we apprehend from Hipparchus, edited the text of Aratus and wrote a “explanation” of the poem.<sup>67</sup> I am, however, less concerned with this case of reception, as Attalus being himself a scientist like Hipparchus is representative of a very specific subcategory of readers of Aratus, namely, astronomy experts who also practice literary criticism. For our sake, I find more useful to focus on Hipparchus’ concern with another type of readership of Aratus, namely people who read Aratus with some competence in science but are no expert astronomers or mathematicians. The author refers to this type of readership in the opening paragraphs of the treatise when he makes some general considerations about the *Phaenomena*.

Hipparchus begins the treatise with an epistolary preface with which he introduces the addressee of his *Commentary*. This is a friend named Aischrion, whose fondness for knowledge Hipparchus praises with the following words (1.1.1.):

“With pleasure I saw in the letter your perseverance in being inclined to love of learning (φιλομαθία). Both the things that you sought about the natural sciences (*tà phusikà*) and the things you sought about what Aratus says in the *Risings together* showed me even your stronger love for *technè* (φιλοτεχνία). This is even more apparent, as you have had your fill in life troubles due to the premature death of your very well-respected brothers.”<sup>68</sup>

This opening sets the ‘scene’ of the *Commentary* and underlines that Hipparchus and Aischrion share an interest in learning (*máthesis*) and art (*téchnè*). Aischrion is presented here not exactly as a peer, but as someone with less experience than Hipparchus. There is, however, a bond of friendship and mutual respect between the two. Lightfoot is right in stressing that “Hipparchus’ use of an epistolary opening immediately sets up the positions of teacher/pupil (or didactic addressee/reader)”; she also notes that “the *Commentary*’s addressee is portrayed as an interested layman” rather than an experienced scientist.<sup>69</sup> So, Hipparchus suggests that the first to have an interest in Aratus’ poem was (conveniently) his less-experienced friend Aischrion. However, what made Aischrion interested in the *Phaenomena* was the poem’s stakes in *technè*. This means that, already in the Hellenistic period, it was possible to approach this poem as some form of *astronomikè* (or *astrologikè*) *technè*, a handbook in astronomy. It might be part of Hipparchus’ strategy to reserve this approach to the poem only for laymen-readers who are eager to read up on science, like Aischrion. What I find interesting here is that, by doing this, Hipparchus might unintentionally inform us on how a broader readership of Aratus interested in *technè* could approach this poem.

Hipparchus, after the epistolary opening, continues to discuss general issues about Aratus, in an ideal conversation with his addressee Aischrion.<sup>70</sup> This section (1.1.2.–1.1.11) continues to be a sort of preface to the entire *Commentary*. One striking comment that Hipparchus makes about Aratus in this part concerns the poem’s *form*. Consider the following quote (1.1.3–1.1.4):

“(3) Many others have also put together a commentary (*exégesis*) of Aratus’ *Phaenomena*; Attalus, our fellow mathematician, seems to have done the most careful account of all. (4) But I believe that the explanation of the content (*diánoia*) of the verses does not require too much of sharp attention. For, the poet is simple and concise, and he is clear even for those who pay moderate attention to it. But, to take notice of the things said by him about astronomy, what is described in accord with the phenomena and what is done erroneously, one would consider this very useful and pertinent to mathematical experience (*empeiria*).”

Hipparchus states that Aratus’ poem is “simple, concise and clear” (the Greek words used are ἀπλοῦς σύντομος, and σαφής). In his view, the poet explains the topics very clearly. This is also a self-serving point, since Hipparchus aims to draw the attention less to Aratus’ phrasing and more to the poet’s lack of mathematical experience, which for Hipparchus is the real game changer for claiming astronomical expertise. As Lightfoot well argues,<sup>71</sup> Hipparchus on purpose does *not* emphasize any poetic qualities of Aratus and work hard, rather, to undermine the power of the *Phaenomena*; to this end, so Lightfoot, Hipparchus comments on

Aratus' alleged simplicity, which is in fact contrary to the many scholarly materials that grew about this poem in Antiquity. But, I wonder, if Hipparchus made a comment about Aratus' "simple" style that is so patently false, would he not run the risk of looking too blatantly biased against the poem?

One way to reconcile Hipparchus' idea with the poem's hermeneutic complexity is to desume that Hipparchus does not consider the poem simple as to mean unproblematic, but that he is comparing the poem with the discourse of contemporary sciences, such as methemeral astronomy, of which he is expert.<sup>72</sup> Compared to this specific language and form of scientific writing, the poem of Aratus might indeed look more "simple and concise". I would argue that Hipparchus is not claiming that the *Phaenomena* poses no hermeneutic challenges, but that its *content* can be more easily understood than certain works of science (at least at a superficial level). Netz rightly suggests that Aratus made a clear choice *not* to deal with more complex science in his poem.<sup>73</sup>

Simplicity in conveying information about science may also suggest a parallel with the genre of *techne*-books, such as the *artes grammaticae* or *artes medicae*. These, as I already said above, aim to take readers through a path of instruction that must be gradual and easily accessible to non-experts. Unlike treatises conveying mathematical and geometrical demonstrations that were written for small communities of experts,<sup>74</sup> the poem *Phaenomena* does indeed convey a more 'elementary' account of astronomical phenomena that would appeal to broader readerships, like Hipparchus' friend Aischrion who is still very fond of *techne*.

Curiously, Hipparchus does not emphasize Aratus' *poetic* 'art' either. But, in one point of the introductory section of the *Commentary*, he concedes that the poem *Phaenomena* has aesthetic qualities, and this is the last issue that I want to touch on. As part of a complex discourse that Hipparchus builds to prepare the ground for his detail-specific attacks on the poem, he writes the following (1.1.7–1.1.8):

"(7) The grace of the verses bestows a certain trustworthiness to the things being said, and almost all those who comment on the poet are well inclined to what the poet says. (8) Eudoxus described, with more experience, the same system of Aratus about the phenomena. It is therefore with good reason that, because of this consensus of many illustrious mathematicians, the poetry of Aratus comes across as trustworthy."

Hipparchus somewhat reluctantly admits that the *Phaenomena* is appealing, from an aesthetic point of view. The poem possesses *cháris*, "beauty", "grace". At the same time, this "beauty" serves a very specific purpose, that is, to make readers believe in what the poem says.<sup>75</sup> This way of thinking suggests that for Hipparchus these aesthetical qualities are not entirely positive. Indeed, we are not being told here that the poem's beauty causes some deep emotions in its readers.<sup>76</sup> Hipparchus diminishes here the meaning of the aesthetic experience that the *Phaenomena* would create. One could, however, turn his argument upside down and argue that the things being said in the poem are not only sound but also beautiful. Thus, audiences would approach the poem not only to be informed about astronomy but also to experience beauty.<sup>77</sup> But this is decidedly not a point that Hipparchus is interested in making.



Hipparchus plays ‘form’ and ‘aesthetics’ against ‘authority’ and scientific ‘expertise’. *Cháris* is considered a rhetorical move with which Aratus makes his poem “trustworthy”. Note that the word *axiopistía* (“trustworthiness”) may point to the domain of rhetoric. It is rarely used in rhetorical treatises, but it links with the word *pístis*, which is key in ancient rhetorical theory. *Písteis* are the “proofs” or “arguments” that speakers should use to persuade the audience.<sup>78</sup> Hipparchus does not want to make a full argument about rhetoric here, but one has the impression that rhetoric plays a role in his thinking. What Aratus would seem to lack in *experience* (*empeiría*) would be compensated by rhetoric. But, once again, Hipparchus has no interest in explicitly crediting Aratus with any form of *techne*, not even rhetorical *techne*, because this would work against his self-promoting goals. He insists that the authority of Aratus’ poem derives from the fact that the poet draws his topics from the more authoritative and accurate work of Eudoxus, namely that many scientists read him.<sup>79</sup> However, I have argued that, when one reads between the lines and retrieves the type of approach to the *Phaenomena* that Hipparchus knows from some of his contemporaries, the poetry of Aratus appears to have its share in *techne*.

In conclusion, the *art* of didactic poems appears to be chimerical, but in a good sense. Archestratus and, with even greater emphasis, Ovid featured multiple discourses about *techne/ars* in their texts. Ancient *techne* thus contributes to making the poems more complex from an hermeneutic and poetological point of view. This is possible also because the term ‘didactic’ cannot account for this aspect of the ancient didactic poems. The complexity of didactic *techne* relies in its polysemy. Didactic poets can present themselves as experts in writing beautiful verses (poetical ‘art’), in handling a certain domain of knowledge, in conveying a persuasive speech about it (rhetorical ‘art’) – and this list could go on. As a result, didactic ‘art’ does not necessarily follow just the principle of duality (content versus form). We seem to have, instead, a plurality of possibilities. For the same reason, it is reductive to speak of ancient didactic poems only as ‘treatises in verses’. Sometimes, didactic poems can be compared to prose treatises and *ars*-books, either because the author himself suggests it (e.g., Ovid), or because ancient readers made this parallel (e.g., Aratus). But, one, in my view, should resist the temptation of thinking equally in terms of duality (e.g., poetry versus prose, treatise versus versification). For, ancient didactic texts are more complex cultural objects, with regard to the domains of *ars*, and any such dichotomy might not fully take into account the stakes with these works.

## References:

1. Cf. *Ion* 537A-538B. On Plato's *Ion*, *enthousiasmós*, and *téchnē*, which I do not discuss in detail in this paper, I can only cite here a few selected references, such as Penelope Murray (ed.): *Plato on Poetry*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 1–24; Stefan Büttner: *Die Literaturtheorie bei Platon und ihre anthropologische Begründung*, Tübingen/Basel 2000, esp. pp. 255–273, 315–361; more recently Carlotta Capuccino: *Filosofi e Rapsodi. Testo, traduzione e commento dello Ione platonico*, Bologna 2005, pp. 171–206, and Stephen Halliwell: *Between Ecstasy and Truth. Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus*, Oxford 2011, pp. 167–179. Halliwell rightly points out that the *Ion* is more ambiguous in giving a final answer to the question whether poetry possesses *téchnē* or not.
2. Such as Hesiod's *Works and Days* on farming, or Theognis' elegies on elite ethics. On the broad cognitive effect of literature for the Greeks, see Halliwell, *Between Ecstasy*, 2011, pp. 7–9.
3. See, e.g., Giuseppe Cambiano: *Platone e le tecniche*, Torino 1971.
4. On *techne* in Greece, the bibliography is vast. A useful collection of ancient passages on *techne* is provided by Rudolf Löbl with a three-volume work: *Τεχνη – Techne: Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung dieses Wortes in der Zeit von Homer bis Aristoteles*, 3 vols., Würzburg 1997–2008; a recent, more comprehensive study of *techne* as described by ancient philosophers is Thomas Kjeller Johansen (ed.): *Productive Knowledge in Ancient Philosophy: The Concept of Technê*, Cambridge 2021.
5. Brecht's political theater notoriously calls for deeper interest in knowledge about reality, especially its social and political tensions; Brecht was also well acquainted with didactic poetry, and for several years he himself worked on composing a poetic version of the Communist Manifesto, which remains incomplete. On this author and genres, see Werner Michler: *Kulturen der Gattung. Poetik im Kontext 1750–1950*, Göttingen 2015, pp. 584–644.
6. The word *techne* has a prominent position in this passage of the *Haliutica*, see ll. 7–8 ἀλῆς... τέχνης κερδαλής; l. 11 τέχνησιν ἀλὸς διὰ μέτρα δάσαντο. Emily Kneebone has recently investigated Oppian's engagement with knowledge and expertise, see "*Oppian's Haliutica. Charting a Didactic Epic*", Cambridge 2020, esp. pp. 44–82.
7. See, e.g., Overduin's considerations about Nicander's *Theriaca*, Floris Overduin: *Nicander of Colophon's Theriaca: A Literary Commentary*, Leiden 2015, pp. 21–31, 90–91.
8. On Arcestratus and didactic poetry, see Georg Wöhrle: "Bemerkungen zur lehrhaften Dichtung zwischen Empedokles und Arat," in: *Gattungen wissenschaftlicher Literatur in der Antike*, ed. by Wolfgang Kullmann, Jochen Althoff and Markus Asper, Tübingen 1998, pp. 279–286; on Aratus' influence, see Emma Gee: *Aratus and the Astronomical Tradition*, Oxford 2013.
9. This genre is in its own right an articulated and complex literary phenomenon, with key developments and with its different strands, see recently the comprehensive and detailed study by Olav Krämer: *Poesie der Aufklärung. Studien zum europäischen Lehrgedicht des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin/Boston 2019; besides, the cultural background of this genre, namely the learned circles of the Eighteenth century, is a dynamic reality which combines pre-modern, text-centric practices with new social and intellectual issues, see e.g. Thomas Assinger and Daniel Ehrmann

(eds.): *Gelehrsamkeit(en) im 18. Jahrhundert. Autorisierung – Darstellung – Vernetzung*, Heidelberg 2022.

10. This is the case of Manilius, for example, and his long proems, see Luciano Landolfi: *Integra prata: Manilio, i proemi*, Bologna 2003; Katharina Volk: *Manilius and his Intellectual Background*, Oxford 2009. On Roman didactic poetry and the ways in which poets present themselves in the texts, see Katharina Volk: *The Poetics of Latin Didactic: Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid, Manilius*, Oxford 2002.
11. On this apparent lack of theorization in Antiquity, see Overduin, *Nicander*, 2015, pp. 12–13.
12. I do not discuss here the testimony of the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, in which we find a scheme of genres of ancient poetry. This text does not provide explanations or even examples of works. Thus, the cited genre of *paideutiké poiēsis* (“educational poetry”) remains a somewhat abstract reference for us. To make things more complicated, the dating of the *Tractatus* is uncertain, and it is not possible to secure a Hellenistic context for it. This work is of a marked composite nature: although it contains ideas from Aristotle and the Peripatos, we are left in the dark with regard to who compiled it and when; see Heinz-Günther Nesselrath: *Mittlere Komödie. Ihre Stellung in der antiken Literaturkritik und Literaturgeschichte*, Berlin-New York 1990, pp. 102–145.
13. *Ars grammatica*, 3.482 Keil: *didascalice est qua comprehenditur philosophia Empedoclis et Lucreti, item astrologia, ut phaenomena Aratu et Ciceronis, et georgica Vergilii et his similia*
14. See cautious remarks by Raphael Dammer: *Diomedes grammaticus*, Trier 2001, p. 24.
15. See 482 Keil: *exegeticon est vel enarrativum in quo poeta ipse loquitur sine ullius personae interlocutione*.
16. See, e.g., Volk, *Poetics*, 2002, pp. 30–33.
17. These shifts in ancient dynamics of society and literacy are well explained by Reviel Netz: *Scale, Space and Canon in Ancient Literary Culture*, Cambridge 2020, pp. 727–779.
18. See Robert A. Kaster: *Guardians of Language. The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 1988, p. 271; on Diomedes’ schooling context and goals, see also Dammer, *Diomedes*, pp. 52–57; Elisa Romano: “Introduzione. La poesia didascalica: un genere in cerca di identità,” in: *Il vero condito: caratteri e ambiti della poesia didascalica nel mondo antico. Atti della XI Giornata Ghisleriana di Filologia Classica. Pavia, 29–30 novembre 2017*, ed. by Raffaella Colombo, Fabio Gasti, Marco Gay and Francesco Sorbello, Pavia 2019, pp. ix–xix, here pp. xiv–xv.
19. See Kaster, *Guardians*, 1988, p. 170.
20. Some scholars argue that Servius with this comment shows to have special insight into the form of didactic poetry, see e.g. Volk, *Poetics*, 2002, pp. 37–38.
21. I continue to call the ancient poems didactic here, for the sake of simplicity, notwithstanding the clarifications about generic qualifications made above.
22. Bibliography on Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* is considerable. In the following pages, I will mainly refer to studies that discuss the idea of *ars/expertise within the Ars Amatoria* and specifically in book 1. More generally, for interpretative issues on the quoted texts, I used the commentaries of Hollis, Pianezzola et al., and Dimundo.
23. There is the variant *me legat*; see Rosalba Dimundo: *Ovidio: lezioni d’amore. Saggio di commento al I libro dell’Ars Amatoria*, Bari 2003, pp. 32–33.
24. See *Controv. exc.* 3, 7.

25. My consideration here is statistical, based on the titles of ancient didactic poems known to us. A peculiar and significant exception might be Horace's *Ars poetica*, whose original title is however disputed; on Horace as important intertext for Ovid, see, e.g., Elena Giusti: "Ovid's *Ars Poetica*: Metapoetic didactic in the *Ars Amatoria*," in: *Didactic Poetry of Greece, Rome and Beyond. Knowledge, Power, Tradition*, ed. by Lilah G. Canevaro and Donncha O'Rourke, Swansea 2019, pp. 151–177.
26. Of course, one must deal with those titles that are passed down to us, and we cannot always be sure about their authenticity, see general considerations in Bianca-Jeanette Schröder: *Titel und Text. Zur Entwicklung lateinischer Gedichtüberschriften. Mit Untersuchungen zu lateinischen Buchtiteln, Inhaltsverzeichnissen und anderen Gliederungsmitteln*, Berlin-New York 1999; and Emanuele Castelli: *La nascita del titolo nella letteratura greca. Dall'epica arcaica alla prosa di età classica*, Berlin/Boston 2020. The titles of the poems discussed in this paper appear, at any rate, to be authentic: on Ovid, see Schröder, *Titel und Text*, p. 84–87; on Arcestratus, see Stephen Douglas Olson and Alexander Sens (eds.): *Arcestratus of Gela. Greek Culture and Cuisine in the Fourth Century BCE*, Oxford 2000, pp. xxii-xxiv; on Aratus, see Douglas Kidd (ed.): *Aratus. Phaenomena*, Cambridge 1997, p. 161.
27. One cannot be definitely sure about the authenticity of this title, according to Overduin, *Nicander*, 2015, p. 169.
28. Such as *Georgics*, *Georgica* in Latin, which comes from an adjective in plural form; hence, literally the title means poem/things "dealing with agriculture", without adding anything about *ars*.
29. Some works of Hellenistic philosophers are titled *Erōtikē téchnē*, See Emilio Pianezzola, Gianluigi Baldo and Lucio Cristante (eds.): *Ovidio. L'arte di amare*, Milano 1991, pp. 185–186. In addition, a papyrus fragment attests a treatise by a certain Philaenis of Samos titled "Techniques of Seduction" (*Peri peirasmôn*). On the genre of ancient handbooks, see Markus Asper: *Griechische Wissenschaftstexte: Formen, Funktionen, Differenzierungsgeschichten*, Stuttgart 2007, p. 55 n. 305, 323–351.
30. On the link between *carmen* and the performative or more formalized character of expressions, see Thomas Habinek: *The World of Roman Song. From Ritualized Speech to Social Order*, Baltimore 2005, pp. 61–62, 74–82. This meaning of *carmen* does not exclude that it can be used as an equivalent of *poema* (see *ibid.*, p. 78). But my point here is that its etymology *can* make readers think about song/elevated poetry.
31. See also Jula Wildberger: *Ovids Schule der 'elegischen' Liebe. Erotodidaxe und Psychagogie in der Ars Amatoria*, Frankfurt 1998, pp. 1–9.
32. On lines 21–24, see Pianezzola, Baldo and Cristante, *Ovidio*, 1991, pp. 188–189; on Ovid's elegiac experience and the *Ars*, see e.g. *ibid.*, pp. ix–xxv.
33. On Ovid's explicit references to his teaching job in the *Ars*, see Volk 2002, *Poetics*, p. 160. [[↩](#)]
34. Adrian S. Hollis (ed.): *Ars Amatoria. Book 1. Edition with introduction and commentary*, Oxford 1977, p. 33, points out that Ovid uses the expression *praeceptor Amoris* to refer to the whole *Ars* in another work (*Tristia* 1.1.67).
35. On Ovid's teaching goals and his well-organized instruction in the *Ars*, see in general Jula Wildberger: *Ovids Schule der 'elegischen' Liebe. Erotodidaxe und Psychagogie in der Ars Amatoria*, Frankfurt 1998, esp. e.g. pp. 25–28, 83–88, etc. Note that Ovid uses the image of the *praeceptor* not simply or mainly because the poem belongs to a 'didactic' genre, but because of the peculiar situation evoked in the *Ars Amatoria*.

36. Alison Sharrock: “Those Who Can, Teach: Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* and Contemporary Instructional Writing,” in: *Wissensvermittlung in dichterischer Gestalt*, ed. by Marietta Horster and Christiane Reitz, Stuttgart 2005, pp. 243–263, here pp. 251–262, underlines that Ovid, while claiming personal experience on the topic of love, also admits his past failures as a lover to sympathize with his unexperienced students.
37. See Volk, *Poetics*, p. 161
38. On *peritus*, see Dimundo, *Ovidio*, p. 45 n. 91.
39. See *Theogony* 22–34
40. It was however not uncommon in didactic poems to invoke deities that mattered for the poem’s topics, see Hollis, *Ars*, p. 37.
41. The poem of Arcestratus is often considered a parody of didactic poetry, see the influential study of Bernd Effe: *Dichtung und Lehre. Untersuchungen zur Typologie des antiken Lehrgedichts*, München 1977, pp. 234–237. But Stephen Douglas Olson and Alexander Sens (eds.): *Arcestratus of Gela. Greek Culture and Cuisine in the Fourth Century BCE*, Oxford 2000, pp. xxviii–xliv, do not consider the poem a parody but an example of “a small subgenre of gastronomically oriented dactylic hexameter catalogue poetry” (p. xliv). This goes in the direction of treating this work as a didactic poem; see also Wöhrle, *Bemerkungen*, 1998.
42. Fr. 1 ιστορίας επίδειγμα ποιούμενος Ἑλλάδι πάση. Fr. 2 †περιῆλθον Ἀσίην καὶ Εὐρώπην†. ὅπου ἐστὶν ἕκαστον / κάλλιστον βρωτόν τε <ποτόν τε>. All translations and Greek text of the *Hedupatheia* are from Olson and Sens (eds.), *Arcestratus*, 2000, unless otherwise noted.
43. See, e.g., Paul Demont: “Die *Epideixis* über die *Techne* im V. und IV. Jh.,” in: *Vermittlung und Tradierung von Wissen in der griechischen Kultur*, ed. by Wolfgang Kullmann and Jochen Althoff, Tübingen 1993, pp. 181–209; Rosalind Thomas: “Prose Performance Texts: ἐπίδειξις and Written Publication in the Late Fifth and Fourth Centuries”, in: *Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient Greece*, ed. by Harvey Yunis, Cambridge 2003, pp. 162–188.
44. Audiences of epideictic rhetoric spectate but receive critically the speeches, see Thomas Schirren: “Der ΘΕΩΡΟΣ als ΚΡΙΤΗΣ. Zum epideiktischen Genos in Arist. Rhet. 1,3,” in: *Papers on Rhetoric 9*, ed. by Lucia Calboli Montefusco, Rome 2008, pp. 197–212.
45. Fragment 1 of Arcestratus may echo to some extent the opening of Herodotus’ *Histories* but what stands out more is Arcestratus’ claim of personal experience with travels, cf. Olson and Sens (eds.), *Arcestratus*, 2000, pp. xxix and 13.
46. ll. 4-5 παῦροι γὰρ ἴσασιν / ἀνθρώπων, ὃ τι φαῦλον ἔφυ καὶ κεδνὸν ἔδεσμα.
47. This is argued by Olson and Sens (eds.), *Arcestratus*, 2000, p. 23.
48. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 28–29.
49. Aristotle, for example, recommends amplification (*aúxēsis*), and especially in epideictic speeches where one must add “greatness” (*mégethos*) and “beauty” (*kálllos*) to the topics, cf. *Rh.* 1368A (1.9.40).
50. This point is clearly made by Andrew Ford: *The Origins of Criticism. Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece*, Princeton 2002, e.g. pp. 93–157, where the scholar shows how poets of the fifth century like Pindar still consider a parallelism between poetry and handcraft belittling with regard to the power of poetry.
51. Cf. *ibid.*, e.g. pp. 229–233.
52. See Olson and Sens (eds.), *Arcestratus*, 2000, pp. 168–170.

53. Indeed, the *Hedupatheia* celebrates gourmet gastronomy, which in Archestratus' view entails high-quality ingredients and simple cooking recipes, see *ibid.*, pp. xlvi–lv.
54. This appears also to be true, see *ibid.*, pp. 169–170. It is not uncommon, among ancient poets, to make references to unmetrical words, and this is often one way of conveying some playful or ironic message. For an overview of some relevant passages in Greek and Latin, see Rudolf Kassel: “Quod versu dicere non est”, in: *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 19 (1975), pp. 211–218; more specifically on late fifth-century examples, see Peter Grossardt: “Metrum und Wortspiel im *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* (11) bzw. bei Aristophanes (Nu. 636–646), Sophokles (fr. 1 W.<sup>2</sup>) und Kritias (88 B4 DK = fr. 4 W.<sup>2</sup>),” in: *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* 43 (2019), pp. 59–106.
55. In the fourth century BCE, meter was sometimes considered to be a marked feature of poetry, one that defined what poetic *technē* is; but this idea was also contested (Aristotle notably took issues with it). On these issues, see Ford, *Criticism*, 2002, pp. 131–139, 229–249.
56. See Olson and Sens (eds.), *Archestratus*, 2000, pp. xxvi–xxvii.
57. The idea of *opsopoiikē téchnē* is attested in Plato's *Symposium* 187E (in Eryximachus's speech). Plato (via Socrates) polemicizes with this type of *technē* and with rhetoric in the *Gorgias* and denies both of them the status of *technē*. These are rather forms of practice, *epitédeusis*, cookery is “not an art but habitude or knack” (*ouk ésti téchnē all' empeiria kai tribé*), cf. *Gorgias* 463A–C.
58. On Aratus, Eudoxus, and the broader issue of popularizing ancient astronomy see, e.g., Stamatina Mastorakou: “Aratus and the Popularization of Hellenistic Astronomy,” in: *Hellenistic Astronomy. The Science in Its Contexts*, ed. by Alan C. Bowen and Francesca Rochberg, Leiden 2020, pp. 383–397.
59. On the complex meaning of *phainō* in Greek thought and in Aratus, see Gee, *Aratus*, 2013, pp. 7–12.
60. See e.g. Christos Fakas: *Der hellenistische Hesiod. Arats Phainomena und die Tradition der antiken Lehrepik*, Wiesbaden 2001, pp. 6–18.
61. Aratus does this in very general terms and does not provide a clear list of the poem's key topics. [[↔](#)]
62. Jean Martin, *Aratus, Phénomènes*, 2 vols., ed. By Jean Martin, Paris 1998, vol. 1, pp. xlix–li, also notices that Aratus' opening is not very informative. As he puts it: “il n'annonce le sujet du poème que d'une façon volontairement incomplète.”
63. Text and translation are from Kidd, *Aratus*, 1997, unless otherwise noted.
64. Authority and expertise claims are indeed interdependent, see in general Jason König and Greg Woolf (eds.): *Authority and Expertise in Ancient Scientific Culture*, Cambridge 2017; On Aratus' weaker voice in the text, see Volk, *Poetics*, 2002, pp. 56–57; Matthew Semanoff: “Undermining Authority: Pedagogy in Aratus' *Phaenomena*”, in: *Beyond the Canon*, ed. by Annette Harder, Remco F. Regtuit and Gerrigje Catharina Wakker, Leuven 2006, pp. 303–317. Occasionally Aratus touches on the theme of expertise but always indirectly, without making references to the domain of *technē*. He speaks only in general terms and uses emotional laden words by insisting on the idea of “confidence” with certain topics, see l. 460 “I am not at all confident (*tharsaléos*) in dealing with them”; and the closure of the poem at ll. 1142–1144: “It is a good idea to observe one sign after another... while with a third you can be confident (*tharséseias*)”.

65. On this text, there has been considerable growing interest in recent years. See, e.g., also for the state of the art, Jessica Lightfoot: “Hipparchus’ didactic journey: poetry, prose, and catalogue form in the *Commentary on Aratus and Eudoxus*,” in: *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 57.4 (2017), pp. 935–967; and a new edition by Francesca Schironi is in progress with Routledge.
66. Hipparchus is not alone in Antiquity in writing scholarly works that criticize others, see Caroline Bishop: “Hipparchus Among the Detractors?,” in: *Classical Commentaries: Explorations in a Scholarly Genre*, ed. by Christina S. Kraus and Christopher Stray, Oxford 2015, pp. 279–396.
67. On Attalus, see Raffaele Luiselli: “Hellenistic Astronomers and Scholarship,” in: *Brill’s Companion to Ancient Greek Scholarship*, ed. by Franco Montanari, Stephanos Matthaios and Antonios Rengakos, Leiden 2015, pp. 1216–1234.
68. Greek text of Hipparchus’ commentary is found in the old, yet only available edition of this work by Carolus Manitius (ed.): *Hipparchi in Arati et Eudoxi Phaenomena Commentariorum Libri Tres*, Leipzig 1894. Transl. mine.
69. See Lightfoot, *Hipparchus*, p. 943.
70. Cf., e.g., 1.1.5. ἔκρινα τῆς σῆς ἔνεκα φιλομαθίας, 1.1.6. ἀλλ’ ἔνεκα τοῦ μήτε σε, 1.1.9. ἀνεγέγραφα σοι, 1.1.11. εὐκατανόητον εἶναι καὶ σοὶ νομίζω.
71. See Lightfoot, *Hipparchus*, pp. 950–957.
72. The third book of the *Commentary* shows Hipparchus’ commitment to mathematical astronomy. See also Richard L. Kremer: “Experience and Observation in Hellenistic Astronomy,” in: *Hellenistic Astronomy. The Science in Its Contexts*, ed. by Alan C. Bowen and Francesca Rochberg, Leiden 2020, pp. 190–218, pp. 191–197.
73. Cf. Reviel Netz: *Ludic Proof. Greek Mathematics and the Alexandrian Aesthetic*, Cambridge 2009, pp. 182–184. Descriptive astronomy, like Eudoxus’ account of the constellations, has many intuitive aspects and can be more easily visualized. Other forms of astronomy in the fourth and third centuries BCE required demonstrations, calculation, and more abstract thinking.
74. See on this Reviel Netz: “Authorial Presence in the Ancient Exact Sciences,” in: *Writing Science. Medical and Mathematical Authorship in Ancient Greece*, ed. by Markus Asper, Berlin/Boston 2013, pp. 217–254, here pp. 242–249.
75. The key passage in Greek is this: ἡ γὰρ τῶν ποιημάτων χάρις ἀξιοπιστίαν τινὰ τοῖς λεγομένοις περιτίθησι, καὶ πάντες σχεδὸν οἱ τὸν ποιητὴν τοῦτον ἐξηγούμενοι προστίθενται τοῖς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ λεγομένοις.
76. On strong emotional responses as the result of aesthetic experiences in Antiquity, see Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi: *Frontiers of Pleasure. Models of Aesthetic Response in Archaic and Classical Greek Thought*, Oxford 2012.
77. This type of reception of the poem is exemplified by an epigram of Leonidas of Tarentum (*AP IX 25 = 101 Gow/Page*), in which Aratus is praised for making the stars “brighter” than reality, cf. Andreas Bagordo: “Das Epigramm des Leonidas von Tarent auf Arat (*Anth. Pal. IX 25 = 101 Gow/Page*)”, in: *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* 24 (2000), pp. 79–88, pp. 86–88.
78. See Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, e.g. at 1355A. A rare use of the concept of *axiopiṣtía* is in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, 1356A,4 (ἀξιόπιστον ποιῆσαι τὸν λέγοντα.).
79. See *Commentary* 1.2.1–2.





Editorial Peer Review

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