Textual Notes on Culex 137-139

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At Culex 123-147 the poet introduces a catalogue of trees, modeled after Ovid’s own in the Metamorphoses, one element of which is the pine-tree. Just like for the other trees in the catalogue, a mythological expansion is provided that locates the most topical mention of the tree in the Argonauts saga, for the pine-tree was the one out of which planks for the ship Argo were made – and in fact this was the very first time in human ‘history’ that anyone had built a ship, so that the pine-tree represents not only one element of a well-known ship myth, but the very root of all ships in the world.3

1 Ov. met. 10.86-106. There the catalogue is prompted by Orpheus’s song functioning as a summoning spell for all kinds of trees, which walk to him and populate a previously barren place (88 umbra loco deere). While that “rationally” explains the coexistence of otherwise incompatible plants, here it is only the Ovidian precedent, and specifically its usage as a catalogic locus amoenus, that allows this non-migratory forest to include plants that cannot either exist together or blossom at the same time. This is one of many elements that prove that the Culex was written after Ovid. On the Culex catalogue, see S. Seelentag, 2012, pp. 29f. For the Ovidian catalogue, a helpful introduction is in F. Bömer, 1969-86, ad loc. (vol. 5, pp. 38f.). The similarities between the two were expounded by L. Castiglioni, 1906, pp. 164ff. (although I do not agree with his suggestion that both texts independently imitated Hellenistic models).

2 For alternative versions and the literary relevance of differing treatments in Greek and Roman authors, see J.J. O’Hara, 2006, esp. pp. 34-41.

3 To be precise, one plank from the Dodona oak was also inserted: the mention of the pine-tree after the oak in the Culex catalogue (134-6) may well be an allusion to that. That the ship Argo had been made of pine-tree (Gr. πεύκη), often with a specific reference to the pine-trees growing on Mt. Pelion, was a much-abused mythical factoid: cf. Eur. Med. 3ff., Ap. Rhod. 1.36, 525 (Πηλιάς), Catull. 64.1, Phaedr. 4.7.7, Prop. 3.22.13, Ov. amet. 2.11.2, her. 6.47, 18.158 (also met. 1.95, an indirect reference to the prima pinus cf. A. Barchiesi, 2005, p. 169), Sen. Med. 336, Luc. 6.420, Stat. Achill. 1.156, Val. Fl. 1.123 (with A. Zissos, 2008, p. 151), 457 (with A.J. Kleywegt, 2005, p. 268), 687, 5.435. While in many of these cases pinus may well be a metonymy, common in Latin verse, for generic “wood” rather than a precise indication of the wood’s type, nevertheless pine-tree planks are the only material mentioned in passages that are indeed concerned with a precise botanical classification of the wood itself. The one exception seems to be Enn. trag. 209 abiega trabes (H.D. Jocelyn, 1967, pp. 352f., considers it an anomaly dictated by the specific context of the line). Pinus here must be taken as a ’repräsentativer Singular.’
However, the textual material out of which this passage is made in the MSS does not grant safe sailing, and ecdotic carpentry is thus in order. Here is the text:4

hic magnum Argoae nauis decus, edita pinus,
proceras decorans siluas, hirsuta per artus
appetit aeriis contingere montibus astra.

At 137 magnum Argoae nauis decus, edita pinus, I have accepted: edita, the reading in C and L, instead of addita of V and Γ, often preferred by editors (including Clausen); and the gen. nauis of several Itali against the dat. nauis in most MSS (V L Γ; C seems to have misread nauis and exchanged consonants to have uani).

With edita, the phrase edita pinus is appositive to Argoae nauis decus:5 “the glory of the ship Argo, the lofty pine-tree” which gave the ship its structure. The adjectival participle edita is used with the same sense as prolata to indicate the height of the pine-tree as a self-standing object,6 regardless of its relative positioning in Argo’s structure—on which, incidentally, it could be meaningfully called “edita” only if just one pine-tree trunk had been used for the mast. Edita pinus being an appositive nom., the peripheral characterizing that very pinus needs to have decus accompanied by a gen. of specification,7 which the Humanistic nauis provides.

4 The text given here is that of my forthcoming critical edition. The sigla used for MSS are those used by W.V. Clausen, 1966, to which readers should also refer for the several other minor transmission issues in this text that I am not treating here.

5 The phrase Argoae nauis itself has no parallel in Latin, but is a calque from Gr. Ἀργόως ναῦς, first found at Ap. Rhod. 1.319, 2.211, 4.554, 938 (the adj. Ἀργόως is also at 658, 1620). Afterwards in Greek literature it is only found at Opp. cyn. 2.622, Arg. Orph. 86, 224, 533f., 619, 879. In Latin, the adj. is found in phrases with nouns meaning/synonymous with “ship”; cf. Hor. epod. 16.57 remige (the first occurrence of Argo in Latin: see the comm. ad loc. of D. Mankin, 1995, pp. 267f., and L.C. Watson, 2003, pp. 525f.), Germ. 345, 621 puppis, 683 ratis, Mart. 13.72.1 carina, Stat. silv. 4.6.42, remos, Val. Fl. 6.116 uela, 7.573 ratis (with A. Perutelli, 1997, p. 443), 8.294 malum, Claud. carn. 26 [Goth.] 16 trabibus. Other occurrences of Argo are at Prop. 3.22.13 (with P. Fedeli, 1985, p. 640), Stat. Theb. 5.725, 6.343, Stat. Achill. 1.156, Val. Fl. 3.3, 430, 691, 6.731.

6 See OLD, s.v. editus, 1. A.E. Housman, 1902, p. 340 [= 1972, pp. 565f.], also prefers edita but takes it in the sense of genita (i.e. pinus nauis decus edita = genita ad nauem decorandam), which I do not believe to be correct.

7 Periphrases with decus indicating various objects conferring “pride” or “glory” usually see this noun followed by a gen. of specification rather than a datūs commodi: cf. [Tib.] 3.7 (Paneg.
Addita is certainly a Humanistic conjecture as much as gen. nauis is, probably meant to have the text imitate phrasings such as VERG. Aen. 8.301 ursa lousi proles (sc. Hercules), decus addidit diuis.⁸ Such a parallel, though, is also semantically improper, since decus addidere there literally means “adding something (or someone, or the value of something) to something else.” The participle addita would indeed agree with nauis of most MSS, but it is precisely this wrong reading that prompted the ‘emendation’ into a dative-governing verb such as addita, and the reading nauis edita (not addidita) of L seems to confirm that edita, also found in C (but with uam) was the archetype’s reading before a (disputable) emendation was proposed. This happened within a tradition leading to V and Γ, which were both largely contaminated and, at least in the case of V, followed a stage which saw a Humanist heavily, and most often wrongly, change the text.¹⁰ Whatever the origin of addita, in the syntax prompted by it decus would be a predicate nom. (“added to the ship as an object of praise”), as in VERG. Aen. 8.301 (quoted above).¹¹ However, an expression whereby the pine-tree is later “added” as a decus to the ship Argo, which was entirely built of pine-tree planks, is counter-intuitive: the ship does not exist until all of the pine-tree planks have been put together and not “added” to something different.¹²

⁸ Further imitated by Stat. Theb. 1.22 tuque (sc. Domitianæ; v. l. teque) o Latiae decus addidit famae.

⁹ Cf. Verg. Aen. 1.592 quale manus addunt ebori decus, Luc. 3.762 (Brutus) primus Caeseris pelagi decus addidit aronis, Manil. 3.28 (facile est) auroque atque ebori decus addidere (imitating Vergil, quot.), Stat. Theb. 3.217 serraque decus uelit (sc. Alcetes) addidere morti, 7.692f. famulo (sc. Amphitracos) decus addidit inane / ... Apollo (with the comm. ad loc. of J.J.L. Smolenars, 1994, 324f.), Sil. 10.307f. mors addidi (Dausqueius, prob. Delx: additum MSS) urbi / pulchra decus, 16.578f. celebreatr iuuabat / sacratos cineres atque hoc decus addidere ludis.

¹⁰ While V and Γ have been considered optini (or at least potiores) by most previous editors, in my forthcoming edition I am very skeptical that they bear genuine/correct readings whenever in disagreement with the rest of the MSS.

¹¹ Also cf. Sil. 10.307f., provided one accepts the reading additum transmitted by the MSS of Silius.

¹² See lentag’s preference is for nauis edita (already printed, among older editors, by C.H. Heyne-K.J. Sillig, 1832, F. Leo, 1891, R. Ellis, 1907, C. Plévent, 1910), which she explains with Houseman’s edita = genita (cit. above). However, the one way to understand nauis would be as a dat. of purpose, which whole phrase I do not consider likely or idiomatic.
Also at 138 proceras decorans siluas I have changed the text from transmitted decorat, accepted by most editors,13 into decorans. The whole sentence thus reads (starting from 137): “the high pine-tree, glory of the ship Argo, adorning the tall forests, here stretches out to the stars.” With the transmitted text, instead, which also has naui ... addita instead of nauis ... edita, the sentence runs: “the pine-tree, added to the ship Argo, here adorns the tall forests”. While this latter reading is not impossible, it has usually necessitated emending appetit in the foll. line into ac petit in order to obtain a clause coordinated with decorat (sc. decorat ac appetit).14

My reconstruction is that a transition from decorans to decorat (decoràs > decorat) took place, potentially as part of the misunderstanding that also produced naui addita in the prev. line. With this text, which has edita pinus isolated from the standpoint of métrique verbale, the phrase proceras decorans siluas provides an attributive expansion to pinus, itself branching out of the periphrasis referencing it (magnum decus etc.). While such an emendation is not strictly necessary whichever reading one adopts in the prev. line, equally unnecessary is the change of appetit into ac petit if one were to accept decorat, appetit could well be coordinated in asyndeton.

Furthermore, I have retained proceras, the transmitted reading in the MSS agreeing with siluas, against Heinsius’s conjecture proceros which has been accepted by most other editors15 and agrees with artus. This may be taken as a further consequence of adopting edita just like the pine-tree is “lofty”, so consequently are the forests that it adorns as their most notable inhabitant.16 However, the specific ordo uerborum itself – proceras decorans siluas (as opposed to isometric siluas decorans) – suggests that the syntactical unit ends here, where siluas is also encapsulated between, and emphasized by, the penthemimeral and ephthemimeral caesurae – instead of continuing on to include artus, with which all other editors’ proceros would agree: in their proceros decorat siluas hirsuta per artus, the phrasal connection between proceros and artus, while visible, would

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13 Ellis obelizes decorat (and timidly proposes “fort. superar uel superan” in apparatc. his is the only participial conjecture I have been able to track) but still accepts ac petit in the foll. I.
14 To be noted is also that with decorat ac petit the adv. hic would modify both verbs whereas the logic of the sentence does seem to require that hic rather modify appetit alone. This alone would not be a sufficient argument against decorat, but that would seem to befit a context wherein the one governing verb is appetit.
15 Among recent editors, only A. Salvatore, 1999, prefers proceras. F. Leo, 1891, had proceras but not as a result of choice among manuscript readings, as he rather considered addita and proceros conjectures of Heinsius’s. C. Plévent, 1910, had proceras but ignored the reading proceros.
16 For the phrase procerae siluae cf. Ov. her. 16.109 ardus proceris speliantur Gargara siluis (also cf. TLL 10.2, 1520, 11, mentioning Plin. epist. 5.6 proceras nemora). The adj. procerus is used for the tallest trees (see TLL 10.2, 1519, 75ff.), and specifically for the pine-tree in the (metapoetic) silua at Enn. ann. 179 pinus proceras peruortunt.
be lost to the articulation of the syntax. The other element to this reasoning is the second half of the line, *hirsuta per artus*, which must be taken as a hypallage standing for *hirsutos per artus*: “the pine-tree adorns the forests with its prickly branches.” With *proceros* agreeing with *artus*, and thus filling its adjectival slot, *hirsuta* would be self-standing and absolute, way too far from its noun, *pinus*.

To conclude with 139 *appetit aeris contingere montibus astra*, as mentioned above, I retain transmitted *appetit* whereas all other editors follow Heinsius’s emendation *ac petit*, in order to avoid a lack of coordination with their preferred reading *decorat* in the previous line. However, with my conjecture *decorans* (see above), *appetit* remains the one finite verb governing not only *contingere* but the whole period.

Whatever the verb, one final problem lies in the transmitted reading *montibus*, which a few editors (among whom W.V. Clausen, 1966) have changed into *motibus* (Scaliger’s conjecture). The interpretation with *motibus* is that the pine-tree “attempts to touch the sky (*appetit/aeris petit contingere astra*) through its movements up in the air,” i.e. the tip of the tree, shaking in the open air ‘near’ the sky, tries to reach it. However, there are no parallels for such imagery or phrasing (including the phrase *aerii motus*).

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17 Also C.E. Murgia, 1971, p. 211 n. 16, argues *proceras* should be preserved “if the poet is cultivating a Lucretian rhythm” (i.e. if he imitates such Lucretian *clausulae as concita per artus, concussa per artus, commixta per artus* etc.). The self-standing clausula *per artus* is indeed very frequent in Lucretius (25x) and also found in the hexameters of Vergil (3x), Ovid (3x), Manilius (2x), Lucan (2x), Statius (7x), Valerius Flaccus (3x), Silius (4x). For *artus* figuratively describing tree branches, see *TLL* 2, 719, 38ff. A similar verse ending is at *Culex 70 gemmantis picta (tellus)* per *herbas*.

18 The phrase *hirsuta pinus* only elsewhere occurs at *OV. met. 10.103* et *succincta comas hirsutaque uertice pinus* which is probably a direct model (see above) and has in *uertice* a parallel to the local determination required by *hirsuta*, here realized through *per artus*. The adj. *hirsutus* can be otherwise used to describe plants: see *TLL* 6.3, 2825, 53f.

19 One further possibility would be taking this clause *κατὰ παρένθεσιν* before the following: 137 *decorat silus / 139 (appetit) / 140 ilicis et nigrae species nec laeta cupressus etc.*

20 For *appeto + inf.*, see *TLL* 2, 286, 43 ff., and especially cf. *Cic. Pisc. 75 aut non appetentem aut etiam recusantem bellum suscipere*, fin. 5.55 ut *appetat animus agere semper aliquid*, Stat. *Theb. 1.234f, gremium incestare parentis / appetit (sc. Oedipus).*


22 Such a corruption did indeed take place at l. 167, where the correct reading *motibus* is wrongly transmitted as *montibus* by *V, F, and L*.
With aeris montibus, instead, we see the pine-tree attempting to reach the sky “from the mountains”, which are the ones rising towards the sky in a phrase (aerii montes) which does indeed occur elsewhere in Latin verse.  

With montibus, also a rhetorical effect of visual gradatio is achieved whereby the focus proceeds up from the water on which Argo sails, to the top of the forests, on to the mountains, the last earthly height under the astra which they try to reach. Through the conflation of all these realms here around the ship may even be an allusion to Argo’s catasterism, in which case contingere may have not only its etymological meaning of “touching” or “trying to touch” (conative), but also, figuratively, that of adipisci, i.e. “to (try to) conquer.”

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23 For such a use of the abl., here governed by contingere, see LSH 2.103. Another possibility is to understand “on the mountains” (giving not the origin of the trees’ movement, but rather the area to which it is limited), for which see LSH 2.146.

24 Cf. Catull. 68b.57 (also 64.240 aerium ... montis ... cacumen), Verg. ecl. 8.59, Aen. 6.234, 8.221, Stat. Achill. 2.139, Sil. 4.740, Ciris 302 (alluding to Verg. ecl. 8.59; see R.O.A.M. Lyne, 1978, pp. 228f.), Rutil. 2.16, Merob. paneg. 17 (with A. Bruzzone, 1999, pp. 105f.). For other phrases with aerius similar to aerius mons, see TLL 1, 1063, 17ff. The adj. is also used at Culex 124 to describe poplars: for aerius describing plants, see P. Bernardini Marzolla, 1951, p. 32, who on that basis proposed the conjecture frondibus (independently from Heinsius, to whom this same conjecture is attributed by other scholars’ works, e.g. W.A. Baehrens, 1925, in appareatu, with no further indications), most recently accepted by T. Gärtner, 2010 (who adds a comparison with Alc. Avit. SHG 4.50 steriles diffundit in aera frondes). To this writer, however, this seems very unlikely and unidiomatic. Finally, Ellis’s attempt (in appareatu) at aresribus is the one literal bite that is worse than these trees’ bark.

25 Cf. Erat. catast. 35 (with A. Santoni, 2009, pp. 235f.), Hyg. astr. 2.37; also see LGRM 6.1005-1028.

26 For a similar concept, cf. Verg. Aen. 11.136 actas ad sidera pinus. More generally, for contingere in such phrases about “reaching out” to the sky, the TLL (4, 713, 16f.) cites our passage along with Prop. 1.8.43 nunc mihi summa licet contingere sidera plantis (with P. Fedeli, 1982, pp. 228f.), Ov. fast. 3.34 contigeratque (sc. palma) sua (v. 1. novâ) sidera summa coma (with F. Ursini, 2008, p. 96), Tib. 1.7.15f. aetherias (vv. II. aetherio, aerio) contingens urtice nubes | ... Taurus.