

EXPLORING DIFFERING NOTIONS OF SCHOLARSHIP IN THE ELEVENTH  
CENTURY: THE TWO EARLIEST EXTANT ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS OF  
HYGINUS'S *DE ASTRONOMIA*

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Although surviving manuscripts of the text of Hyginus's *De astronomia* date from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries, illustrated versions do not appear until the mid-eleventh century.<sup>1</sup> The two earliest extant manuscripts are now in the Vatican (Fig. 1) and Leiden (Fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> A comparison of the two provides a valuable lesson in why modern scholars should be careful not to generalize when deliberating on how a "typical" eleventh-century scholar might have addressed the challenges of preserving the "classical authority" of any text.

As objects, the two manuscripts could scarcely be more dissimilar. The Leiden manuscript (Fig. 2) is a jumble of mismatched bits and pieces of parchment dating to about 1025–1030.<sup>3</sup> The *De Astronomia* appears on fols. 155r–188r, with both the script and the images having been convincingly attributed to the well-known bibliophile and monk from Saint Cybard d'Angoulême, Adémar de Chabannes (988–1034). From its appearance, it seems likely that the manuscript was written for his personal use.<sup>4</sup>

Conversely, the Vatican manuscript is a beautifully made prestige object (Fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> It was written prior to 1056 in the Spanish monastery of Santa Maria de Ripoll under the supervision of the well-known scholar Brother Olivo. The actual execution of manuscript, however, has been attributed to another, less well-known, and, perhaps, junior monk named Arnaldus.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, the manner in which the Hyginian texts are provided in each manuscript could not be more different. For, despite its scrappy appearance, the Leiden manuscript is philologically exemplary and faithful to the structure of its classical model, presenting all four books of the *De astronomia* in their canonical order. The text of the Vatican manuscript is idiosyncratically constructed, having been compiled from a series of astronomical excerpts arranged according to four topics: "De sole," "De luna," "De natura rerum" and "De astronomia." The descriptions of the constellations themselves have been taken from classical and early medieval authors, including not only Hyginus, but also "Aratus," Pliny, Boethius, Bede, and Isidore.

Having said that, each excerpt from Hyginus in the Vatican manuscript has been accurately copied from its original [con]text, with original spellings and grammar intact. As a result, it is possible to string together the various fragments to form a fairly close approximation of the original text from which the Hyginian passages were taken. Once that is done, it turns out that the texts of the Vatican and Leiden manuscripts are in fact extremely close and uniquely share a precise group of readings that most closely resemble the lost classical prototype.<sup>7</sup>

The illustrations accompanying the texts of the two manuscripts are also stylistically and iconographically distinct. The Leiden

ce tēpē l'ycōz agros flama uastabat. Unda uictor p̄fugiens post somas inuentionē cū ad celū  
 cōtenderet euasit. neq. longē iā abest. respiciens ad tēn timore p̄mot. decidit. Inq. perisse  
 dī. E quis aut sub uolasse. At tē sidera aboue constitutus existimans. Alu n̄ crimi  
 natū ab amia. sed nosa opus audire q̄nolla aut p̄cibus eius mouerē. p̄fugisse argis  
 dixer. Euripides aut in melanippa. hippen chironus centauro filia thean antea appella  
 tidio. Cypriū. alē p̄tē in monte pelio. astudū inuenando maxmū habere. quodā tēpē  
 abeolo hellems filio iouis in pote p̄suasā concepit. Cūq. iā paratū appropinquat p̄fu  
 gisse in illū. nepatri cū unygmē sperare nepotē. pote asse uiderē. Itaq. cū patris cū p̄se  
 querē. dicit p̄uisse abeoy pote stare nepotem apertem conspiciat. que deorū  
 uoluntate postquā peperit. mequā conuersa in astra ē constituta. Nonnulli eā uatē  
 di. xij. fuisse. Sed q̄d deoz cōsilio. hominib; sit enunciate solita. mequā ē cōuersam.  
 Callimachus aut ait. q̄d desierit uenari. ac colere diuā. Anquā sup̄specion dextimus. cum  
 diuā cōuerisse. h̄p̄ dī eā haere n̄ ē in conspectu centauro quē chirona ē nulli dixer.  
 et aliam dimidiā apparere q̄noluerit scire. fonnā ē.

**Q**uis areticū cyculū ex pectans. aestuo orbe n̄i. extremo ore caput delphini tangere  
 uidet. A quarimanū dextm̄ ceruice suū cōiungens. aurisq. pisab; clausus quos in xii  
 signis postea demonstrabim. Huius instelli corpus apparē usq. ad umbilicū deformatū.  
 qui occidit cū pisce duduob. primo qui supra ignē fiet us. Exortē cū aqua pro toto cū  
 pisce cū quo occidit. At manus aquari dextm̄. In h̄tē in rostro stellas. ii. obscuras. In capite. i.  
 In maxilla. i. In uerisq. aurib; singulas. In ceruicib; iii. obscuras. sed mā xime lucas. que  
 caput p̄xima apparē. In uero clauā. i. In pectore. i. in tē se. p̄lio. i. in umbilico nouissima. i.  
 que andromede caput uocat. In genib; utrisq. singulas. In uerisq. p̄plicib; singulas. Ita  
 h̄tē om̄nū.

Stellarū xvii



Fig. 1 Pegasus. Mid-eleventh century. Illumination. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, Reg. Lat. 123, fol. 193r

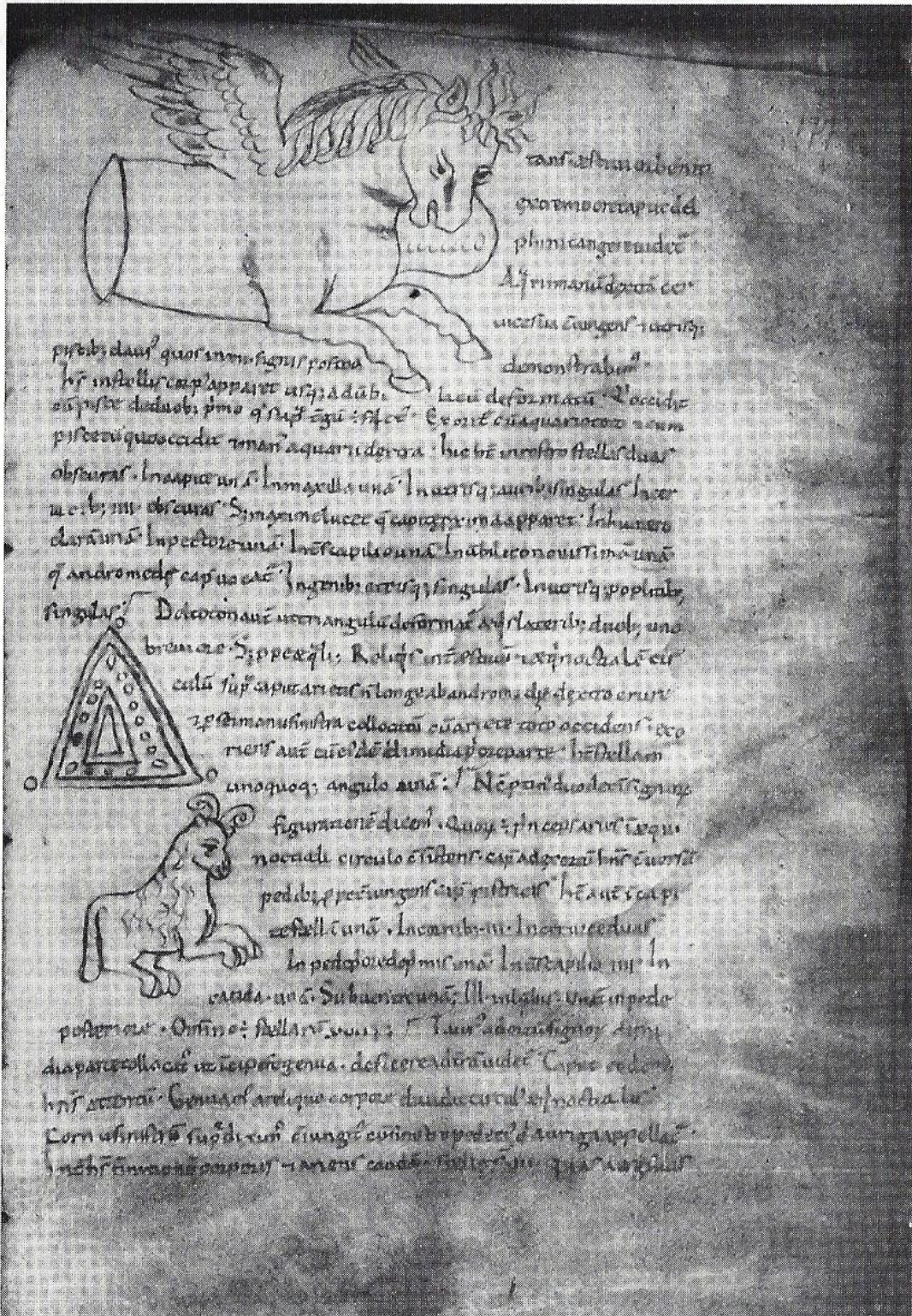


Fig. 2 Adémar de Chabannes, *Pegasus, Triangulus, and Aries*. Illumination. c. 1025–1030. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Voss. Lat. 8°15, fol. 177r

manuscript sets the illustrations within the text of Book 3 (fols. 172v–181v)<sup>8</sup> so that they follow the order in which each constellation is described (that is, the constellations of the northern ecliptical hemisphere, then the twelve constellations of the zodiacal band, and, finally, the constellations of the southern ecliptical hemisphere). In the Vatican manuscript, the illuminated section of Reg. Lat. 123 appears in a section entitled “Hygini fabula” as part of the fourth topic: “De astronomia.” The illustrations begin with the twelve zodiacal signs (fols. 175v–182v), and the remaining constellations of the northern and southern celestial hemispheres follow (fols. 184v–204v).

Iconographically, neither set of illustrations bears close resemblance to any illustrations of the constellations that are more or less directly derived from classical prototypes, such as those preserved in the Leiden *Aratea* or the Basel or Madrid Germanicus manuscripts. Instead, they both appear to derive, ultimately, from a pictorial tradition most closely associated with the pseudo-Bedan *De signis caeli*. In particular, several of the defining features found in these two Hyginus manuscripts first appear in a Carolingian manuscript of the pseudo-Bedan *De signis caeli* from Fleury-sur-Loire, Paris BN Lat. 5543, although each represents an independent variant of the original.<sup>9</sup>

Stylistically, the drawings in each are equally dissimilar. The Vatican pictures are highly colored and painterly in their execution, many constellation groupings being set within a colored frame and against a colored background, recalling a pictorial convention common to a late classical prototype. The style in which the constellations are portrayed imbues them with a certain “classical feel” and perhaps suggests that the illuminator was tasked not only with copying the

form of the figures, but with reproducing the loose and fluid style in which the pictures from his model were painted.

Despite his painterly bravado, it is clear that the artist of the Vatican manuscript (Fig. 1) is often unsure about many of the details of what he is copying. For example, he misunderstands the structure of the *harpe* held by Perseus and misses the identity of the severed head of Medusa. He is confused over the pictorial formula of Pegasus’s head set against the profile of his left wing and does not understand or cannot reproduce the implied anatomical structure behind Sagittarius’s foreshortened right arm.

In contrast, the Leiden illustrations are line drawings. This change in medium suggests to modern eyes that these drawings have lost their direct stylistic connection to a presumed late classical prototype.<sup>10</sup> And this apparent stylistic distance is exacerbated by the fact that the antique formula of framing each constellation is not used, so that pictures and text are often jumbled together.

Nevertheless, if one moves beyond the immediate impressions generated by these stylistic changes and considers more closely how each figure has been constructed—form, posture, attributes, clothing, and so forth—it becomes clear that the artist of the Leiden pictures does have a profound respect for the authority of his model. He just manifests it in a different way.

Adémar’s skill as a draftsman has suffered damnation by faint praise from recent scholars: they describe his illustrations as being significant “iconographic documents” or important because they allow the art historian a glimpse into “the aesthetic taste of an 11th-century monk.”<sup>11</sup> In his illustrations of the *De astronomia*, though, Adémar shows himself to be unusually adept at understanding, interpreting, and re-creating pictorial

formulas. If one compares the illustrations in the Vatican Hyginus with those in the Leiden manuscript, it becomes clear that, in all the elements where the Vatican artist goes awry, Adémar copes beautifully. For example, he is able to delineate the two-bladed shape of Perseus's *harpe* without difficulty and clearly shows the Medusa's head as being encircled by snaky curls. He successfully depicts the head of the open-mouthed Pegasus set in front of the forward curve of his left wing (Fig. 2), and he understands the foreshortening of Sagittarius's right arm.

For this reason, it would be wrong to characterize one style as "better" than the other. Instead, they appear to reflect different concerns. The Vatican artist seems to have been interested primarily in the overall "look" of his drawings, successfully managing to recreate the "feel" of a late classical model. Adémar, however, is either unable to or not interested in re-creating the stylistic impression of a classical manuscript.<sup>12</sup> He does appear to have a keen insight into the individual pictorial components of his model. It is the sort of attention to detail that one might expect of a careful, talented scribe, although one might not normally expect a man primarily interested in texts to have been so skilled a draftsman.

Considering how the incorporation of the *De signis caeli* illustrations was achieved indicates that the process was different in each manuscript. In the Leiden Hyginus, the task was more complex since it involved, first, rearranging the pictures from the sequence in which they appear in the *De signis caeli* to the order in which they appear in the *De astronomia*; second, determining how many pictures should fit on each page to accommodate the exact amount of the new Hyginian text; and, third, taking into account

that the parchment of this particular manuscript is uneven and adjusting the size and spacing of the script to accommodate these irregularities.

The possibility that Adémar might have copied his pictures directly from a Hyginus manuscript in which the illustrations from the *De signis caeli* had already been inserted is diminished when one realizes that the edges of the text hug the contours established by the drawings. Therefore, the pictures were clearly drawn on the pages before the text was written. In particular, the extruded tail of text that appears alongside the illustrations of Cepheus and Cassiopeia (fols. 174r–v) confirms that the Leiden manuscripts could not have been copied *in toto* from a similarly deformed model. It must have been Adémar himself who incorporated the *De signis caeli* illustrations into Book III of the *De astronomia*. Once again, one is prompted to admire the artistic skill of this bookish monk.

One more issue that merits attention concerns the placement of the stars in the Leiden and Vatican Hyginus manuscripts. There are only four constellations that have been marked with stars in the Leiden Hyginus—Hercules, Lyra, Cygnus, and Triangulum. Interestingly, a careful examination of the positions of the stars shows that they closely follow the stellar positions listed in Book 3 of the *De astronomia*, and not those from *De signis caeli* tradition.

To take the constellation of Hercules (Fig. 3) as an example, the stars that have been added to the Leiden Hercules are as follows: 1 in the head, 1 in each shoulder, 1 under his left arm, 1 on his right forearm, 1 in his right hand, 1 on each side, 3 on his right thigh, 1 on his right knee, 2 on his right shin, 1 on his right foot, and 4 close to the lion's skin. The texts stipulate that Hercules has

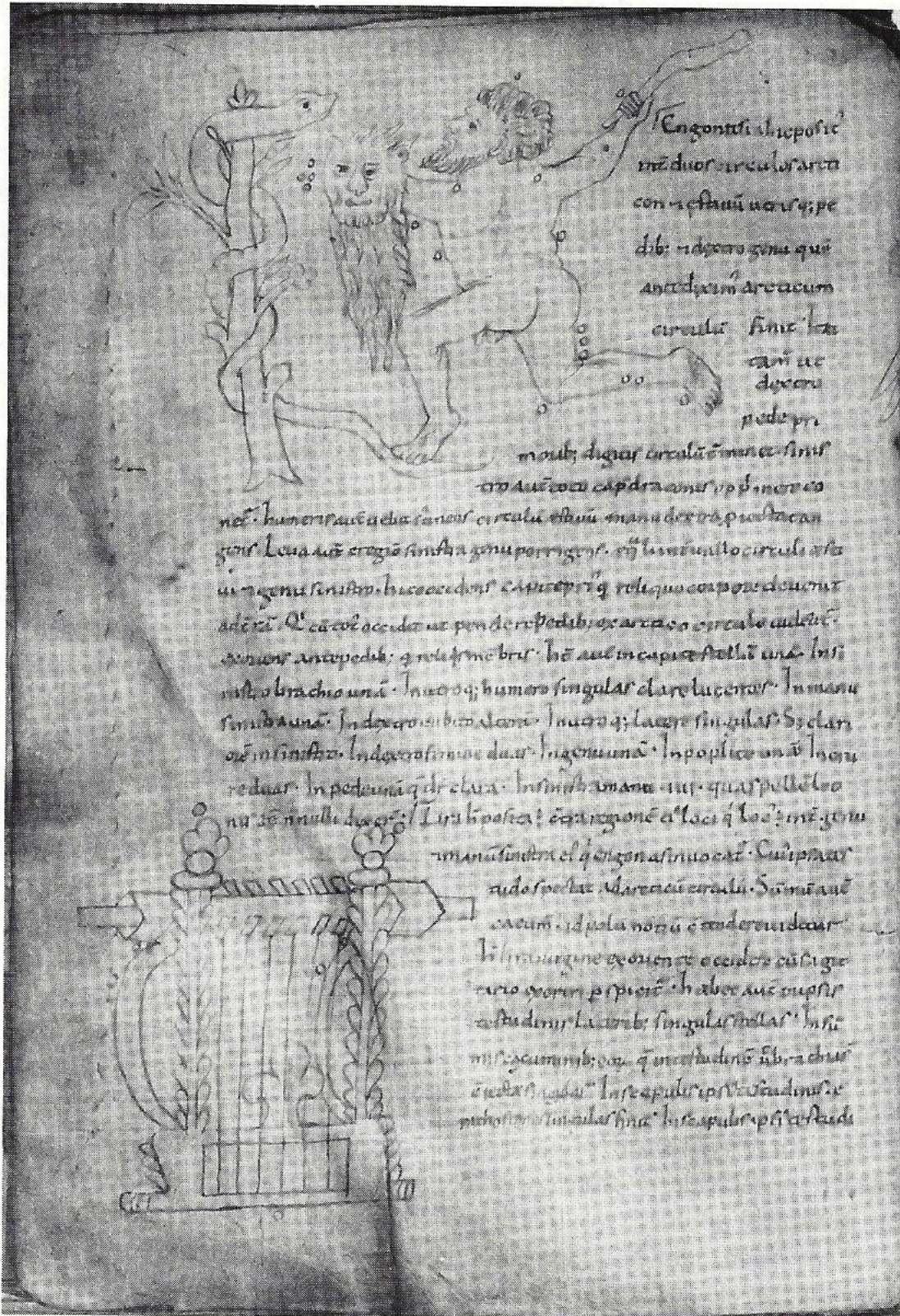


Fig. 3 Adémar de Chabannes, *Hercules and Lyra (with Stars)*. Illumination. c. 1025–1030. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Voss. Lat. 8° 15, fol. 173v

Hyginus 3.5

in capite stellam unam  
 in sinistro brachio unam  
 in utroque humero singulas clare lucentes  
 in manu sinistra unam  
 [-]  
 in dextro cubito alteram  
 [-]  
 in utroque latere singulas, sed clariorem in sinistro  
 in dextro femine duas  
 in genu unam  
 in poplite unam  
 in crure duas  
 in pede unam, quae dicitur clara  
 in sinistra manu quattuor quas pellem leonis esse  
 nonnulli dixerunt.

Clearly, the stars have been placed in accord with the Hyginian text; therefore, the scribe's actions are the result of an informed iconographic choice, rather than one of simple copying.

With the Vatican illustrations, it is difficult to uncover any dominant rationale behind the placement of the stars. In 11 constellations, they can be connected to the *De signis caeli* text; in 7, to the text of Hyginus. The placement of the remaining 24 are sufficiently problematic to be unattributable to any single or known pictorial source. Overall, then, the position of the stars in the Vat-

Pseudo-Bede, *De signis caeli* 4

in capite 1  
 [-]  
 in utroque humero 1 splendidam  
 [-]  
 in dextra manu 1  
 [-]  
 in cubito sinistro 1  
 [-]  
 in dextra coxa 2  
 in genu dextro 1  
 in sinistro genu 1  
 in eadem tibia 1  
 [-]  
 et in Ropalo, quem tenet in eadem manu, 1.<sup>13</sup>

ican manuscript as well as the accompanying text reflect a compiler's mentality.

In conclusion, the Leiden manuscript seems to reveal an academically inclined, artistically competent scholar whose primary aim was to create an "accurate" copy of a classical text to which he might add his own erudite insights. The Vatican manuscript, however, is a scholastic compilation whose author/s bring together so many contradictory textual and pictorial sources that, even though it is lavishly illuminated, it is "scientifically" extremely problematic.

## NOTES

As ever, I thank Elly Dekker for her ongoing support of my explorations into these early astronomical texts.

1. This peculiar gap has prompted an as yet unresolved discussion among modern scholars as to whether or not the text of the *De astronomia* itself was ever illustrated in antiquity. This essay is not the place to address that dilemma beyond saying probably yes,

but we have only a vague idea of what those original illustrations might have looked like. For a fuller discussion of the problem, see the commentary on the *De astronomia*, which appears as part of the The Saxl Project (<http://www.kristenlippincott.com/the-saxl-project/manuscripts/classical-literary-tradition/hyginus-de-astronomia>).

2. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, Reg. Lat. 123,

and Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Voss. Lat. 8° 15. Since the bibliography on both manuscripts is too vast to be cited here, the reader is asked to consult the relevant sections of The Saxl Project (see n. 1, above) for additional references and comments.

3. Ghislaine Viré describes the Leiden manuscript as “recopié pêle-mêle des notes éparses et des textes profanes et religieux sur les feuillets de dimensions inégales, sans souci de la mise en page.” See Ghislaine Viré, “La Transmission du *De Astronomia* d’Hygin jusqu’au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Revue d’histoire des Textes* 11 (1981):159–276, esp. 205.

4. A. W. Byvanck was the first to propose the attribution to Adémar, arguing that, for the most part, the pages of the manuscript had been written and illustrated by one hand, suggesting that they were “écrits en grande parties par Adémar pour son usage personnel” (A. W. Byvanck, *Les principaux manuscrits à peintures de la Bibliothèque royale des Pays-Bas et du Musée Meermann-Westreenianum à La Haye* [Paris: 1924], pp. 69–72, esp. p. 69). See also Léopold Delisle, “Notice sur les manuscrits originaux d’Adémar de Chabannes,” *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques* 35 (1896):241–358; J. Porcher, *L’Art roman à Saint-Martial de Limoges: Les manuscrits à peintures, historique de l’abbaye, la basilique*, exh. cat. (Limoges: 1950), pp. 43–57, esp. pp. 50–54; Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *La Décoration des manuscrits à Saint-Martial de Limoges et en Limousin du IX<sup>e</sup> au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Mémoires et documents publiés par la Société de l’École des Chartes 17 (Paris: Droz, 1969), pp. 163–225, esp. 165–166; and Viré, 159–276, esp. 205.

5. Viré describes the Vatican script as “a une trace régulier tout au long du codex et le texte est agrémenté de tables astronomiques et des dessins en couleurs représentant les constellations, que qui nous permet de dire qu’il s’agissait d’un exemplaire de bibliothèque de belle qualité.” See Viré, 159–276, esp. 205.

6. See Delisle, 241–245; Viré, 205, n. 3; Ghislaine Viré, ed., *Hygini De astronomia* (Stuttgart: B. G. Taubner, 1992), p. xvii.

7. See Viré, “La Transmission,” 203–206. As to why two manuscripts from such different locations might be so close in their readings, Viré notes that the monastery of Santa Maria in Ripoll was “une founda-

tion” of Saint-Victor de Marseille and enjoyed particularly close relations with other scriptoria in France, especially those in the Loire Valley and the north of France (see *ibid.*, 206).

8. Patrick McGurk errs in citing the Leiden manuscript and Munich, Staatsbibliothek, CLM 10270 as “being the only two out of twelve Hyginus manuscripts, which have survived from 1025 to 1225, to illustrate Book III, and not Book II.” See Patrick McGurk, *Verzeichnis astrologischer und mythologischer illustrierter Handschriften des lateinischen Mittelalters*, IV [= *Catalogue of Astrological and Mythological Illuminated Manuscripts of the Latin Middle Ages*, IV: *Astrological Manuscripts in Italian Libraries (Other Than Rome)*] (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1966), p. xxii.

9. See A. W. Byvanck, *De platen in de Aratea van Hugo de Groot, with a Summary: The Illustrations in the Aratea of Hugo Grotius, and a List of Illustrated Astronomical Manuscripts* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitg. Mij., 1949), pp. 189 and 191; Gaborit-Chopin, pp. 186–191; and Patrick McGurk, “Germanici Caesaris Aratea cum scholiis: A New Illustrated Witness from Wales,” *National Library of Wales Journal* 18 (1973):198–199.

10. It seems prudent to be slightly circumspect in making this judgment since our sense of what the illustrations in a “classical” manuscript look like understandably has been swayed by the more luxurious surviving examples from late antiquity. If one considers the scratchy and unframed ink drawings found in papyrus rolls, it is easy to imagine how this less formal approach might represent another possible stylistic model. For such examples, see Kurt Weitzmann, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex: A Study of the Origin and Method of Text Illustration*, Studies in Manuscript Illuminations II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), esp. pp. 49–53, and *id.*, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), esp. ch. 5.

11. See Gaborit-Chopin, p. 163.

12. Taking into consideration the caveat in n. 10, above.

13. See Viré, *Hygini De astronomia*, p. 98, and Antonio Dell’Era, “Una rielaborazione dell’Arato latino,” *Studi medievale* 20 (1979):284.