

A COMMENTARY ON THE *CYNEGETICA* BY OPIAN
OF APAMEA, BOOK II*

by

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The *Cynegetica* (*On Hunting*) by Oppian of Apamea (3rd century AD) is a didactic poem written in hexameter and dedicated to the emperor Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus Augustus (better known as Caracalla), one of the two sons (the second being Geta) of Lucius Septimius Severus by his second wife, Julia Domna of Emesa in Syria (cf. *Cyneg.* I 3 f.; IV 20)¹. The work definitely must have been written after AD 212 judging by the allusion to the capture of Ctesiphon by Septimius Severus (I 31), but according to MAIR (1928) the most plausible date for the *Cynegetica* is after the murder of Caracalla's brother and co-emperor, Geta, which means after AD 212. The way in which Oppian presented Caracalla in the invocation opening the first book reinforces this theory: he is described as the sole emperor and heir of Septimius Severus, the master of lands and oceans (I 10 f.). However, in the light of what we know about the imperial family, one may assume that the poem was written even slightly later than AD 212; in AD 215 Caracalla and his mother Julia Domna undertook a trip to the East. That trip included Apamea and Antioch, where they were

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¹ All references in this paper, unless stated otherwise, are to Oppian's *Cynegetica*. Where no book numbers are given, references are to the second book.

received with great honours and where they spent the winter of AD 216. Hence, SPATHARAKIS (2004) put forward the theory that Oppian might have written and offered his poem to Caracalla on the occasion of the emperor's stay in Syria. The poem also provides the reader with some information about the poet himself. Oppian refers to Apamea as his homeland (called here Chersonese II 100, or Pella II 101; 114) on the river Orontes while talking about the previously unat- tested labour of Heracles in Syria: as Oppian reports, Archippus, the lord of Pella and a friend of Heracles, asked the hero to make a hydrological improvement to the city, which was flooded by the river Orontes. Heracles was tasked with making separate channels for the waters of the river, and of the lake, which resulted in an extremely fertile plain, hence called the new plain of Heracles (νέον πέδον Ἡρακλῆος, II 149). Elsewhere, Oppian mentions the tomb of the Ethiopian king Memnon, which was allegedly situated in the vicinity of Apamea. According to the poet, "the Assyrian dwellers mourn for Memnon, the glorious son of the Morning" (II 152 f.) in that place. Several lines later he once again refers to his fatherland: "Howbeit the spacious glories of our fatherland we shall sing in due order with sweet Pimplean song" (II 156 f.; transl. by MAIR 1928).

The issue of the authorship of the *Cynegetica* has attracted a protracted scholarly debate (in the last decades: HAMBLENNÉ 1968; MARTÍNEZ, SÁNCHEZ 2003; WHITE 2004). The author of the *Cynegetica* is frequently referred to as Pseudo-Oppian to avoid confusion with the author of the poem *Haliēutica* (*On Fishing*), Oppian of Cilicia, to whom an ancient *Life* (*Vita B*), the *Suda* (10th c.), a short biography by Constantine Manasses (12th c.) as well as manuscript tradition, in my opinion wrongly, ascribe the authorship of both poems. In the last of these testimonies one can find incorrect information that the same author wrote not only the *Cynegetica* and the *Haliēutica*, but also the *Ixeutica* (*On Fowling*), a work otherwise attributed to a certain Dionysius. However, since this problem was not the primary subject matter of my dissertation, I refer to the author simply as Oppian, for the sake of convenience.

The *Cynegetica* consists of four books. As noticed already by SCHMITT (1970), the books of the poem are thematically paired: the first pair is devoted to the triple division of the hunting, hunting seasons, the hunter's physical qualities and weapons, breeds of horses and dogs (which are treated in the first book); further, to the general precepts of hunting and finally the descriptions of hunting for particular kinds of game (which are treated in the fourth book). The second pair, which consists of the second and the third book, deals with different species of animals; the second book is dedicated mainly to horned animals such as bulls, deer and antelopes, and the third one to predators such as lions, leopards and tigers. Thus the poem describes different breeds of dogs and horses, various species of animals to be hunted as well as methods and weapons of hunting. In comparison to other hunting treatises, Oppian's poem is exceptional: its form and character is far more original and multifaceted than similar works dealing

with hunting and animals. However, the *Cynegetica* cannot be considered to be just a hunting handbook; the technical descriptions are enriched with numerous mythological digressions and vignettes about the animals' idiosyncrasies, which not only add colour to the discourse, but also prove the author's knowledge of ancient literary classics and provides the reader with insight into the state of contemporary knowledge of zoology.

The *Cynegetica* started to enjoy popularity in the sixteenth century, when four editions of the text were released (LIPPIUS 1517; VASCOSANUS 1549; TURNEBUS 1555; RITTERHAUSEN 1597) and three commentaries were written (BRODAEUS 1552; BODINUS 1555; RITTERSHAUSEN 1597). These first commentaries are written in Latin and have a form of factual commentaries, which contain brief explanations of particular words and phrases as well as ancient testimonies. The testimonies included in these works are extremely valuable for modern researchers working on commentaries. From the sixteenth century to the present day, twelve critical editions of the text have been produced. Apart from preparing editions of the text, authors in the nineteenth and twentieth century concentrated chiefly on studies on the linguistic problems of the *Cynegetica* (e.g. LEHRS 1837; BUSSEMAKER in DÜBNER, BUSSEMAKER 1849; MILLER 1891). In twentieth century research on the *Cynegetica* one can distinguish several different tendencies: scholars were deeply interested in didactic aspects of the poem (e.g. HOPKINSON 1994; TOOHEY 1996) and in Greek poetry's contribution to emperor worship (e.g. AYMARD 1951; OPELT 1960). The poem was also translated into English in the Loeb Classical Library series (MAIR 1928); this edition deserves special scholarly attention owing to valuable remarks and testimonies situated in the footnotes. The editor also provided the reader with a useful introduction dedicated to such problems as the authorship of the poem, zoology before Oppian, the division of the art of capturing animals into three types (hunting, fishing and fowling), information about some animal idiosyncrasies and a general plan of the books of the poem. The only modern commentary on any part of the poem is that of SCHMITT (1970), which is devoted to book one. It is worth emphasising that up until 1970 one can observe a gap in studies on the *Cynegetica* aimed at producing commentaries. Over the last few years one can observe various trends in the studies on Oppian: in one group, represented mostly by Italian scholarship, the scholars have focused on the particular problems of the poem (MASSIMILLA 1999; CIPOLLA 2006); in another one, the researchers have worked on bilingual editions of the poem, which were supplemented by brief remarks situated either in the footnotes or in the appendices (MAIR 1928; CALVO 1990; L'ALLIER 2009; SESTILI 2010). However, these comments and notes cannot be considered real commentaries, since they provide the reader with only brief and basic information about the characters and motifs. Thus, my commentary to the second book of the *Cynegetica* is going to fill the gap in studies on the *Cynegetica*.

In my commentary I scrutinise the composition of the second book of the poem in order to determine whether the particular compositional elements are

connected somehow, or whether they were introduced into the poem accidentally; I examine what Oppian calls particular animals and figures, what types of terms, names and epithets he uses and what role the animals and characters play in the poem. In my discussion of the second book of the *Cynegetica* I devote special attention to the means of artistic expression as well as the frequency of use of the particular terms and names, since Oppian, constantly striving for linguistic and poetical innovativeness, repeatedly replaces traditional appellations with rare and extraordinary equivalents. While analysing the descriptions of the animal species, I try to estimate to what extent these depictions reflect reality and from which sources Oppian may have derived knowledge about hunting, zoology and natural history: did he write based predominantly on his own knowledge or did he repeat hearsay? Did he have a chance of personally seeing the animals he discussed, or did he derive his knowledge solely from the available treatises on animals and hunting? Since Oppian was seeking novelty and originality, his poem abounds with rare and local versions of myths; furthermore, some of the myths were reinterpreted by Oppian himself (e.g. a myth about the tenth labour of Heracles, 109–158, or about the Thracian king Phineus, 612–628). My aims are to carry out an analysis of the modified myths and mythological motifs, to separate the traditional elements from newly introduced ones, and to determine their role in the second book of the poem. However, my commentary tries to contribute not only to furthering of research into Oppian's poetry, but also to studies on the pagan literature and the culture of the late antiquity: apart from the didactic part on the wildlife, the author includes in his work – knowingly or not – a great number of hints and allusions to phenomena of different types. Among them one can list historical phenomena (e.g. forms and practices of emperor worship, allusions to foreign imperial policy, such as the Roman–Parthian wars, the capture of the Parthian capital Ctesiphon in AD 198), literary tendencies (e.g. the development of court and didactic poetry modelled on erudite Hellenistic works), cultural references (e.g. hunting as a luxury form of entertainment and a part of *tryphé* – the elegant lifestyle), and social ones (e.g. imperial patronage over the poet).

I base my commentary on the newest critical edition of the text (PAPATHOMOPOULOS 2003). Since this edition comprises the critical apparatus with various *lectiones*, my commentary does not focus on textual problems. However, if a particular *lectio* changes the sense of the word and the passage, it is discussed in the body of the commentary. In the commentary I attempt to conduct an in-depth analysis of Oppian's work, distinguishing within it several major parts or so-called thematic panels which reflect the intended composition of the *Cynegetica*. Thus, at the first stage of the research, the whole book was divided into thematic panels; subsequently, the thematic panels were divided into sections and subsections; the smallest unit was a word or phrase accompanied by the number of the line in question. After the introduction of the preliminary division

of the text as described above, I examine the style of the particular compositional elements and I determine whether connections and interdependencies exist between them. Apart from the analysis of the text itself, the main research method is based on the comparative analysis of the literary testimonies, both those collected in 16th c. commentaries (BRODAEUS 1552; BODINUS 1555; RITTERSHAUSEN 1597) and those gathered from online databases of ancient literature (*TLG*, *TLL*). Of course I make frequent references to modern works on hunting in the ancient Mediterranean world (HULL 1964; ANDERSON 1985; BARRINGER 2001).

I distinguished six thematic panels within the inner structure of the commentary; each panel is preceded by an ample introduction which comprises a discussion of the character and the structure of the passage under consideration. The first thematic panel contains the invocation (1–42). The invocatory part is then divided into three parts: an address to Artemis (1–4), a catalogue of the human and semi-divine inventors of the different hunting arts (5–30) and a eulogy of hunting (31–42). The second thematic panel concerns bulls (43–175). This thematic panel has a highly elaborate structure. Briefly speaking, the part devoted to bulls consists of four main sections: a description of bulls' mating habits (43–82), a catalogue of breeds of bulls (83–108), a mythological excursus on Heracles and Orontes (109–158) and a part devoted to bison (159–175). The element which connects the excursus with the section about the breeds is a Syrian species of bulls. As was demonstrated in the commentary, this breed was, reasonably, discussed in the catalogue as the last one: it provides the poet with an excuse for the mythological *aition*, in which the Syrian cattle played the crucial role. The part which closes the thematic panel concerning bulls deals with the animal species termed by Oppian as bisons (159–175). The third thematic panel deals with “deer-like” animals (176–325): deer (176–292), fallow deer (293–295), *iorcus* (296–299), antelope (300–314) and gazelle (315–325). As I noticed, this thematic panel is interesting from the compositional point of view: one can suppose that Oppian matched the animal species following deer into pairs: fallow deer with *iorcus* (familiar woodland creatures) and antelope with gazelle (exotic plain animals). As my studies on the second book showed, the structure of the section about deer was complex to such an extent that I needed to divide the passages into six subsections: in the first one, Oppian provides the reader with some general information about deer (176–186): one can learn about the physical qualities of this animal, its temperament and its idiosyncrasy. The next subsection is devoted to stags' mating habits, a recurring motif in the *Cynegetica* (187–208). Within the next few lines the poet described the most conspicuous feature of deer, mainly focusing on the antlers (209–216). Subsequently, he proceeded with a description of the amphibious nature of deer (217–232). A lengthy passage dedicated to the idiosyncrasy of deer and snakes follows this description (233–290). This passage has the form of an excursus, but unlike that one about Heracles and Orontes, this one does not relate in any way to mythology. On the contrary, this excursus

shows how the ancients were trying to explain the phenomena among animals that they could observe but which they did not understand. The last part about deer has a purely fanciful nature and refers to a popular belief that persisted in antiquity (291 f.); according to that belief, deer were long-living animals, an opinion frequently repeated by ancient authors.

Oppian's fourth thematic panel is devoted to wild sheep and goats (326–488). As the analysis of its content indicates, this panel is strongly thematically and stylistically diversified. It is one of the longest thematic parts in the second book and it consists of nine sections. Just like in the panel dedicated to deer, Oppian starts his descriptions of wild sheep and goats with some general information about these animals (326–337). The second section relates to an idiosyncrasy concerning the respiratory system of wild goats (338–342). In the subsequent section, Oppian concentrates on the phenomenon of the mutual love between the parents and their young (343–376). The passage about the animals' affection is followed by thematically paired units dedicated to the sheep of Gortyn (377–381) and then to an animal species called *subus* (382–392). Three subsequent thematic sections are intrinsically combined in terms of the topics being discussed as well as the mood and style: the first unit is devoted to the inter-species relationship between animals (393–409); the second one has the form of a lengthy address to Eros (410–425); the final unit is a return to the *alien desires*, which means love between animals of different species (426–444). In the last section, included in the fourth thematic panel, Oppian meticulously describes an oryx: its appearance, temper and fighting style (445–488). A relatively short thematic panel is devoted to the elephant and the rhinoceros (489–569). In the sixth and final thematic panel, Oppian briefly discusses small creatures, which he seemingly condemns. Among the animals species which according to the poet are not worth poetical interest one can distinguish: panthers, cats and dormice (570–585), squirrels (586–597), spiny mice and hedgehogs (598–604), apes (605–611) and moles (612–628).

The division of the second book of the *Cynegetica* into thematic panels does not match the analysis of the structure of the book presented by MAIR in the introduction to his English translation of the poem; the editor proposed the general arrangement of the content of the book without any further information concerning the structure of the parts devoted to particular animal species discussed in the second book. In my opinion, the division of the book into thematic panels, sections and subsections better reflects the intended composition. As the analysis of the compositional elements clearly shows, the particular elements are closely connected in terms of content, style and sense. The research on the *Cynegetica* definitely proves that its composition was carefully and elaborately planned. On the grounds of the analysis of the catalogue of the first mythological hunters, I put forward the theory that the catalogue was composed according to the times of the day: the type of hunting discovered by Centaurs would take place at dawn (ἐπιδόρπιον

εὔρετο θήρην), the coursing invented by Castor would be organised at noon (μεσημβρινοῦ δρόμοιο) and the snaring with the use of traps and hunting nets started by Hippolytus and Orion – by night (νυχίην πανεπίκλοπον ἄγρην).

Another theory I formulate in my commentary also deals with the composition; this theory is based on the meaning of the word ἡ ὀπώρα used in the eulogy of hunting (31–42). In the body of the laudation, Oppian lists the indulgences connected with hunting: a nap in a flowered meadow, resting in a cave and in the shade of the rocks, or bathing in a stream. If one accepts LILLY'S (1919) theory, according to which the word ἡ ὀπώρα denotes here not fruit but autumn, one may suppose that the particular activities were listed according to the seasons: first spring, then summer, late summer and autumn.

As is clearly indicated in the studies on the second book of the *Cynegetica*, some animal species are given lengthy and detailed descriptions while others are just briefly mentioned; among those which enjoyed Oppian's greatest interest one can mention bulls (132 lines), wild sheep and goats (118 lines) and deer-like creatures (116 lines). In my commentary I explain this phenomenon; Oppian's deep sentiment for his fatherland underlies the poem and, as research into this book shows, some of the animals being discussed are closely connected to his home town: the fact that both cattle and wild goats are parts of the legend of the founding of Apamea seems to explain why Oppian provides these animals with such lengthy and meticulous descriptions. The poet's interest in the deer and deer-like creatures is also perfectly explainable: one may suppose that the poet alludes in this way to the noble, most valuable type of hunting, represented in the catalogue by Perseus. It is also worth mentioning that the hero was associated with the hunting of gazelles, oryxes and deer. Moreover, this interpretation offers the reader an explanation as to why Oppian disregards small animals like squirrels, hedgehogs or dormice; this type of prey surely did not enjoy the interest of the noble, mythological hunters, who decidedly preferred hunting for such animal species as boars, lions or deer. The passage in which Oppian compared the goats that attend their elderly parents to humans provokes scholarly discussion; contrary to the prevailing viewpoint, REBUFFAT (2001) claims that the sense of this simile is deeply negative. In my opinion, his reading is not correct, since it directly contradicts Oppian's ideas concerning animals; the poet praises the family bonds between animals, clearly approves the species which look after their young and on the other hand condemns those which favour or neglect one of their children. Oppian's approval of family bonds is also discernible in the further part of the text devoted to wild sheep and goats: it is worth noting that the fawns whose mother has just been caught in the snares ask not only Artemis, but also Zeus, her father, for help. In my opinion, the allusion to the kinship between the gods aims at emphasising the poet's endorsement of animals' family bonds.

The animal species whose identification poses a significant problem is the so-called sheep of Gortyn. Although the creature is given a shorter description

than the mysterious *subus*, it has one conspicuous feature, namely two pairs of horns. According to HULL (1964), this animal denotes the four-horned antelope (*Tetracerus quadricornis*). This interpretation is not completely unfounded, but I suggest that the animal described by Oppian under the name of the sheep of Gortyn is a four-horned sheep, the Jacob sheep. What makes this identification more probable is that this species is native to Syria. Hence, one cannot exclude the possibility that Oppian personally saw this creature.

The main aim of my commentary to the second book of the *Cynegetica* is to analyse its composition and to prove that connections between particular compositional elements do exist. I also elucidate the role of mythological characters, the animal species and the way in which they were termed; I juxtapose the descriptions included in the poem with modern publications on zoology to determine to what extent Oppian's depictions are in line with reality; I study the mythological digressions and reinterpreted myths to separate traditional elements from new ones. However, many aspects of the poem still remain to be discussed. Furthermore, one has to remember that the *Cynegetica* consists of four books and all connections can be traced only as a result of the analysis of the whole poem. Thus, since this commentary is dedicated only to the second book, some of these associations and interdependencies might have been merely mentioned or omitted.

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