Aëtius *Placita* 2.18

Περὶ τῶν ἄστρων τῶν καλομεμένων Διοσκούρων

**Witnesses**

Ps. Plutarch 2.18, Eusebius 15.49 (cf. 15.32.8), ps. Galen 60, Quṣṭa Ibn Lūqā 2.18
Stobaeus 1.24.1n.

**Analysis**

1. So far all the chapters on the heavenly bodies have treated subjects for which there are analogous chapters elsewhere, e.g. on the cosmos or on the earth. This present chapter deals with a particular theme that is peculiar to the stars, though as we shall see, it could have been placed elsewhere. One can usefully compare the section on the earth (*P* 3.9–17), which ends with chapters on subjects that are peculiar to the earth, i.e. earthquakes, the sea and tides.

2. For this chapter *P* preserves two lemmata:

\[
\text{ιη'. Περὶ τῶν ἄστρων τῶν καλομεμένων Διοσκούρων}
\]

\[
P.2.17.1 \text{ Ξενοφάνης τοὺς ἐπὶ τῶν πλοίων φαινομένους οἶνον ἄστέρας}
\]

\[
P.2.17.2 \text{ Μητρόδωρος τῶν ὑφώντων ὁφθαλμῶν μετὰ δέους καὶ καταπλή\\-\\εξους εἶναι στιλβηδόνας.}
\]

The only significant variation among the sources concerns the title; *P* and *Q* preserve the long title; *E*, followed by Diels, leaves out the reference to the stars. G’s title is shorter still. Since all the other titles in 2.13–19 do contain the word ἄστρα or ἄστέρες, it seems prudent to retain it. Like in ¶13, the title appears to contain the term ἄστρα (only some mss. of *P* have ἄστέρων). It is difficult to determine the rationale for the usage of the two very similar terms,\(^{336}\) and we follow the majority of the witnesses.

3. *S* preserves only the former of *P*’s doxai:

\[^{336}\text{See our note on 2.13 above, n. 272.}\]
The Xenophanean lemma is attached to the earlier doxa of the same philosopher in ¶13. Exceptionally, however, P’s second doxa is not included. Metrodoran doxai are found in 2.15* and 2.17*, so it should not have been difficult to join it up with the lemmata at 24.1h or 24.3. The omission would appear to be deliberate and runs contrary to S’s usual practice. We note that the words οὗς καὶ Διοσκοῦρους καλοῦσι τινες have been added to the doxa, no doubt in order to compensate for the fact that A’s title has disappeared in his scheme of coalescence. No traces of this chapter or its subject are found in T or Ach.

4. This short chapter treats the phenomenon of St. Elmo’s fire, so it could easily have been placed in Book III on meteorological phenomena. It is placed here because the Dioscuri were also associated with the constellation of the Gemini.337 Since the phenomenon occurs mostly at sea, and was often taken as an augury, the chapter is neatly placed in between 2.17 (stars fed by ocean) and 2.19 (stars as signs).

5. With its two doxai, the chapter thus represents the practical minimum found in the Placita, i.e. a single διαίρεσις with two opposed points of view (cf. 2.8* and 2.10* above; 2.12* without a proper division is exceptional). The basis of the dichotomy is clear. Xenophanes, as the representative ψυχόφορος, gives a physical explanation of St. Elmo’s fire in terms of his fiery cloud theory, which has already been mentioned at A 2.13.13* and will return in later chapters.338 Metrodorus, on the other hand, gives what we might call a psychological or epistemological explanation, i.e. from the viewpoint of the observer.339 The two views

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338 But as cloudlets (νεφέλας) instead of clouds (νεφώ). The various lemmata in A show that Xenophanes attempted to introduce differentiation in his theory; see further on 2.20* and 2.25* and the comments at Runia (1989) 266–267.
339 Although this would still be thought of in physical terms, i.e. the glittering of the fearful eyes projects outwards to cause the apparent phenomenon; cf. Plato’s ψυχόφορα δύσματα at Ti. 45b. I have not been able to find any comments on this passage, not even in the exhaustive account of ancient meteorological theories in Gilbert (1907),