THE LATIN RECEPTION OF HESIOD

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1. A man without a myth, or the poet of prose

Even if the first explicit mention of Hesiod in Latin goes back no further than the age of Caesar, the poet from Ascra must have represented an important reference point in the panorama of emerging Latin literature ever since the archaic age.1 A sure trace of the proem of Hesiod’s Theogony (vv. 60 and above all 76) has long been indicated in a fragment of the epic by Naevius (according to many commentators, the incipit of the poem), in the definition of the Muses (novem Iovis concordes filiae sorores, 1 M.);2 and the very form of this allusion by Naevius presupposes a familiarity with a great classic of the archaic Greek age, on a par with Homer.

In Latin literature, as in that of Greece,3 Hesiod may be said to appear together with Homer, a figure from whom he seems to find difficulty in breaking free in order to acquire an autonomous identity and profile (their mention together, as an inseparable couple, is quite frequent: Cicero, Tusc. 1.3 and 98; Nat. deor. 1.41; Ovid, Ars 2.4; Seneca, Ben. 1.3.10; Epist. 27.6; Statius, Silv. 5.3.26 and 150–151; etc.). That is to say, Hesiod seems to be defined as the “non-Homer”, as if his identity had to be defined mainly “by opposition” to the figure of the greater poet, whose imposing presence occupies the reference panorama of Latin men of

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1 For comments and suggestions I thank E. Magnelli and M. Telò.
2 The lack of an overview of the presence of Hesiod in Latin literature and culture is a serious gap in scholarship, which hinders both an overall vision of the poet’s fortunes, and an adequate knowledge of his wide-ranging, capillary presence in the cultural history of Rome. Rare, unimportant references to Latin literature are also to be found in Wolbergs (1988), which is largely dedicated to Hesiod’s Nachleben, but which is useful, on the contrary, for Christian culture. Good partial contributions are La Penna (1962) (and [1985]); Pontani (2000); Hardie (2005). A series of pointed echoes of Hesiod in Latin authors can be found in the apparatus of Rzach (1902); some integrations are offered in West (1969) and (1986).
4 On the fortune of Hesiod in Greek literature, cf. at least Buzio (1938); Reinsch-Werner (1976); Fakas (2001); Petrakis (2003); Musäus (2004).
letters in the archaic age. The idea of a dichotomy, of a “natural” opposition, which easily turns into competition, between Homer and Hesiod, an idea which is already crystallised as the basis of the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*, must have been extremely ancient, and it persists tenaciously through the course of the centuries (continuing to provoke intolerance in Plutarch, *Quaest. Conviv. 675 A*). We know that the problem of the relative dating of the two poets, for example, was the subject of a philological discussion in Rome, in the *Didascalica* by Accius, who assigned the chronological primacy (probably linked with a high degree of authority and prestige) to Hesiod, with whose text the Latin poet was evidently familiar. The same familiarity was demonstrated also by the contemporary annalist Cassius Emina (fr. 8 P.), who was likewise interested in discussing a question which, in the following centuries, was to occupy the philological skills of the great antiquarian Varro (fr. 68 Funaioli), as well as Cicero himself (*Cato* 54) and Seneca (*Epist. 88.6*), and to inspire the debates of the learned circles of the imperial age, of which Aulus Gellius informs us (3.11, 17.21).

However, the figure of archaic Latin literature in whom the presence of Hesiod, together with the dominant figure of Homer, can be concretely seen playing a fundamental role is that of Ennius. While on the one hand Ennius, by introducing the heroic hexameter to Rome, presents himself as the natural heir and continuator of Homer (undoubtedly more so than Livius Andronicus), and as the *alter Homerus*, so defined by critics in the period of Horace (*Serm. 2.1.50–51*), on the other hand Ennius is,

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4 On the antiquity of the tradition, which probably goes back to the rhetor Alcidamas, and finally found expression in the extant text of the *Certamen*, which is of the period of Hadrian, and in general on its characteristics, cf. Rosen (1997) 474.


6 Degl’Innocenti Pierini (1980) 58–59, who also points out a possible trace of Hesiod’s text in Accius (cf. also p. 121; on possible relationships with the *Scutum*, p. 25). It is clear that the very title, *Didascalica*, evokes a connection with the archegete of the poetic genre, especially if, as has been suggested (Pöhlmann [1973] 848, on the basis of fr. 13 M.), the work contemplated a teacher and a learner.

7 He was interested in Hesiod both as an *auctor* of agriculture (*Res rust. 1.1.9*) and for his etymological speculations (*Ling. Lat. 5.20.3 a chao cavo caelum*; cf. also Paul. *Fest. 45 L.*).


10 Furthermore, on the presence of Hesiod also in the strictly epic Ennius, cf. at least Häussler (1976) 161–162, 172–178.