

# The Classical Review

<http://journals.cambridge.org/CAR>

Additional services for *The Classical Review*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

## On the Enigma in Vergil, *Ecl.* III. 104

Arthur Wright

The Classical Review / Volume 15 / Issue 05 / June 1901, pp 258 - 258

DOI: 10.1017/S0009840X00030390, Published online: 27 October 2009

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0009840X00030390](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009840X00030390)

### How to cite this article:

Arthur Wright (1901). On the Enigma in Vergil, *Ecl.* III. 104. The Classical Review, 15, pp 258-258 doi:10.1017/S0009840X00030390

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

ON THE ENIGMA IN VERGIL, *ECL.* III. 104.

- D. Dic quibus in terris—et eris mihi magnus Apollo—  
 tris pateat caeli spatium non amplius ulnas.  
 M. Dic quibus in terris inscripti nomina regum  
 nascentur flores, et Phyllida solus habeto.

No satisfactory interpretation, as far as I know, has been offered for the former couplet. The traditional explanation, that a hoax was intended, is not probable in itself, and, if true, then by the laws of amoebean verses there should have been another hoax, to cap it, in the next couplet. All solutions connected with the notion of a grave or a pit leave *quibus in terris* without meaning. This indeed might not in itself be a fatal objection, but surely graves are not openings in the spacious vault of heaven, but in solid earth.

Perhaps a clue to the meaning may be found in Herodotus iv. 158, where the Greek wanderers in Libya are brought at last to a well of Apollo and recommended to settle there, *ἐνθαῦτα γὰρ ὁ οὐρανὸς τέτρηται* 'for here there is a hole in the sky,' or a window in heaven. The *χάλκεος οὐρανός* was supposed to be pierced with holes, through which rain fell. If a country like Egypt or Ethiopia had no rain, it was because there were no windows. If in certain favoured parts of such countries the blessing of rain was occasionally granted, it was because there was a small window there. The existence of oases in the desert was well known, and this passage in Herodotus appears to

show that the cause of them was supposed to be not merely the existence of a well, but also of a window. Vergil had not travelled like Herodotus and seen things for himself, but he had read about them and meditated on them and formed his own ideas. It is not at all surprising that he should have made a country bumpkin like Damoetas express the slowness of the rainfall in terms of the size of the window, fixing with rustic particularity upon precisely three ells as the *maximum* for each opening. If Damoetas had been asked to account for the intermittent character of the rainfall, he might perhaps have been content with the naive simplicity of Strepsiadēs

καίτοι πρότερον τὸν Δι' ἀληθῶς ἔμην διὰ κοσκίνου οὐρεῖν.—Ar. *Nubes*, 372.

It may be objected that the verb *τερπαίνω* in Herodotus may easily describe a number of small perforations like the holes in the rose of a watering can, through which rain can pour *guttatim*, whereas Vergil's *pateat* suggests rather an open window through which it would rush in a deluge, as indeed is the case in Genesis vii. 11, where the metaphor of a window in heaven occurs. It may be enough to reply that if Vergil's language had been perfect, we should not have been puzzling over it after the lapse of nineteen centuries. Possibly the fact that in Egypt and Libya the open windows of the harem are regularly fitted with lattice work containing minute perforations may help to justify the word.

ARTHUR WRIGHT.

## ON THE EPISTOLA SAPPHUS.

Of the two MSS. of the *Ep. Sapph.* here collated, the first is in the Corsini Library in Rome 43. F. 5, the same MS which I have described in the *Journal of Philology* for 1887 pp. 153 *sqq.* and given a complete collation of its readings in the *Culex* in Vol. vi. pp. 203, 4 of this *Review*. I call it here II.

The second MS belongs to the D'Orville collection in the Bodleian, no. 166 = 17044 in Madan's *Summary Catalogue* (vol. iv. p. 78). It is a small thin MS containing

fol. 1–47 Tibullus, fol. 48 Sappho vatis Elsie (Lesbie) Mitilene ad Phaonem Siculum amatorem. On p. lviii. it is said to be drawn ex antiquissimo manuscripto.

The Corsini MS belongs to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century: the D'Orville MS seems to be not earlier than the middle of the fifteenth century. I call it here *D'O*.

Both MSS I have collated with Sedlmayer's edition of the *Heroides* Vienna 1886.

1. *Ecquid ubi* II *Nunquid ubi* *with* al.