

THE TITLE OF BASINIO DA PARMA'S EPIC POEM ON SIGISMONDO MALATESTA



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The humanist poet Basinio da Parma (1425–57) wrote an epic poem in the mid-15th century to celebrate Sigismondo Malatesta of Rimini, and he gave this poem the title Hesperis. In order to clarify the meaning of this title, we will first examine what Basinio means by Hesperia/Hesperius in his pre-Hesperis poetry, and then analyse what it denotes within the epic. It turns out that in the Hesperis, Sigismondo's opponents, the Spaniards, are named with it in most passages. Basinio's choice of title is explained as one of many aspects of his close imitation of Homer.

For some time now, there has been a welcome development, not only in German-speaking countries, that Neo-Latin texts are increasingly being included in the study of Classics. This also means that there are more and more courses on Neo-Latin topics, and in this context the question of reliable dictionaries and lexicons comes up again and again. In this situation, we Neo-Latinists are in the pleasing position of being able to confidently refer our students to 'the Ramminger', i.e. *Neulateinische Wortliste: Ein Wörterbuch des Lateinischen von Petrarca bis 1700*.¹ Although this immensely practical lexicon, for which the dedicatee of this *festschrift* deserves the greatest thanks, includes texts up to the end of the seventeenth century, one can nevertheless discern a focus on fifteenth century Italian humanism. It can therefore be assumed that Johann Ramminger will be pleased with the following remarks, which will revolve around a lexicographical question on an outstanding text of Italian humanism.

The specific subject of this paper will be Basinio da Parma (1425–57)² and his epic poem *Hesperis*, in which he celebrates the deeds of his patron in Rimini, Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta (1417–68), especially his wars against Alfonso and Ferrante of Naples in the years 1448 and 1452. The epic, which consists of 13 books, was for a long time only available in Lorenzo

¹ See <http://www.neulatein.de/>.

² For Basinio da Parma's biography see Mazzucchelli 1911; Ferri 1914; Ferri 1917; Ferri 1924; Fiore 1930; Poesch 1962; Campana 1962; Campana 1965; Ceruti Burgio 1993; Coppini 2009.

Drudi's edition from the end of the eighteenth century.³ Recently, Christian Peters has presented a German translation facing the Latin text.⁴ The poem occupies an important position in the history of Neo-Latin epic poetry,⁵ as it is the first epic poem after Petrarch's *Africa* to attempt to imitate the ancient large-scale epics of Homer or Virgil, even in its macrostructure (13 books, 6948 verses in total).⁶

The lexicographical question to be discussed in the following refers to the title of the epic: What does *Hesperis* actually mean? For this purpose, an important basic question must be clarified first: while with many epics it is not clear whether the title we usually use today was also the title chosen and intended by the author, in the case of the *Hesperis* we can safely assume that Basinio wanted this title. The handwritten autograph has been preserved in Rimini (Biblioteca Gambalunga, MS SC 67), and there one reads already on the first pages “Βασινίου ἑσπερίδος τὸ πρῶτον” (fol. 2r) and “Basinii parmensis hesperidos liber primus” (fol. 3r, in each case: first book of Basinio's *Hesperis*). Corresponding information is found at the end of each book or at the beginning of a new book. It therefore seems certain that this was the title Basinio himself chose for his poem.

In the constantly growing literature on Basinio, one sometimes finds “Italiade”⁷ as a suggested translation for *Hesperis*. This is appropriate inasmuch as the poem is indeed about stylising Sigismondo Malatesta as a leader who succeeds in uniting all the troops of Italy behind him and, fighting at their head, defeats an external enemy, the Spaniard Alfonso V of Aragon (1396–1458) and then his son Ferrante of Naples (1424–94). Considering the historical reality of the Apennine peninsula in the mid-fifteenth century, with its many competing city-states, one immediately recognises the fiction that Basinio creates by focusing on two concrete enemies competing against each other. He takes this to the extreme by having not the two armies but only the two leaders face each other in a duel in the first book.

Basinio is one of those authors who are intent on creating a *gesamtwerk* by referring within their works to earlier works and to planned future works. Already in his early poems,⁸ Basinio referred ahead to his epic poem about

³ Basinio da Parma 1794.

⁴ Basinio da Parma 2021.

⁵ For a general introduction to Neo-Latin epic poetry, see Belloni 1912; Zabughin 1921, 279–345; Lippincott 1989; Kallendorf 2014; Schaffnerath 2015; Gwynne 2017.

⁶ For Petrarch's *Africa* I have used the editions Pétrarque 2006 and Pétrarque 2018.

⁷ Campana 1965, “vale quanto ‘Italiade’”.

⁸ Basinio's early poetry, i.e. the collections *Liber Isottaetus*, *Cyris*, and *carmina varia*, were collected and edited by Ferri 1925. We use the following abbreviations: Isot. (*Liber Isottaetus*), Cyr. (*Cyris*), and *carm. var.* (*carmina varia*).

Sigismondo, and here the *condottiere* often appears in this leader role for a united Italy. In the *Liber Isottaeus*, a poetic epistolary novel in which Sigismondo and his lover Isotta degli Atti exchange letters, in letter 1,2 Isotta worries about her lover, who is not staying with her, but has to wage war; she realises that he is the only support for the wavering Italy (1,2,62–62 “Per si qua Italiae te tangit cura cadentis, / Cuius nunc oneri sola columna subes”, if somehow the worry for the tumbling Italy touches you, whose burden you bear for the moment as the only pillar). She takes a similar view in letter 1,4 (1,4,23–24 “Tu tantam in molem, tu tantos solus in usus, / In tantos lectus solus es ipse duces”, for so big a burden, for so big a task, against so great leaders, you alone are chosen), and in 2,10,7 she addresses him as “princeps Italarum gloria rerum” (leader and glory of Italy). Of particular importance is poem 3,2 from the *Liber Isottaeus*. Here, the poet addresses Sigismondo and delivers a kind of *Hesperis* in nuce: Through his achievements in the war, Sigismondo saves the whole of Italy (3,2,8 “Italiae servas qui pia regna tuae”, you who save the pious rule of your Italy), which asked him to become its leader (3,2,133–34 “Itala gens te / Laudat et Italiae te iubet esse ducem”, the people of Italy praise you and call you to become their leader).

Not only in the *Liber Isottaeus*, but also in a number of other poems, Basinio announces an epic poem about Sigismondo, always emphasising the all-Italian claim to leadership that he will assert. The *Hesperis* itself then fulfils this promise: Sigismondo appears as an outstanding figure chosen by God⁹ to save a united Italy against a foreign enemy. Against this background, it is understandable that the epic is called an ‘Italiade’. As a thematic title this is quite appropriate, but as a translation for *Hesperis* it misses the author’s intention, as will be shown here.

1. Explanation of the term

The word *Hesperis* and all other derivations to be discussed here are based on the word *Hesperus* (evening star),¹⁰ which Varro (*res rusticae* 3,5,17) distinguishes from the morning star as follows: “Stella lucifer interdium, noctu Hesperus ita circumeunt ad infimum hemisphaerium ac moventur, ut indicent quot sint horae” (During the day the morning star, at night the evening star thus strives towards the lower hemisphere and they move in such a way as to indicate how many hours have passed, cf. Sen., *Med.* 878). Two adjectives are derived from this noun:

The feminine adjective *Hesperis*, *-idis* at first generally meant “occidental” (e.g. Verg. *Aen.* 8,77, see below), but then as a noun in the plural

⁹ Cf. Peters 2016, 133–254.

¹⁰ For the explanation of the word, see OLD 2012, 793.

(*Hesperides*) it became the name of the daughters of the Night who live on an island in the ocean in the far west of the world and have a garden there in which golden apples grow, guarded by a dragon (cf. Ov., Met. 11,114).

Less specific is the adjective *Hesperius*, which also means “situated towards the evening, occidental”. It is often used in connection with geographical expressions, e.g., “fretum Hesperium” (Ov., Met. 11,258, western sea). From the original junction “terra Hesperia” Hesperia has emancipated itself and stands for “the Occident” (Macr., sat. 1,3,15). The word occurs mostly in poetry (e.g., Verg., Aen. 1,530 or Hor., carm. 1,36,4).

Whereas the Greeks used Ἑσπερία specifically to denote Italy throughout (cf. Dion. Hal., Ant. 1,35,3), in Latin *Hesperia* can denote Spain (cf. Isid., etym. 9,2,126) in addition to Italy (cf. Verg., Aen. 1,530–34 and 3,185).¹¹ It is instructive what Servius knows to report on Aen. 1,530:

Hesperiae duae sunt, una quae Hispania dicitur, altera quae est in Italia. quae hac ratione discernuntur: aut enim Hesperiam solam dicis et significas Italiam, aut addis ‘ultimam’ et significas Hispaniam, quae in occidentis est fine, ut Horatius “qui nunc Hesperia sospes ab ultima”. et haec est vera Hesperia, ab Hespero dicta, id est stella occidentali. ceterum Italia Hesperia dicitur a fratre Atlantis, qui pulsus a germano Italiam tenuit eique nomen pristinae regionis inposuit, ut Hyginus docet.

There are two Hesperias, one means Spain, the other is in Italy. You can distinguish them in the following way: Either one says only Hesperia and means Italy, or one adds “the outermost” and means Spain, which lies at the end of the western world, as when Horace [carm. 1,36,5] says: “who is now happily back from the outermost Hesperia”. This is the true Hesperia, named after Hesperus, that is, the star of the West. Furthermore, Italy was then called Hesperia after the brother of Atlas, who ruled over Italy defeated by his brother and imposed on it the name of his ancient homeland, as Hygin teaches us.

This dichotomy of the meaning of *Hesperia*, so clearly formulated here, has borne rich fruit in Neo-Latin literature. One (late) example is representative of many: In his epic poem on Alexander the Great, *Alexandrias* (first Forlì 1773, then Bologna 1776), the Jesuit Francisco Javier Alegre formulates in a speech by the warmonger Ninos of Tyros: “duas / cepimus Hesperias” (Alex. 4,288–89, we took the two Hesperias). For Basinio da Parma, who wanted to turn the wars in Italy in the first half of the fifteenth century into a confrontation between Italy and Spain, the term, which could denote both

¹¹ For the distinction, see Epperlein 1971, 84–85.

Italy and Spain, provided an ideal hook for an erudite game with his readership.

2. Passages from Basinio's poetry before the *Hesperis*

It has already been mentioned that Basinio refers to his great epic in advance in numerous poems written before the *Hesperis*.¹² One striking example is *carm. var. 18*, a poem in which Basinio not only announces an epic to Sigismondo in general and anticipates the *Hesperis* in many points, but also prepares the motif of the temple (*carm. var. 18,119* “Ast hic de Pario ponam tibi marmore templum”, but here I will build you a temple of Parian marble), which will play an overriding role in the *Hesperis*: In the first book, Sigismondo vows to have a church built in Rimini, if he succeeds in his martial enterprises (*Hesp. 1,566–70*), and in the last book he fulfils this promise (*Hesp. 13,343–60*). The motif thus has the function of a cramp here. While in the *carmina varia* it is still the temple known from Virgil's *Georgics* that is promised to Augustus and which can be interpreted poetologically as an epic, in the *Hesperis* it has then become the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini itself that frames the poem.

The word *Hesperus* and its derivatives are found several times in the works preceding the *Hesperis*. Less relevant here are the passages where the word is generally associated with the area in the far west or with the myth of the Garden of the Hesperides: In *carm. var. 3,40* “fretum Hesperium” denotes the ocean in the west, in *Isot. 3,9,73–74* the area far to the west is called “Hesperidum ad oras”.¹³ All the other passages are more specific, because *Hesperia* refers to either Spain or Italy.

Statistically, the passages where *Hesperia* clearly means Italy are more frequent: in letter 3,2 of the *Liber Isottaeus*, the poet addresses Sigismondo and states that with Alfonso a barbarian and foreign enemy has come into the country, whom Sigismondo must ward off for all of Italy (*Isot. 3,2,19–24*):

Venerat Ausonias etenim rex barbarus oras,
Cui tantos animos septima regna dabant,
Antiquas gentes Ethruscaque moenia tentans
Atque Fluentinas terruit ille domos.
Nec mora longa, iubes fulvis circumdatus armis
Tutari **Hesperiam**, maxima regna, tuam.

¹² There is also the parallel phenomenon that Basinio refers back to the *Hesperis* in later works, e.g. *Astronomica* 1,18-20 with reference back to the *Hesperis*.

¹³ In this context, Filippo Visconti's description as “maximus Hesperidum” (*carm. var. 6,4*) is difficult to understand.

A barbarian king came to the lands of Ausonia, emboldened by his seven kingdoms; he attacked the ancient peoples and the walls of Tuscany, he struck fear into the houses of Florence. But it is not long before you, clad in your gleaming golden weapons, command your Hesperia, the greatest realm, to be protected.

The “rex barbarus” refers to King Alfonso of Naples, who possessed seven crowns (cf. Hesp. 6,221–22) and who initially overran the cities of Tuscany with war. He is contrasted with Sigismondo, who had to protect and preserve “his Hesperia/Italy” (“Hesperiam [...] tuam”) from Alfonso. The opposition Alfonso vs. Sigismondo makes it clear that *Hesperia* must mean Italy here. Similarly, in Isot. 3,10, a letter from the poet to Sigismondo, to whom it is announced that he will be the saviour of Italy (Isot. 3,10,73–76):

Sis Italum potius decus immortale virorum,
Qui serves magnam solus et **Hesperiam**.
Quam, nisi tu fueris, iam barbarus occupet hostis
Et teneat regni maxima iura tui.

Be the immortal glory of the men of Italy, by saving by yourself the great Hesperia! If it were not for thee, a barbarian enemy might seize it and have complete control over thy kingdom.

Again, the opposition “barbarus hostis” vs. *Hesperia* clearly establishes that *Hesperia* is Italy. Similarly unambiguous in Isot. 3,2,52 the “Hesperii duces” are the commanders of Italy fighting together against Alfonso (Isot. 3,2,49–52 “Etruscaque moenia tentat [scil. Alphonsus] / Et pavor Ausonios occupat usque viros. / Si capit Italiam [omnipotens quod vertat in auras / Iupiter], **Hesperios** non feret ille duces”, he [scil. Alfonso] attacks the cities of Tuscany and fear drives the men of Italy. If he takes Italy [may the almighty Jupiter protect us!], he will not withstand the Hesperian commanders). In *carm. var. 18*, already mentioned several times, Sigismondo repels enemy troops from the coast of Hesperia, i.e. Italy (*carm. var. 18,22-23* “barbaricas ab littore gentes / **Hesperio**”) and thus saves the realm of Hesperia, i.e. Italy (*carm. var. 18,136* “Qui regnum **Hesperiae** concussa que moenia servas”).

More rarely, the word *Hesperia* can stand for Spain in Basinio's poetry before the *Hesperis*. In the epyllion *Diosymposis* there is a detailed description of the temple of Fama. A gallery of statues is concluded by the portraits of two rulers: Emperor Augustus and Sigismondo Malatesta. Of the latter it is said that he will drive the peoples of Hesperia from the Tyrrhenian beach with the help of the gods, which only makes sense if one understands it to mean the Spaniards (Dios. 372–73 “hunc [scil. Sismundum] **Hesperias** ab littore gentes / Tyrrheno auspiciis divum detrudere faustis”, that he [scil.

Sigismondo] drives the peoples of Hesperia from the Tyrrhenian coast by the good omens of the gods).

In sum, in the poetry that Basinio wrote before his *Hesperis*, the word *Hesperus* and its derivatives are found in junctures that were introduced and common since antiquity. In concrete terms, then, *Hesperia* can mean Italy or Spain, although statistically the meaning Italy occurs more frequently. This changes fundamentally in the *Hesperis*:

3. Passages from the *Hesperis*

In the *Hesperis*, in addition to the toponym *Hesperia*,¹⁴ there is also the general adjective *Hesperius*,¹⁵ the plurale tantum *Hesperidae* for a people,¹⁶ and the patronymic *Hesperides* for the name of a man.¹⁷ In the *Hesperis*, too, the word can stand for the West in general, but then specifically for Italy or Spain. Not relevant for our context are the passages that refer to the garden of the Hesperides (Hesp. 8,105 “**Hesperidum**que choro sublimi Atlante satarum”, from the circle of the Hesperides, the daughters of Atlas),¹⁸ to the sinking of the sun into the waves in the far west (Hesp. 6,445 “iam sole **Hesperias** dudum labente sub undas”, already the sun sank into the western waves) or the designation of the west wind Zephyrus as a character of the west (Hesp. 7,525 and 10,281 “**Hesperides** Zephyrus”). At the end of an address to the Pope, Sigismondo refers to the Holy Father as “Maxime Pontificum, clari quem rector Olympi / tradidit Hesperiiis rectorem Iupiter oris” (Hesp. 4,563–64, Pontifex Maximus, whom Jupiter, the ruler of the great heavens, has appointed as ruler of the western shores). Here the “Hesperian shores” in a broader sense means the Western world, i.e. the world of Catholic Christianity.

In contrast to the poems discussed above, which predate the *Hesperis*, the adjective *Hesperius* in the *Hesperis* only rarely—exactly five times—refers to Italy, either as a part of clearly locatable geographical elements or in intertextual reference: in a morning prayer, Sigismondo addresses Apollo and lists among the places sacred to the god also Mount Soracte (Hesp. 1,117–18 “Soractis et arces / **Hesperias**”). The mountain now called Monte Soratte lies about 50km north of Rome, and Virgil attests it as a place of worship of Apollo (Aen. 11,785 “sancti custos Soractis Apollo”). The passage is also linked to another passage in Virgil (Aen. 7,695–97) where the “arces Soractis”, like Basinio’s, are inserted into a small catalogue of (Italic)

¹⁴ Hesperia: 1,355; 3,92; 3,373; 7,71; 7,326; 10,351; 10,538.

¹⁵ Hesperius: 1,118; 4,564; 5,150; 6,445; 10,305; 11,256; 11,331; 12,229.

¹⁶ Hesperidae (people): 1,382; 1,442; 1,580; 1,610; 2,139; 8,105; 10,354; 11,438.

¹⁷ Hesperides (man): 7,525; 8,157; 8,173; 10,281.

¹⁸ Cf. Astron. 1,224–225.

localities. – Like the Soracte, the Tiber, which has its source in the Apennines, can clearly be assigned to Italy geographically; Basinio refers to it as “**Hesperidum** late rector Tiberinus aquarum” (Hesp. 11,438, the Tiber, which widely rules over the waters of Italy), and again he took this formulation directly from Virgil (Aen. 8,77 “corniger Hesperidum fluvius regnator aquarum”).¹⁹ – At the beginning of the fifth book of the *Hesperis*, Basinio describes how Francesco Sforza besieges the city of Gradara, which Sigismondo rushes to relieve. Sigismondo makes a courageous speech to his soldiers in which he says, among other things, that the gods cannot be favourable to a general who devastates the cities of Italy (Hesp. 5,149–50):

Scilicet Italiae divique deaeque potentes
vastanti **Hesperias** faveant, proh Iupiter, urbes?

Should the mighty gods and goddesses of Italy be favourable to one who ravages the cities of Hesperia, by Iove?

With regard to the current siege of the city of Gradara, “Hesperiae urbes” must have meant Italian cities. Basinio took the formulation from Claudian, who in his *Panegyricus* on the third consulate of Emperor Honorius indignantly stated that Eugenius, his father’s archenemy, had illegally appropriated the cities of Italy and thus caused the Emperor to hurry to the relief (carm. mai. 7,66 “barbarus Hesperias exul possederat urbes”). – The same formulation is used in Book 11 of the *Hesperis* by the malformed Seneucus, who wants to dissuade the Italians from cooperating with Sigismondo; among other things, he accuses Sigismondo of depopulating entire cities in Italy (Hesp. 11,329–32):

si pietas animum, nostra virtute superbus,
inque solens numquam vacuas tot civibus urbes
Hesperias tanta vastasset clade

If decency drove his spirit, he would probably never, relying on our fighting power, have haughtily and intemperately robbed so many Hesperian cities of their citizens and ravaged them with such mischief.

Again, the cities of Italy appear here as “Hesperiae urbes”, which have been invaded by an illegitimate ruler and which are to receive protection and rescue from elsewhere. The passage thus again takes up the formulation familiar from Claudian. – The adjective *Hesperius* appears one last time with clear reference to Italy: in a speech in Book 12 of the *Hesperis*, the goddess Pallas complains that her brother Mars has caused so many soldiers from Italy to perish (Hesp. 12,229–30):

¹⁹ On the unusual linguistic form of Virgil’s line see Fratantuono 2015, 8.

Hesperios quot caede viros Mars ipse cruentis
Celtarum manibus Stygium demisit ad Orcum.

How many Hesperian men has Mars himself sent down to the Styx in death at the bloody hands of the Celts!

The Celts here refer to the Spaniards. The god of war used them to send men from Hesperia, i.e. from Italy, into the underworld. To sum up, the places where *Hesperius* refers to Italy are few in number and clearly determined either by the addition of a geographical unit or by an intertextual reference.

In contrast to these five passages where *Hesperius* denotes Italy, in many more places where it occurs it means Spain. It is striking that without exception all occurrences of the nouns *Hesperia* and *Hesperidae* refer exclusively to Spain:

1,354–55 (“at patriae miserere tuae, miserere labantis / **Hesperiae** extremis terrarum nobilis oris”, but still have mercy on your homeland, have mercy on the wavering Hesperia, the noble land on the farthest shores of the world): Antiphates turns to his king Alfonso and asks him not to go to war against Sigismondo, thus showing mercy to his homeland and to the shattered Hesperia. The expressions “patria tua” and “Hesperia labans” are constructed in parallel as predicate genitives. Therefore, *Hesperia* here means Spain. It is less likely that a contrast between Alfonso’s homeland on the one hand and *Hesperia* on the other is implied here; then *Hesperia* would be understood as Italy. Much depends on the meaning of the words “extremis terrarum nobilis oris”. Peters translates “das geadelt ist bis an die entferntesten Gestade der Welt”²⁰. This rather suggests an understanding of *Hesperia* as Italy. Much more likely it must be understood as “noble on the farthest shores of the world” and thus mean Spain.

1,381–84 (“Non tam arguerim vos, si mora longa fatigat, / **Hesperidae** [...] at patrios tamen hic rediisse penates / turpe sit”, I do not blame you, if you are tired of the long wait, sons of the West, [...] but to return home here and now, that might well be shameful): King Alfonso realises that his men are tired of the long wait, but he tells them that it would be shameful to return home now.

1,442 (“Vos haec, **Hesperidae**, vos haec audite, Latini”, Hear this, ye Hesperides, hear it, ye Latins): A few verses further on, Alfonso’s and

²⁰ Basinio da Parma 2021, 159.

Sigismondo's armies face each other and Sigismondo addresses them directly. It could be that Sigismondo uses two different expressions, *Hesperidae* and *Latini*, to address only his Italians. But it is much more likely that he addresses both the Spaniards (*Hesperidae*) and the Italians (*Latini*) in order to negotiate the terms of the duel with both sides. It is also fitting that Alfonso explicitly addresses both sides in his speech before the duel (Hesp. 453–54 “audite, rogamus, Iberi, / et magni Ausonii”, Listen to me, I beg you, you Spaniards and you great Italians).

1,580 (“in medium **Hesperidum** atque Italum processit uterque”, both stepped into the middle between Spaniards and Italians): As part of the planned duel between Sigismondo and Alfonso, the two opponents step into the middle between Spaniards and Italians.

1,609–10 (“Conclamant Itali laetumque ad sidera tollunt / murmur, at **Hesperidum** solvit genua omnia torpor”, The Italians rejoice and raise a joyful murmur to the stars, but the Spaniards' knees go weak with paralysing shock): When the duel seems to have a favourable outcome for Sigismondo, the Italians rejoice while the Spaniards freeze in terror.

2,139–40 (“haud secus **Hesperidae** atque Itali concurrere telis / omnibus”, not differently, Spaniards and Italians fought each other with all their weapons): The fight between Spaniards and Italians is compared to the fight between two hostile swarms of bees.

3,90–92 (“Itali, fortissima semper / pectora, quos mecum voluit Fortuna superbos / **Hesperiae** populos nostris detrudere terris”, Italians, your hearts are always the bravest, and fate would have you drive the haughty peoples of Hesperia out of our land with me): Sigismondo addresses his soldiers and confirms to them that the goddess of fortune herself has ordained that together they should drive the Spaniards from their land.

3,371–74 (“prospectat latis longe fulgentia campis / agmina, magnanimosque duces, missamque sub armis / **Hesperiam** et duros Tyrrheno in litore Celtas / Ausonidum clausos turmis utrimque refusus”, he contemplates the battle lines gleaming in the vast fields, the lofty leaders and Hesperia in arms, the brutal Celts on the Tyrrhenian shore, enclosed all around by the outflowing troops of the Ausonians): In the third book, Jupiter views the battlefield from an Olympian perspective and sees the Spaniards encircled by the Italians. Again, the question arises whether the above passage is

meant to express a contrast between *Hesperia* (i.e. Italy)²¹ under arms and the Celts (i.e. Spain) fighting on the Tyrrhenian coast, or whether *Hesperia* and Celts stand as two expressions for one content, namely the Spaniards, who are further said to have been surrounded by the troops of the Italians. The latter solution seems more appropriate.

7,70–72 (“*mente movens tacita, Libycas an naviget oras, / anne per **Hesperiae** populos ignotus ut hospes / Cimmerios petat arte locos*”, In silence, he ponders whether he should sail to the Libyan coast or go incognito through the peoples of Hesperia to seek out the Cimmerians as a guest): After his father appeared to him in a dream, Sigismondo ponders how he should go to the island far to the west, via the African coast or incognito through Spain.

7,325–26 (“*tum magni Pandulphi Marte superbos / **Hesperiae** populos duris cecidisse sub armis*”, that the haughty peoples of Hesperia had fallen under his hard weapons in the war with the great Sigismondo): In Spain, Sigismondo arrives incognito at the home of the old woman into whom Minerva has been transformed. She tells him that the Spaniards have suffered defeat in the war against Sigismondo.

10,304–05 (“*Iam terras, mediumque fretum, Maurusiaque arva / **Hesperiasque** domos, montes camposque videbat*”, He already saw the countries, the Mediterranean, the Moorish shores, the houses of Hesperia, its mountains and fields): On his return journey from the islands of the blessed far to the west, Sigismondo first sees the houses of Spain.

10,349–51 (“*eventum belli talem fore, qualia circum / moenia gesta diu Populonia bella superbis / **Hesperiae** populis*”, the outcome of the war would be like the war long fought by the haughty peoples of Hesperia around the walls of Populonia): At the siege of Faiano by the troops of Ferrante, the besieged cry out to their oppressors that it will be as surrendered to them as it was to the Spaniards who had once besieged Populonia.

10,354 (“*Talibus **Hesperidae** atque Itali contendere dictis*”, Spaniards and Italians fought with such invective): This is how the war of words that

²¹ The fact that Basinio takes up a passage from Virgil here (Aen. 7,43-44 “*totamque sub arma coactam / Hesperiam*”) nevertheless does not help with the explanation.

broke out between the Spaniards and the Italians besieged by them in Foiano is concluded.

10,537–38 (“Quod superest Latii facile est domuisse tyrannis / **Hesperiae** antiquis”, What is left of Latium is easily subjugated by the ancient rulers of Hesperia): In a speech to his troops, Ferrante prophesies that the Spaniards will soon succeed in taking the rest of Latium as well.

11,255–59 (“Igitur Tarracona petemus, / **Hesperiasque** domos, et prodigiosa priorum / litora Geryonasque alios armentaque prisca, / Amphitryoniades nostris quae vexerit oris / fatalem praedam”, So let us strive towards Tarragona, and the Hesperian homesteads, the mighty shores of the ancients, figures like Geryon and their ancient flocks, brought to our part of the world by the hero from the lineage of Amphitryon, a fateful prey): In a speech to his men, Sigismondo wonders how many times he will have to defeat the troops of the Spaniards and plans to attack them in their own land.

Apart from the purely numerical preponderance of passages where *Hesperia* means Spain, it is particularly striking that Spain is meant in all ten passages where the toponym *Hesperia* occurs. In contrast to Basinio's earlier poetry, there has thus been a clear shift in meaning away from Italy and towards Spain. In view of these findings, how can it be explained that Basinio nevertheless called his epic *Hesperis*?

4. *Imitatio Homeri*

Basinio distinguished himself from his earliest works as a great admirer of Homer. He owes a fierce episode in his intellectual biography to his courageous commitment to his revered role model: his dispute with Porcellio and Seneca, against whom he emphasised the importance of the Greek language and literature, is considered one of the most important humanist disputes about Greek.²²

Already in his early poems, Homer plays a major role: he repeatedly refers to his own reading of Homer (carm. var. 20,171–72 “Dum dederat magni mihi carmen Homeri / Ocia”, when the poem of the great Homer had given me leisure; cf. carm. var. 20,185 “Si legis Iliados divina poemata”, when you read the divine lines of the Iliad; Cyr. 3,41 “Haec manus aeternum solum tractavit Homerum”, this hand has only dealt with Homer for ever), honourably calls him “father” (carm. var. 1,30 “Maeonidesque pater”) and

²² Cf. Ferri 1920.

refers to himself as his son (Cyr. 4,42 “Meque suum natum dulcis Homerus alit”, sweet Homer nourishes me as his son). He knows that the heroes celebrated in Homer’s epics owe all their glory to their poet (e.g. *carm. var.* 3,9–10 “Dic referant grates vati pro laudibus ambo [scil. Achilles et Hector] / Quas subeunt magnas, dulcis Homere, tibi”, say they both [scil. Achilles and Hector] should thank you for the great praise they owe to you, sweet Homer; cf. *carm. var.* 4,17 “Meonides Ithacum fortemque sequatur Achillem”, Homer should follow the strong man from Ithaca and Achilles) and he goes even further: without Homer there will be no Hector (*carm. var.* 7,17 “Homerus abest: nullus et Hector erit”, if there is no Homer, there will be no Hector). To his patrons Basinio promises that a second Homer will one day sing their praises, such as for Leonello d’Este (*carm. var.* 13,12 “Atque tuas laudes alter Homerus aget”, a second Homer will sing your praises; cf. *carm. var.* 16,3–5 “cunctosque canam tua facta per annos. / Me superent quicumque ferant ea, laude minores, / Atque velim magno vix concedatur Homero”, forever I will sing of thy deeds; I may well be surpassed by those who perform such deeds, but in praise they are inferior, and I need hardly give way to the great Homer), or Sigismondo Malatesta, to whom he repeatedly promises in the *Liber Isottaeus* that he will one day sing of him like Homer sings of his heroes, for his deeds are “Maeonia bella canenda tuba” (*Isot.* 2,10,107–08 cf. 3,10,8). In the poem to Pope Nicholas V, Basinio explains why he does not want to undertake to translate Homer (*carm. var.* 20,44–45 “Forsitan id rogites, quid non ego vertere magnum / Meonium aggrediar”, perhaps you wonder why I do not set out to translate the great Homer), but instead, like Virgil, wants to write his own epic poem in recourse to Homer (*carm. var.* 20,95–96 “Nimirum auctorem divinae mentis Homerum / Sortitus cunctis imitator maximus actis”, as the author of his all too divine spirit he chose Homer, this greatest imitator in all deeds).

In the *Hesperis*, one may then recognise this long-announced epic poem in the succession of Homer. In fact, Basinio strives to imitate Homer on many levels in this text. Numerous episodes and similes are developed after models in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, some characters are adapted from Homeric models. Characters from the Homeric epics are repeatedly present in the *Hesperis*, for example Achilles and Ulysses in the temple of Fama on the Isle of the Blessed (*Hesp.* 7,50 and 8,215). In the autograph, Basinio has repeatedly noted in the margin the original quotation of the passages from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which he takes up and reworks in the passage in question; it was thus obviously important to him that it be clear down to the last detail how he is imitating his venerated model.

If we now consider Basinio’s enthusiasm for Homer and bring it together with the findings elaborated above for the analysis of the word *Hesperia* in

the *Hesperis*, a hypothesis can be suggested: Basinio wanted to imitate Homer also in his choice of title for his epic. In this, he deviated considerably from the choices of earlier Neo-Latin epic poets: he did not choose a title aimed at reproducing the content as correctly as possible, like Gerardus Anechinus in his *Carmen heroico metro in tres libros divisum de quibusdam miraculis Virginis Mariae occursis Mutinae* written in Modena in 1399, like Maffeo Vegio in his *Vellus aureum*, or like Gianantonio Pandoni in his *Triumphus Alfonsi devicta Neapoli*. Nor did he put the hero of his epic in the title, as Vegio did in his *Antonias*, Antonio Baratella in his *Polydoreis* or he himself did earlier in his *Meleagris*. The *Hesperis* follows epic conventions insofar as the ending *-is/-idos* places it in the line of tradition of the *Aeneid*. But it is clearly *not* a Sigismondo epic (one could think of a *Pandulphias*). Rather, Basinio follows his great model Homer, for whom the name of the antagonists of his heroes was decisive for the title: the title *Iliad* is derived from the name *Ilion* for Troy. This also explains the title of *Hesperis* from the term *Hesperia*, which is used for the Spanish. In opposition to Homer, the contrast is not so sharp here, because after all, *Hesperia* can in principle designate both countries, Italy and Spain, and the *Hesperidae* already possess a considerable part of the Apennine Peninsula with the Kingdom of Naples.

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