Abstract: The paper discusses the text of one of the fragments of Eratosthenes’ *Erigone* (fr. 22 Powell). Modern scholars have linked this one-line fragment with a Hellenistic theory that placed the origin of drama in the village of Icaria, in the Attic countryside. It is likely that the fragment did mention the word “billy-goat” (τράγος); on the contrary, there are no definite elements in favour of the hypothesis that Eratosthenes had devised a theory on the origin of tragedy in Icaria.

Keywords: Eratosthenes of Cyrene, Erigone, origins of tragedy, Icaria, Attica

1. *Erigone*, fr. 22 Powell

Among the lost poetic works of Eratosthenes of Cyrene, a narrative elegy, the *Erigone*, must have been one of the most admired in antiquity: the anonymous author of the treatise *On the Sublime*, in the famous passage where he argues that greatness of spirit in a poetic work is more important than formal perfection, mentions the *Erigone* as an example of those poems that have a claim to the latter, defining it as ‘an absolutely flawless little poem’ (33.5: διὰ πάντων γὰρ ἀµώµητον τὸ ποιητικόν). Unfortunately, only a handful of fragments from the *Erigone* has survived: the most recent edition assigns six fragments to this work, as well as four more of uncertain attribution.¹

Even if it is impossible to reconstruct the poem’s structure, in view of the limited number of fragments we possess, it will be useful to summarize in brief the content of the local Attic myth it was based upon. The peasant Icarius received Dionysus as a guest when he arrived in Attica; the god, in reward for his hospitality, presented him with a vine branch and taught him how to make wine. Icarius, following the god’s bidding, shared the wine with other peasants, who got drunk and, thinking he had tried to poison them, killed him. His daughter Erigone, led by the dog Maera, found him and hanged herself on a tree. When other

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¹ See Eratosth. frr. 1-6 Rosokoki (= frr. 24, 25, 26, 22, 23, 36 Powell) and fragmenta dubia 1-4 Rosokoki (= frr. 32, 33, 31, 27 Powell).
young women in Athens followed her example, the Athenians, to appease her curse, established a rite in her honour during the annual Dionysian festival of the Anthesteria. Icarius then became the constellation of Boötes, Erigone became the Virgo and Maera the star Sirius. Erigone’s myth was widely known, and the fact that most of our testimonies on it date to the time after Eratosthenes is an indication of the important place Eratosthenes’ poem must have had in its circulation in the following centuries.2)

According to the traditionally accepted picture of the poem, it consisted of a series of aetiological episodes, in a typically Hellenistic fashion. An aition, in particular, has often been considered to be the context of one of the most controversial fragments of the Erigone, fr. 22 Powell (= 4 Rosokoki = 32 Hiller = p. 156 Bernhardy). This single-line fragment seems to refer to a Hellenistic theory on the origin of theatre in Athens; this theory connected the early stages of the history of drama to rural festivals in Attica, and was later adopted by a number of Latin authors of the Augustan age, most notably Horace in the Ars poetica (ll. 220-4 and 275-7).3) If Eratosthenes was alluding to this theory, it has been argued, this reconstruction of the origins of drama could be traced back to him.4) In this paper I propose to reappraise the evidence on the text of this hexameter, which is not as indisputable as was thought until recently, and to discuss this line’s value as evidence for ancient theories on the early history of drama.

The only source for our fragment is a Latin author, Hyginus, who quotes it in his work On Astronomy. Hyginus is recounting how Dionysus taught Icarius the art of making wine, and how later Icarius caught a billy goat gnawing his vine, killed it and taught his comrades to dance around its inflated skin; as Jordi Pàmias Massana pointed out (2001, 51-9), this mythical episode presents a familiar structure linked to a religious sacrificial rite: an animal breaks a prohibition, and this transgression becomes the motive for the person conducting the sacrifice to overcome the inhibition to kill it; the slaughtering of an animal, forbidden in itself, becomes acceptable in the eyes of the community in consideration of the sacrilege committed by the animal. Let us consider Hyginus’ quotation of the fragment:

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2) See Geus 2002, 101. Eratosthenes had possibly dealt with this myth in another of his works, the Astronomy (Catasterisms): see Geus 2002, 102, 105-8.

3) A. Pickard-Cambridge offers an excellent account of the problems posed by our fragment in his classic treatment of ancient testimonies on the origin of tragedy (1962, 69-74). A detailed discussion of our fragment as a testimony to the origin of tragedy is in Rosokoki 1995, 84-6 and in Geus 2002, 102-5.

4) For this theory, see Meuli 1955, 210-2 and 226 f., Merkelbach 1963, 471-7 and 496-501 and Pfeiffer 1968, 169 n. 2, who mention it with varying degrees of confidence; a clear overview of the discussion concerning the origin of tragedy is in the first chapter of Lesky’s standard work on Greek tragedy (Lesky 1972). On its adoption by Augustan poets see Rudd 1989, 28.
Qui [scil. Icarius] cum sevisset vitem et diligentissime administrando floridam facile fecisset, dicitur hircus in vineam se coniecisse et quae ibi tenerrima folia videret decerpsisse; quo facto Icarum animo irato tulisse eumque interfecerisse et ex pelle eius utrem fecisse ac vento plenum praeligasse et in medium proiecerisse suosque sodales circum eum saltare coegisse. Itaque Eratosthenes ait:

Ἰκαριοῖ, τόθι πρῶτα περὶ τράγον ὄρχησαντο.5)

‘And after (Icarius) had planted the vine and had easily made it thrive with the most assiduous care, they say that a billy goat burst into the vineyard and plucked off the most tender leaves he saw there; Icarius, enraged by this, killed him, made a bag with its skin, filled it with air, tied it up, threw it among his friends and made them dance around it. So Eratosthenes says:
In Icaria, where they first danced around the goat.’

Establishing with any amount of certainty the text of our line from Eratosthenes is by no means an easy task, since editors of Hyginus’ Astronomy generally show little interest in reporting the manuscripts’ readings of the text of the line, and usually resort to printing it in the version that has become traditional since the early Renaissance editions of Hyginus’ work.6) Editors of the Erigone, on the contrary, take as their starting point the much improved text offered by Eduard Hiller’s 1872 edition of the fragments of the poetic works of Eratosthenes; in particular, for our fragment Hiller offers some reliable manuscript readings reported to him by Conrad Bursian (Hiller 1872, 106). The fragment was later included in Powell’s Collectanea Alexandrina (the text presented above is the one we read in Hiller’s and Powell’s editions); in 1995 Alexandra Rosokoki printed it in her collection of the fragments of the Erigone. As is usual in Greek quotations found in manuscripts of Latin authors, the text is in many points obscure, since the scribes who copied them were in most cases not accustomed to reading and writing Greek; from Hiller’s apparatus it is clear that the line is written in our manuscripts in Greek capitals.

5) Hyg. de astr. 2.4.2, ed. Viré; the text of Eratosthenes’ line is that accepted by Powell.
6) See the recent editions of Le Boeuffle and Viré, who print Ἰκαρίου ποσὶ πρῶτα περὶ τράγον ὄρχησαντο; the genitive Ἰκαρίου was generally considered to depend on a lost noun in the preceding line, and ποσὶ was linked to the verb ὄρχησαντο (see Rosokoki 1995, 84). The most recent and detailed account of the readings of the mss. regarding our line is found in an unpublished dissertation by Sister Lidwine [Wilma] Fitzgerald, Hygini Astronomica, University of St. Louis 1967 (I have not seen this work; I owe this information to Emanuele Dettori, Università di Roma Tor Vergata, who is preparing a new edition of the poetic fragments of Eratosthenes).
For the purpose of my discussion, I have prepared a short apparatus to our line, based on the manuscript readings found in the editions of Hiller and Rosokoki:?


We shall need in any case to analyse the quotation word by word. There can be no doubt, first of all, that Eratosthenes mentioned the Attic village of Icaria and that he stated that someone ‘danced for the first time’ or ‘at first, danced’ (πρῶτα ὃς ἐφέσαν). Hiller proposed the now universally accepted reading Ἰκαριοῖ, ‘in Icaria’, for εικαριοι of the mss. 8) Τόθ, ‘there’, is the reading of the mss. (DEFg), accepted by Hiller, and is connected to the preceding locative; 9) there is no need to change it into ποσί, an emendation generally favoured by editors of Hyginus since the early printed editions (ποσί is still in Viré’s 1992 Teubner text).

The most difficult problems concern the words περὶ τράγον, generally accepted by modern editors of Eratosthenes (Bernhardy, Hiller, Powell). However, they do not appear in any manuscript; περὶ τράγον is an emendation that goes back to Johann Soter’s 1534 edition of Hyginus and that has acquired the status of a modern vulgate. 10) The main testimony, ms. D, has περιστραγον; the others have περιστρατον (Eg), and πεστρατον (G). 11) A. Rosokoki in 1995 first challenged the accepted text and in her edition of the fragments of the Erigone printed her own emendation περ εἰς τράγον: this is unlikely to be right, however, for the resulting hexameter would have a word-ending in the middle, after the postpositive περ and before the prepositive εἰς. 12) In 2002, Klaus Geus, in his important book on Eratosthenes

7) Sigla codicum (from Rosokoki): D = Montepessulanus H 334, s. ix; E = Reginensis Lat. 1260, s. ix; F = Bruxellensis 10078, s. xi; G = Parisinus Lat. 8663. s. xi; g = Monacensis Clm 13084, f. 73, s. ix/x
8) The locative Ἰκαριοῖ is attested in Stephanus of Byzantium (1 44 Billerbeck-Zubler, s.v. Ἰκαρία).
9) For the locative + τόθι see Call. fr. 229.10 ἐν ὠλην τόθι πρῶτον ὄφθης, cited by Pfeiffer 1968, 169 n. 2.
10) I owe this information on the readings found in the early printed editions of Hyginus to Emanuele Dettori.
11) The sigma before the tau is present in the majority of the mss. used by Lidwine Fitzgerald in her edition of the Astronomy (see above).
(102-5), discussed again the text of our fragment and proposed to read περὶ στρατὸν, ‘around the host’ (‘um die Schar’). Geus argues that this reading is the closest to the manuscript tradition; the original tau in στρατὸν could have easily lost a part of the horizontal line and become a gamma. The resulting line, Ἰκαριοῖ, τόθι πρῶτα περὶ στρατὸν ὄρχησαντο, would find a parallel in Callimachus’ hymn to Artemis (3.240 f.: περὶ πρόλιν ὄρχησαντο / πρῶτα μὲν …, ‘they danced around the armed dance, first …’). If this reconstruction of the text is right, it would be highly unlikely that Eratosthenes in the line was referring to the origins of drama. Geus, in fact, argues that the episode of the goat might have not been present in the Erigone at all (2002, 106-8).

Most recently, Heather White (2003, 302), has defended the correctness of the reading of ms. D, περιστραγον, pointing out that the adjective στραγός can mean “crooked”: Eratosthenes would refer here to the askoliastein, a game played at festivals in Attica: the players had to jump and try to keep their balance on top of a greasy wine-skin, filled with air or wine, which was also the prize for the winner; the companions of Icarius would have danced around the goatskin “in a crooked manner” (περὶ στραγὸν ὄρχησαντο). If we opt

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12) So already Geus 2002, 104; see also Hopkinson 1997, 30: if we accept Rosokoki’s text, the line has no caesura. In Rosokoki’s opinion (1995, 85), περι emphasizes πρῶτα (‘for the very first time’) and εἰς τράγον states the dancers’ aim (they dance to win the goat as a prize).

13) Otto Schneider, in his review of Hiller’s edition (1873, 222), had advanced a similar hypothesis and proposed to read περὶ στρατὸς ὄρχησαντο. He understood the nominative στρατὸς as a collective singular (= λαὸς or δῆμος), linked to the plural verb ‘danced’ (with περὶ in tmesis).

14) A goat, however, must have been present in the poem if we accept Hollis’ proposal to recognize a quotation from the Erigone in a passage of Porphyrius, De abstinentia 2.10.1: αἶγα δὲ ἐν Ἰκαρίῳ τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἐχειρώσαντο πρῶτον, ὅτι ἀμφελον ἀπέθριεσεν: the poetic word ἀπέθριεσεν might derive from Eratosthenes and would correspond to “decerpsisse” in Hyginus (see Hollis 1991).

15) See Hesych. lex. σ 1959 Hansen: στραγγός· στρεβλός. ἀτακτος †ἡ στόματα; Phot. lex. 179.9 Naber: στραγγός (corr. Naber: στραγχός cod.): ἀναιδής, σκολιός, στρεβλός, δύσκολος; Synag. σ 244 Cunningham; Suid. σ 1160 Adler.

16) For a discussion of the game in relation to our fragment see Latte 1957.
for this reading, it becomes unlikely that our line had anything to do with an *aition* on the origin of tragedy.\(^{18}\)

The main difficulty in the traditionally accepted text, \(\pi\epsilon\rho\iota \tau\rho\acute{a}g\acute{o}v\), is that the sigma before \(\tau\rho\acute{a}g\acute{o}v\) in our manuscripts remains unaccounted for. Our main testimony, ms. D, has \(\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\sigma\tau\rho\acute{a}g\acute{o}v\). Is there a way of explaining its presence in the line? A possible answer is that this sigma, which was not in the original text of the line, is the result of an incorrect reading of an element of the Greek script of the quotation. Specifically, it is not unusual to find in Greek papyrus bookhands a serif on the left side of a horizontal stroke; in our case, a serif on the left side of the horizontal line of the letter tau could have been confused with a sigma written in ligature with the following letter, a tau in our case. The confusion can more easily happen when the scribe uses a small sigma that is placed high above the line.

An example of this serif, together with the occurrence of a sigma written in ligature, can be found in a second-century BC Berlin papyrus that contains an anthology of passages from Greek plays (P. Berol. 9772). In col. 5, line 17 of the papyrus, we read ὦ δ但不限πονα ποντία Κύπρι (Eur. Hipp. 415): the sigma of δ但不限πονα is written in ligature with the next letter, a pi, and this sigma is very similar to the serif of the tau in the word ποντία. See P. Berol. 9772, ed. by W. Schubart and U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, Berliner Klassikertexte Heft V, 2, Berlin 1907, 127. Our line is the last but one in the image of the papyrus found in Schubart 1911, table 6 c, and in Cavallo 2008, table 24 on p. 47.

A Latin scribe, unaccustomed to the Greek hand of the quotation in Hyginus’ text, could easily have misread a serif on the left side of the tau in the word τράγον as a sigma. The presence of the sigma can explain why the gamma in τράγον became a tau: gamma and tau are easily confused letters (see already Hiller 1872, 106). Moreover, τράγον is the *lectio difficilior* as compared to στρατόν.

If this is the explanation of how a sigma intruded before the tau in our quotation from the *Erigone*, the sigma would presumably have originated early in the history of the text of Hyginus, when a scribe whose first language was Latin, copying the text of the work *On Astronomy*, presumably misread the serif in the Greek line and thus added a letter that was not in the original text. Ideally, we should be able to find a similar mistake in one of the other Greek quotations in Hyginus’ work; unsurprisingly, however, this is not the case, since there are only three quotations in Greek in the *On Astronomy*, all very short ones, and none contains mistakes of this type.\(^{19}\)

\(^{17}\) The verb \(\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\rho\chi\acute{e}\omicron\alpha\) is used in tmesis by Callimachus (see *Hy*. 3.240, quoted above), and the neuter singular of an adjective often appears in Aratus as an adverb (see Kidd 1997, 499, on *phaen*. 943).

\(^{18}\) It would not be easy, however, to assign to Eratosthenes the spelling with one gamma (στραγός), required by the metre, which is likely to be late. I owe this observation to E. Dettori.
In fact, Greek quotations in Latin authors are rare and far between, and finding a case comparable to ours could prove a wearying and ultimately unsuccessful task. Still, a promising source of Greek quotations are Latin grammatical works, which often include Greek words cited as examples, as well as quotations from Greek authors. In particular, the *Institutiones grammaticae* of the Latin grammarian Priscian (fifth-sixth century AD), originally written with the purpose of teaching Latin to Greek speakers, include a number of citations from Greek classical authors. A case in Priscian’s text that can be compared to ours is a quotation from Homer in book seven of the *Institutiones* (7.54), where Priscian quotes *Iliad* 12.231.

At the end of this line, where Homer’s text reads φίλα ταῦτα ἀγορεύεις, one of Priscian’s mss. has instead ΦΙΛΑϹΤΑΥ ΤΑΓΟΡΕΥΕΙϹ.\(^{20}\) The Latin scribe added a sigma after φίλα and before ταῦτα, and this sigma could possibly have the same origin of the sigma in the Eratosthenes quotation, that is, it could be the result of a misreading of a feature of the Greek hand in the quotation.

To sum up, if my explanation of the presence of the sigma in Eratosthenes’ line is right, the standard reconstruction of the text of the fragment could still be the correct one, and our line originally read: Ἰκαριοῖ, τόθι πρῶτα περὶ τράγον ὀρχήσαντο, ‘in Icaria, where (the Icarians) first danced around the goat’.

2. Eratosthenes on the origin of drama?
As we have seen, it is quite possible, in the light of my considerations on the fragment’s text, that the line did contain a reference to a billy goat, consistent with the context in Hyginus. What are the consequences, then, for Eratosthenes’ supposed speculations on the origin of drama? In my opinion, it would still be difficult to make a case that Eratosthenes developed a theory of drama that linked its origin with the rural festivals in the Attic countryside; it is certainly possible that he was alluding to a theory of this kind that was already in circulation in his time, but this does not mean that he endorsed it, let alone originated it. The sensible observations of A. Pickard-Cambridge on this point are, in general terms, still valid: it is unsafe to link the line of Eratosthenes with the question of the origin of tragedy (Pickard-Cambridge 1962, 72-74).

We know that the problem of tragedy’s place of origin – whether it was Attica or the Peloponnese – was already debated in the fourth century BC: Aristotle in the *Poetics* mentions the opposing claims of Athenians and Dorians regarding the origin of tragedy and comedy, based on the etymology of the words κώμη, ‘village’ and δρᾶμα (*poet.* 1448 a30-
Our evidence shows that in Eratosthenes’ time the theory that located the origin of drama in the Attic countryside, in Icaria, connecting it with the etymology from κόμη, must have been well-known; in the second third of the third century BC the chronicle preserved on the Parian Marble mentions it in detail:

\[ FGrHist\ 239\ A\ 39: \ άφ᾽ \ οὗ \ ἐν Αθῆναις κομιω[ιδών χο][π[ός ἔτη]δή, [στη]σάν[των πρώτων Ίκαριών, εὐρόντος Σουσαρίωνος, καὶ άθλον ἐπέθη πρῶτον ἱσχάδω[ν] \ ἀρσιχο[ζ] καὶ οἶνου με[τ]ρητῆς, …
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‘From the time when in Athens a chorus of comedians was set up; the Icarians formed it first, and Susarion invented it; it was established that the prize would be a basket of dried figs and a measure of wine …’

Since Eratosthenes was born, according to the Suda, during the 126th Olympiad, that is in 276-273 BC, I would think it unlikely that a theory he devised could have become widespread in such a short time. Moreover, the Alexandrian epigrammatist Dioscorides (who was active in the second half of the third century BC) connects our Attic-village theory with the name of Thespis, the first inventor of tragedy:

\[ AP\ 7.410, \text{ll. 1-2:} \]

\[ Θέσπις \ οὗ, \ τραγικὴν δὲ \ ἀνέπλασε \ πρῶτος \ άιδήν \ κομίταις νεαράς καινοτομῶν χάριτας …
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‘This is Thespis, who first formed tragic song, discovering new delights for the villagers’ …

Thespis is mentioned in the Parian Marble as well (FGrHist 239 A 43, that also mentions the goat as a prize); according to later sources, Thespis came precisely from Icaria (see Suidas θ 282 Adler, s.v. Θέσπις). This theory on the origin of drama is familiar to modern readers because it was known in Rome in the Augustan age; Horace in his Ars poetica (275 ff.) mentions Thespis as the creator of tragedy:

\[ ignotum \ tragicae \ genus \ invenisse \ Camenae \ dicitur \ et \ paenultris \ vexisse \ poemata \ Thespis … \]

In addition to standard reference works, a lucid overview of the abundant bibliography on the origin of drama, with a critical assessment of ancient evidence, is now in Scullion 2005, 30-3. A good collection of texts relevant to Eratosthenes’ fragment is in Meuli 1955, 226 ff. Eratosthenes’ exact date of birth is controversial; see now the discussion in Geus 2002, 7-15.
we are told that Thespis invented tragic poetry, unknown before him, and that he carried his plays around in wagons …’

In conclusion, the theory that linked the origin of drama to local festivals in Attica was probably already current at Eratosthenes’ time, and it is consequently unlikely that he originated it. On the contrary, it is more realistic to think that he was hinting at this already existing theory in the *Erigone*. We should bear in mind that the debate on the early history of drama had been waged at least since Aristotle’s time; Eratosthenes, moreover, was a prominent intellectual who moved in the Hellenistic circles of the scholar-poets at Alexandria: is it credible that he could have used in the same line the words “Icaria”, “for the first time”, and “billy goat” without being aware of their inevitable implications for his learned readers?

3. Eratosthenes’ work *On Old Comedy*

It is necessary at this point to look into Eratosthenes’ activity as a philologist in more detail. One of the reasons the name of Eratosthenes has been linked to the debate on the origin of drama is that he was the leading authority of his time on Attic comedy: this was the subject of the most important of his philological writings, the treatise *On Old Comedy* (Περὶ τῆς ἀρχαίας κωμῳδίας), an extensive work that comprised at least twelve books.24 We should also remember that, according to the ancient biographical tradition (see the entry in Suidas, ε 2898 Adler), Eratosthenes had studied in Athens, where he had been a pupil of the Stoic philosopher Ariston of Chius and of the Platonist Arcesilaus.25 There, as Pfeiffer suggests (1968, 161), he may have developed an interest in Attic comedy, an interest he pursued further after his move to Alexandria, where he could make use of the resources of the Ptolemies’ library. C. Strecker in 1884 collected the extant fragments of this work; they have now been included in A. Bagordo’s edition of fragments of ancient treatises on drama (Bagordo 1998, Eratosth. frr. 1-23).26 We have a more accurate picture of the contents of Eratosthenes’ philological work than we have of his poetic production: Bagordo in his edition assigns to *On Old Comedy* 23 fragments where Eratosthenes is cited by name, while

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23 See also AP 7.411, 1-2; on these two epigrams see Fantuzzi 2007, 105-9.
26 On the content of the fragments see Strecker 1884,12-22, Bagordo 1998, 37-40 and Geus 2002, 295; on p. 289 Geus lists a number of new fragments (that were either overlooked in
Strecker’s work includes 38 more fragments which can be very probably assigned to him and a further 28 *fragmenta dubia*.

The surviving material shows that Eratosthenes dealt with a variety of problems related to old comedy, from the discussion of Attic words and of the historical background of the plays to problems related to the staging and dating of comedies; he may have tried to identify spurious works on the basis of the presence of pseudo-Attic terms (see fr. 149 Strecker = 17 Bagordo = sch. Ar. ran. 1263); he certainly was familiar with the διδασκάλια, as his discussion of the two different versions of Aristophanes’ *Peace* shows (see fr. 38 Strecker = 10 Bagordo = argum. Ar. pac. A 2 Holwerda). In relation to a problematic passage in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (ll. 1028-29), Eratosthenes mentioned a second staging of Aeschylus’ *Persians* in Syracuse at the time of Hieron (fr. 109 Strecker = 6 Bagordo = sch. ad Ar. ran. 1028 f/Chantry). Eratosthenes’ work on comedy, owing to the breadth of information he displayed and the sound judgment he showed when dealing with a variety of issues, was the starting point of all subsequent work on comedy and on Attic language in Alexandria. Although this is no more than an *argumentum ex silentio*, I believe we should take into account the fact that nothing in the extant fragments makes us think that Eratosthenes could have discussed the topic of the origin of drama in this work.

4. Eratosthenes and poetics

Eratosthenes did, however, have a more general interest in questions regarding the theory of poetry and he was certainly well aware of the philosophical debate of his time regarding poetry, even if he does not seem to have engaged in it. This interest in the topic, as we shall see, has been invoked in the discussion regarding his (supposed) theory on the reconstruction of the origin of drama. Let us examine first the material we possess regarding his interest in this subject. A number of his geographical fragments show that in all likelihood he was well informed on poetics and in particular on the philosophical debate of his time on the aims and the evaluation of poetic works. At the beginning of his *Geography*, he discussed the use of archaic texts, in particular Homer’s epics, as a source of geographical facts; in this context he famously said that the aim of poetry was to captivate and delight the listener, not to instruct him:

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\text{Strab. 1.1.10 (p. 6 f. C.) (cf. 1.2.3, p. 15 C.) = Eratosth. fr. I A 20 Berger:}
\text{… δφησιν Ἐρατοσθένης, ὅτι ποιητὴς πάς στοχάζεται ψυχαγωγίας, οὐ διδασκαλίας.}
\text{… what Eratosthenes says, that every poet’s aim is to enthral, not to teach.}
\]

Strecker’s edition or were found in recently published papyri). See also the detailed discussion of some of the fragments in Tosi 1994, 187-91 and Tosi 1998.

\(^{27}\) See Pfeiffer 1968, 161 f.
These statements are part of the discussion whether the Homeric epics should be used as a source of geographical information, which occupied a short section in the first book of Eratosthenes’ Geography (see Berger 1880, 19); we possess about twenty fragments of it, mostly quoted by Strabo.²⁸ It is interesting to note that Eratosthenes here uses a number of technical terms that are common in the treatises on poems and on the aim and evaluation of poetry from Aristotle onwards. The above-mentioned word ψυχαγωγία / ψυχαγωγέω appears already in Arist. poet. 1450a 33 (see also 1450b 16); in the same context, Eratosthenes also speaks of κρίσις ποιημάτων ‘judgement of poetry’, of the ἀρετή ποιητοῦ, of the διάνοια, ‘meaning’ of a poem.²⁹ These are all technical terms in common use in the Hellenistic debate on which criteria should be employed to evaluate a poetic composition.³⁰ We must remember, however, that the context of these remarks was not that of a dispute on poetics, but of a scientific discussion: Eratosthenes, in the introductory sections of his work, engages in a polemic against those who had preceded him in the study of geography (see Geus 2002, 265-267). This polemic shows that he was well-informed on the issue, but the information we glean from Strabo does not allow us to assume that Eratosthenes had actively taken part in the philosophical discussion on the problem of the evaluation of poetry.

²⁸ Fragments I A 1-21 in Berger’s collection (Berger 1880, 19-40) = frr. 2-11 in Roller 2010 (the latter joins the fragments with similar content). Eratosthenes maintained that the geographical references in the epics were purely fictitious, and mocked the misguided attempts of those interpreters who tried to identify Homeric places or to find all sorts of teachings in the poems: one would find the location of Odysseus’ wanderings, he quipped, when one discovered the cobbler who sewed the bag of winds (Strabo 1.2.15, p. 24 C. = fr. I A 16 Berger). On Eratosthenes’ views on poetry see Pfeiffer 1968, 166-8.

²⁹ See Strab. 1.2.17 (p. 25 C.) = fr. I A 17 Berger: ... οὐχ ὡς Ἐρατοσθένης φησὶ κελεύων μὴ κρίνειν πρὸς τὴν διάνοιαν τὰ ποιήματα μηδ’ ἱστορίαι ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ἐξεταίρει; Strab. 1.2.3 (p. 16 C.) = fr. I A 21 Berger: (Eratosthenes) ... ποιητοῦ τόπων ἡμιτείρα τῆς χειροτονίας ὡς ἡ σχέσις τῆς ἱστορίας μὴ ἐπισκεπτόντως ἄρκης ἐπίκεισθαι τοῖς ὑπάρχοντες τοῖς γεγονόσις ἡ σχέσις τῆς ἱστορίας μὴ ἐπισκεπτόντως ἄρκης ἐπίκεισθαι. On the meaning of these terms see a useful synopsis in Mangoni 1993, 86-103. For a more detailed treatment of Eratosthenes’ use of these philosophical terms in a scientific context see my article Trania e prassi del genere epico: il caso di Eratostene, forthcoming in the papers of the conference Sua cuique proposito lex – I generi letterari e le loro leggi quarant’anni dopo (Roma, La Sapienza, 7 May 2010).

³⁰ Our main source on this topic is the treatise On Poems by Philodemus of Gadara, which has come down to us thanks to the papyri of the villa in Herculaneum, where these terms appear again and again. See the word indexes in R. Janko’s editions of books 1, 3 and 4 of the On Poems (Janko 2000 and Janko 2011) and in C. Mangoni’s edition of book 5 (Mangoni 1993).
In fact, the topic of the aims of poetry appears to have been much debated in Eratosthenes’ time: the philosopher Neoptolemus of Parium (probably his contemporary), disagreed with him on this question and maintained that poetry’s aim was not only to enthral but also to be useful, possibly rebutting Eratosthenes’ statement. Neoptolemus, like Eratosthenes, uses the rare word ψυχαγωγία in this context, adding the concept of ὀφέλησις:

Neoptolemus is generally held to be the Greek source of Horace’s Ars poetica: for this reason, some have recognised a line Eratosthenes – Neoptolemus – Horace in the general theory on poetry; this line would be paralleled in the discussion on the origin of drama and its location in the Attic countryside. In other words, Horace would have taken the Attic village theory on the origin of drama from his source, Neoptolemus of Parium, who in his turn depended on Eratosthenes.

I do not think, however, that it is wise to go that far down the way of Quellenforschung; it is clear that Eratosthenes was familiar with poetic theory, but he did not apparently have a particular interest in it outside the scope of the debate on the reliability of Homer as a source of information on the geography of the Mediterranean. In a similar way, in the Erigone he might have hinted at the contemporary discussion on the origin of drama, but this does not prove that he had taken part in it, especially in view of the fact that the theories he refers to seem to have been already known among his contemporaries. It would be typical for a Hellenistic scholar-poet to allude to a noted philological or more generally scientific discussion in one of his poetic works. We can recall on this point that Eratosthenes’ main poetic work, the Hermes, a hexameter poem on the juvenile adventures of the god, certainly contained allusions to contemporary philosophical and scientific theories on the natural world: see fr. 13 Powell, on the order of the planets and the theory of the harmony of the spheres and fr. 16 Powell, on the five geographical zones on the earth’s globe.


32) See also the insightful overview of the debate in Pfeiffer 1968, 166 f.

33) So Pfeiffer 1968, 169 n. 2.

34) On the Hermes and its content see now the detailed discussion in Di Gregorio 2010.
In conclusion, working on our slender and controversial evidence, we can say that it is unlikely that Eratosthenes had developed a personal reconstruction of the early stages of the history of drama. However, it is probable that in the Erigone he referred to a contemporary theory that made Attica the place of origin of drama.35)

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