

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the four-book division of Hyginus' handbook on astronomy, a division that is a long established convention in the print history of the work but has no manuscript authority, ignores the author's own description of his work as a single *uolumen*, and makes his references to the size of the book that he was writing seem ridiculous. The four-book division is a modern sophistication imposed on the text transmitted in the manuscripts and its continued appearance in modern editions (Bunte 1875; Le Boeuffle 1983; Viré 1992) suggests that the intentions of an author who writes on a technical subject in an indifferent style can safely be disregarded, even when the author's understanding of the form of his work is an important factor that influences the composition and reception of the work. As scholars in the field of the history of the book have shown, the material aspects of a text are productive of meaning, as well as the words of that text, and are of special significance when the author professes to be aiming at the realization of a particular form, in the case of Hyginus' book, a single *uolumen* that covers a wide variety of topics: a general description of the celestial sphere, catasterism myths, arrangement and number of the stars that form the constellation figures, and finally a description of the circles of the celestial sphere, which leads into a discussion of the motions of the stars and planets. The evidence for Hyginus' plan to write a complete work whose length is coextensive with the roll is clear. In the preface Hyginus anticipates the reader's reaction to the size of his book. He mentions both the large number of lines of text (*tantum numerum uersuum*) and the great size of the roll itself (*magnitudinem uoluminis* Praef. 6). These comments make little sense when embedded in a work divided into four books, because no one of the books is unusually long for a prose work, and in fact three of the books are unusually short: according to Viré's lineation, the preface and book 1 contain 252 lines of text; book 3, 507 lines; and book 4, 645 lines (it should be noted that the last sentence is incomplete and more text followed, although it cannot have been much since it is clear that Hyginus was nearing the end of the work); it is only book 2, the catasterisms, with 1364 lines, that has the makings of a full *uolumen*, but certainly not one noticeable for its large size. Accordingly, none of the individual books, as they are now defined, can accurately be described as "big". If, on the other hand, we take *magnitudo uoluminis* to refer to the whole work of four books, a very unlikely possibility, the phrase makes little sense because the four-book work isn't large at all. If the line numbers are added up, the total (2768) is comparable, as I will show, to the length of Cicero's *Brutus*, a one-roll work, and to Cornelius Nepos' *liber de excellentibus ducibus*, a *liber* that is coextensive with the roll; and both of noteworthy length. Hyginus again refers to his *uolumen* at 4.14.1 when he is nearing the end of the work: he is making the point that work and roll are coming to an end together as he takes up a discussion of the moon. Hyginus's references to the *uolumen* show that the writing space provided by a single roll defined the compositional structure of his work: a single roll that comprehends a vast and complex subject, the science of the heavens.