

# Notes on Statius' Thebaid

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## Notes on Statius' Thebaid

By D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Cambridge, Massachusetts

1, 147ff.

*non impacatis regum advigilantia somnis  
pila, nec alterna ferri statione gementes  
excubiae*

*ferri statione* is to say the least an extraordinary phrase, and Heuvel's<sup>1</sup> ingenious suggestion that Statius was thinking of Verg. Aen. 2, 333 *ferri acies*, which he had mistakenly taken as referring to the warriors, not the swords, is surely too far-fetched to quiet one's misgivings. Then does not *gementes* make too much, and in too casual a fashion, of the average entry's reluctance to take his turn of duty? In Statius oddity is privileged, but I cannot quite suppress a suspicion that he wrote *ferrum ... gerentes*.

1, 164f.

*iam sorte carebat  
dilatatus Polynicis honos.*

*cadebat coni.* Bernartius. Vollmer (Rhein. Mus. 51, 1896, 31) explained 'honor regius Polynicis, sorte dilatatus, vacabat', but to get this out of the Latin is beyond me. Perhaps *iacebat*. *iacere* is used of Polynices himself in 3, 696 *da bella, pater, generique iacentis / aspice res humiles*. *regius honos* is a Virgilian expression (Aen. 7, 814 *attonitis inhians animis ut regius ostro / velet honos levis umeros*), quite differently employed.

1, 681ff.

*tum motus Adrastus  
hospitiis (agnovit enim): 'quid nota recondis?  
scimus' ait, 'nec sic aversum fama Mycenis  
volvitur iter.*

<sup>1</sup> H. Heuvel, *Statii Thebaidos liber primus* (diss. Zutphen 1932). Also note: Delph. = Beraldus, *Statium ed. in usum Delphini* (1685); Garrod = H. W. Garrod, *Stati Thebais et Achilleis* (Oxford Cl. Text 1906); Håkanson = L. Håkanson, *Statius' Thebaid* (Lund 1973); Housman = A. E. Housman, *Class. Quart.* 27 (1933) 1-16 and 65-73 (= *Cl. Papers* 1197-1222); Klotz = A. Klotz, *Stati Thebais* (Teubner 1902; ed. correctiorem curavit T. C. Klennert, Leipzig 1973); Mozley = J. H. Mozley (Loeb Cl. Library 1928); Nisard = Coll. Nisard, *Stace etc.* (1843); Poynton = J. B. Poynton, *Statius' Thebais* (Oxford 1972-1975); Wilkins = A. S. Wilkins, *Stati Thebais*, Corp. Poet. Lat. (Postgate) 1905.

*hospitiis* is generally understood with Delph. ‘affectu quo quis circa hospites suos solet moveri’. But Adrastus’ emotion was prompted by his realization of Polynices’ identity, not by the fact that Polynices was his guest. Polynices’ last words, *est genetrix Iocasta mihi* (681), and his studious avoidance of any mention of his father, told all. *agnovit enim*: the whole story flashed through Adrastus’ mind:

*tum motus Adrastus:  
‘hospitiis’ (agnovit enim) ‘quid nota recondis?’*

‘Why do you hide from your hosts what they already know?’ For *hospitium* = *hospes* see my Propertiana, pp. 42f. on Prop. 1, 15, 20 *ut semel Haemonio tabuit hospitio* and Th.L.L. VI, 3039, 60.

3, 330ff.

*sic nota in pascua taurus  
bellator redit, adverso cui colla suoque  
sanguine proscissisque natant palearibus armi;  
tunc quoque lassa tumet virtus multumque superbit  
pectore despecto; vacua iacet hostis harena  
turpe gemens crudosque vetat sentire dolores.*

335

Garrod rightly judged *pectore despecto* corrupt, though his conjecture *despecto pecore*, *an* is nugatory. Whether the verb means ‘look down at’ (‘id est, ut despicit pectus confossum glorioso vulnere’ Delph. – surely not an easy thing for a bull to do) or ‘despise’, it makes no sense with *pectore*. Perhaps *aequore* (= *campo*) might be considered: cf. Verg. Georg. 3, 116 *equitem docuere sub armis / insultare solo et gressus glomerare superbos*, Aen. 11, 599 *fremet aequore toto / insultans sonipes*, where the metaphorical sense of *insultare* is surely implied, more or less.

3, 378f.

*ibo libens certusque mori, licet optima coniunx  
auditusque iterum revocet socer.*

Polynices is determined to go to Thebes, though his wife and father-in-law dissuade him. The words *auditusque iterum*, obelized in more than one edition, have been discussed and ‘emended’ perhaps as extensively as any in the poem. In my opinion they are textually sound, but two steps must be taken in order to understand them. First the allusion has to be seized, as it was by Housman. It is to 1, 431–473, ‘where the rebuke of Adrastus fell on the ears of Tydeus and Polynices and composed their quarrel.’ But when he maintained that *iterum* belongs not to *revocet* but to *auditus*, he missed the second step. He must have translated: ‘although my father-in-law’s voice, heard for the second time, call

me back.' The scholiast, though getting the allusion wrong, saw the sense, which is exactly expressed in Housman's paraphrase of his note: 'licet me socer, cui revocanti ante oboedivi, revocationem iteret.' To Klotz' assertion, 'nec enim intellegere potes 'cui ante oboedivi' propter maxime vicinum *iterum*', I can only rejoin that Statius' readers would have an easier time of it if they never had to do anything more difficult than that.

3, 551ff.

*unde iste per orbem  
primus venturi miseris animantibus aeger  
crevit amor? divumne feras hoc munus, an ipsi,  
gens avida et parto non umquam stare quieti,  
eruimus, quae prima dies, ubi terminus aevi,* 555  
*quid bonus ille deum genitor, quid ferrea Clotho  
cogitet?*

The day of birth can hardly be the object of divinatory enquiry. The subject will not want to know about it; and while it is an indispensable datum for casting a horoscope, the astrologer does not usually have to dig it out for himself, though he may have difficulty in fixing the exact time. In short, unless Statius' wits were wandering, I think he must have written *summa dies*; cf. 623 *alio mihi debita fato / summa dies*. Men try to discover what kind of death they will die (*quae* = *qualis*) and when. *prima* will have come from a copyist or reader who felt that the opposite to *terminus aevi* was called for.

4, 369ff.

*accumulat crebros turbatrix Fama pavores:  
hic iam dispersos errare Asopide ripa* 370  
*Lernaeos equites; hic te, bacchate Cithaeron,  
ille rapi Teumeson ait noctisque per umbras  
nuntiat excubiis vigiles arsisse Plataeas.*

The scholiast missed the point of 373 ('id est, nunciat Argivos hostili more excubias agere'), and I do not know that anybody has taken it. Someone had seen from a distance the watchfires burning in Plataea, a Boeotian town properly on the alert, and come along with a report that the Argives had captured the place and set it on fire.

4, 409ff.

410

*ille deos non larga caede iuencum,  
non alacri pinna aut verum spirantibus extis,  
nec tripode implicito numerisque sequentibus astra,  
turea nec supra volitante altaria fumo  
tam penitus durae quam mortis limine manis  
elicitos patuisse refert.*

The note in the scholia puts forward two different interpretations: 'ELICITOS PATUISSE REFERT non aliis rebus melius quam manibus elicitos. id est: tantum interius inferos aperire refert quam sunt mortis durae spatia demensa.' Translators are content with the first: 'He replies that heaven shows not its will so clearly by lavish slaughter of steers ... as by the ghosts called up from Death's stern barrier' (Mozley, and similarly Nisard. Poynton is here too loose to count). That is indeed the sense we expect, only it is not in the Latin. To put it in, we should need to change 413: *quam penitus durae per mortis limine manis / elicitos* (for *non ... quam* = *non tam ... quam* see Kühner-Stegmann II, 457f.). But 413 is cited by Priscian (G. L. K. II, 498, 2) as we have it. 'The gods are not so thoroughly revealed by lavish slaughter etc. as are ghosts': that is to say, though the logic of the expression seems to leave something to be desired, there is less to be learned from them. Cf. Luc. 6, 432, in a passage which Statius clearly has in mind, *noverat et tristes sacris feralibus aras, / umbrarum Ditisque fidem, misero-que liquebat / scire parum superos.*

4, 639ff.

640

*hos terrae monstra deumque  
tela manent pulchrique obitus et ab igne supremo  
sontes lege morae.*

The shade of Laius prophesies, but has it been understood? *terrae monstra* and *deumque telis* are correctly referred by the scholiast to the deaths of Amphiaraus and Capaneus respectively, so *pulchrique obitus* will likewise allude to a particular death – certainly not to the deaths of the other champions collectively (think of Tydeus and Polynices). The one intended is Parthenopaeus; not because his death was especially beautiful, like that of Menoeceus (10, 628 *pulchrae gaudia mortis*), but because *he* was. Such associative epithets are characteristic. To give only one example: 10, 87 *qua desidis atria Somni/securumque larem segnis natura locavit*, where *segnis* can hardly be genitive.

5, 20ff.

*'at tamen, o quaecumque es' ait, 'cui gloria tanta  
venimus innumerae fatum debere cohortes,  
quem non ipse deum sator aspernetur honorem,  
dic age' sqq.*

Adrastus addresses Hypsipyle. 'Sensus huius loci coniecturis obruti est: venimus ut tibi vitam deberemus' Klotz. But *fatum* often = *mors*, never *vita*. So:

*cui gloria tanta  
venimus, innumeras fato debere cohortes*

*innumeras ... cohortes* defines *gloria*: the glory of owing countless cohorts to death. But for Hypsipyle's intervention the army would die, and so is forfeit to death, a debt which she has taken upon herself. *fato* is in the Peterhouse MS.

5, 316ff.

*ac prope maesta rogum confusis crinibus adsto  
ense cruentato, fraudemque et inania busta  
plango metu, si forte premant, cassumque parenti  
omen et hac dubios leti precor ire timores.*

316 *crinibus* Håkanson: *ignibus codd.* Hypsipyle hopes that her father's pretended cremation, on the face of it a bad omen for him, will not take effect as such; also that the false death will, as it were, operate as a conductor for the dangers she fears for him, rendering them harmless. The best commentary on this much misunderstood passage is in a letter from Caelius Rufus to Cicero (Ad fam. 8, 1, 4): *urbe ac foro toto maximus rumor fuit te a Q. Pompeio in itinere occisum. ego ... non sum commotus et hoc mendacio, si qua pericula tibi impenderent, ut defungeremur optavi.* Cf. (cited in my note ad loc.) Suet. Nero 40, 2 *Britannia Armeniaque amissa ac rursus utraque recepta defunctum se fatalibus malis existimabat* and Liv. 45, 41, 9 *defunctam esse fortunam publicam mea tam insigni calamitate spero.*

7, 414ff.

*Arcades insanas latrare Lycaonis umbras  
nocte ferunt tacita, saevo decurrere campo  
Oenomaum sua Pisa refert; Acheloon utroque  
deformem cornu vagus infamabat Acarnan.*

415

'Achelous, maimed of either horn, was dishonoured by the Acarnanian exile' (Mozley, explaining that the exile is Tydeus). *vagus Acarnan* is an anonymous Acarnanian, who, happening to be abroad, thought he saw Achelous lacking not merely one horn (the one of which Hercules had deprived him) but two, and so reported. But *infamabat* implies that it was a slander. As often, Mozley's blunder is his own<sup>2</sup>. Nisard is much nearer, though not quite right: 'L'Acarnanien vagabond (dit) qu' Acheloüs privé de sa dernière corne leva son front déshonoré.'

<sup>2</sup> Håkanson 79–85 offers a 'brief survey' of the shortcomings of this translation; but plenty of fish remain in the sea just as bad as those he has pulled out.

7, 463ff.

*si tenuis demisit lumina somnus,  
bella gerunt; modo lucra morae, modo taedia vitae  
attonitis, lucemque timent lucemque precantur.* 465

The night before the battle. To the Thebans the few remaining hours of darkness were *lucra*, a sort of bonus; cf. 9, 779 *quonam usque moram lucrabere fati?* At the same time, delay was irksome; they were impatient to be up and doing. *taedium vitae*, a familiar phrase, is hardly apposite here. The warriors were not sick of their lives. I propose *visae*. Sometimes the delay (*morae*; the plural is not uncommonly so used) seemed so much gain, sometimes a weariness.

7, 649ff.

*quis tibi Baccheos, Eunaee, relinquere cultus,  
quis lucos, vetitus quibus emansisse sacerdos,  
suasit et assuetum Bromio mutare furorem?* 650

*emansisse* = 'spend a night away', to be interpreted from *manere* = *pernoctare*, for which see Th. L. L. VIII, 282, 57. Similarly in Luc. 6, 47 *intermanet* = *in medio pernoctat*, as understood by Hortensius, Haskins, and Fraenken.

7, 698ff.

*talis medios aufertur in hostis  
certus et ipse necis. viris fiducia leti  
suggerit; inde viro maioraque membra diesque  
latior et numquam tanta experientia caeli,  
si vacet: avertit morti contermina virtus.* 700

In 701 editors prefer a corruption, *laetior* (ω). If this be taken with Nisard and Poynton as 'gladder seemed day', it is beside the point. Statius is not talking about Amphiaraus' state of mind but about his enhanced powers of mind and body (*viris*). On the other hand it would be odd if the sky (*dies*) became more favourable (Mozley) just as he was about to plunge to his doom. If *dies* is sound, I suppose it means that the heavens expanded, i.e. Amphiaraus could see more of them. But I rather think it should be replaced with *acies*. His vision widened (cf. Juv. 9, 64 *Polyphemi lata acies*).

8, 170ff.

*omnia laudes,  
Amphiaræ, tuas fecundaque pectora veri  
commemorant lacrimis, et per tentoria sermo  
unus: abisse deos dilapsaque numina castris.*



'Omnia pro omnes' Delph., which seems to have been found no less satisfactory than simple. But let the neuter hold its own: all things reminded the weeping survivors (*lacrimis* = *lacrimantibus*: Th. L. L. VII, 2, 838, 47) of their lost prophet.

8, 338ff.

*haec ubi dicta,*  
*nigrantis terra pecudes obscuraque mergit*  
*armenta, ac vivis cumulos undantis harenae* 840  
*aggerat et vati mortis simulacra rependit.*

'ET VATI id est Amphiarao imaginarium funus exolvit. ut Virgilius «tunc ego met tumulum Rhoeteo in litore inanem constitui»'. The scholiast, like modern interpreters, did not see the point of *simulacra rependit*. The burial of the victims was a kind of re-enactment of the death of the prophet whom the earth swallowed up.

9, 17ff.

*et nunc ille iacet (pulchra o solacia leti!)*  
*ore tenens hostile caput, dulcique nefandus*  
*immoritur tabo; nos ferrum immite facesque,*  
*illis nuda odia et feritas iam non eget armis.* 20

*inmite* P: *mite* ωS. Eteocles comments on Tydeus' devouring of his enemy's head. For 22 perhaps *nos ferrum Marte* (= *bello*) *facesque* ('«tenemus» subaudis' schol.).

9, 228f.

*stupet hospita belli*  
*unda viros claraque armorum incenditur umbra.*

'The word *umbra* is sometimes used by Statius in the sense of "reflection"; here of the light reflected from a thing' Mozley. I rather suppose that *umbra* means an image reflected in water, as often.

9, 663ff.

*'sed decus extremum certe' confusa vicissim*  
*virgo refert 'veraeque licet solacia morti*  
*quaerere, nec fugiet poenas, quicumque nefandam*  
*insontis pueri scelerarit sanguine dextram ...'*

*uereque* P: *duraeque* ω S. Diana speaks of Parthenopaeus' forthcoming death. Since *verae* is plainly impossible (naturally it has had its defenders), Håkanson judges, as seemingly did Helm (Berl. Phil. Woch. 29, 1909, 991), that *durae* must be the right reading. But so tame an epithet is far more likely to be one of the



many interpolations in  $\omega$ . *carae* would be acceptable per se, but palaeographically the preference belongs to *nostrae* ( $\bar{n}rae$ ). As Atlanta's son, Parthenopaeus was 'one of us' from Diana's point of view, and his death was *her* concern.

9, 805ff.

*acrior hoc iuvenem stricto mucrone petebat  
Amphion, cum se medio Latonia campo  
iecit et ante oculos omnis stetit obvia vultu.*

807 *omnes ex omnis* P: *omni* S. *omnis* in modern texts leaves *vultu* in the air. And it is little to the purpose to say that Diana appeared before all eyes; she came to speak to Parthenopaeus and interrupt his combat with Amphion. His were the eyes in front of which she stood, in the guise of his guardian Dorceus, as we are told in the following lines. The scholiast reads *omni* with an absurd interpretation: 'nihil de vivo vultu mutavit in conspectu rectissimo.' But may not the meaning be: 'she stood squarely (*omni vultu* = 'full-face') before his eyes, blocking his path'? Nisard has: 'et lui fait de tout son corps un obstacle infranchissable.'

10, 870ff.

*utque petita diu celsus fastigia supra  
eminuit trepidamque assurgens desuper urbem  
vidit et ingenti Thebas exterruit umbra,  
increpat attonitos: 'humilesne Amphionis arces,  
pro pudor, hi faciles carmenque imbelli secuti,  
hi mentita diu Thebarum fabula muri  
et quid tam egregium prosternere moenia molli  
structa lyra?'*

875

873 *humilesne* P  $\omega$  S: *haene illae* N<sup>2</sup>. In Housman's judgement the true correction in 873 had been found by Peyraredus, *Amphionis artes*: 'The construction is "hine muri qui faciles secuti sunt Amphionis humiles artes carmenque imbelli?"' Why should Capaneus ask such a question? In such a situation an indignant question like 'are *these* the walls ...?' indicates that the object seen in actuality falls short of its reputation. But in this instance the flimsiness of the walls was what might have been expected from their alleged origin. Housman's observation that the corruption 'was partly caused by the *Amphionis arces* of IV 357, 611, VII 456' belongs to a kind that always cuts both ways.

*attonitos* must be the Thebans inside the walls. But *they* are not the object of Capaneus' reproach. Let us try a different approach:

*increpat attonitas humilesque Amphionis arces:  
'pro pudor, hi faciles carmenque imbelli secuti,  
hi mentita diu Thebarum fabula muri!'*

The walls are astounded and cower before Capaneus' scorn; cf. my Propertiana, p. 176: '*laetentur ... sagittae* [Prop. 3, 12, 11] is usually regarded as a daring personification, for the like of which we may turn to Statius' Thebaid and find terrified standards (11, 409), astonished trumpets (*ibid.*), weary bows and arrows (9, 588. 682), and a helmet out of breath (9, 700).' Naturally such ventures are not confined to instruments of war: cf. 7, 697 *Amphiaraus equis ac multo pulvere vertit / campum indignantem* 12, 170 *et ipse / auditu turbatus ager*.

## 11, 105–110

*ipse etiam, qui nos lassare precando  
suetus et ultricis oculorum exposcere Diras,  
iam pater est: coetu fertur iam solus ab omni  
flere sibi. atque adeo moror ipsa irrumpere Thebas  
assuetumque larem. tibi pareat impius exsul,  
Argolicumque impelle nefas.*

110

Tisiphone announces that she herself will operate in Thebes while her sister Fury looks after Polynices. 108 is generally taken as an expression of real reluctance, absurd in the context. *adeo* merely adds liveliness and emphasis, as e.g. in 10, 218 *solus eo! atque adeo venit ille et quassat habenas* ('Ay, and there *he* too comes, shaking his reins' Mozley). Cf. Poynton: 'Enough! I tarry, Thebes my goal shall be, / and that familiar house.'

## 12, 216ff.

*heu, si nudus adhuc, heu, si iam forte sepultus,  
nostrum utrumque nefas. adeo vis nulla dolenti,  
mors nusquam saevusve Creon? hortaris euntem,  
Ornyte.*

Polynices' wife: 'Is death, or fierce Creon, all a dream?' (Mozley). To be sure. Her question is in self-reproach at her failure to have acted on that assumption: 'is *this* what comes of my claim that death and Creon don't exist?' *vis nulla dolenti* means 'is violence nothing to the mourner?' In her grief she *should* have cared nothing for force majeure. Usually this is misunderstood, as by the scholiast ('nusquam est animi magnitudo, quae perducatur ad mortem') and Mozley ('hath sorrow then no power?'). Nor does *hortaris euntem* mean merely 'thou dost cheer me on my way.' Ornytus had tried to dissuade her against going to Thebes, but to her his warnings were an encouragement: 'you encourage me, but I am going anyway' (cf. *currentem incitas*). Statius' delight in such flowers of paradox is matched only by the declaimers (Seneca the elder, pseudo-Quintilian).

## 12, 382ff.

*mene igitur sociam (pro fors ignara!) malorum,  
mene times? mea membra tenes, mea funera plangis.  
cedo, tene, pudet. heu pietas ignava sororis!  
haec prior.*

385

Antigone to Polynices' wife, Argia. *haec prior* is not an aposiopesis, as printed by modern editors, and *haec* is not a pronoun but an adjective referring to *pietas*. 'This (wifely) love takes precedence of a sister's.'

## 12, 661ff.

*noctem adeo placidasque operi iunxere tenebras,  
certamenque immane viris, quo concita tendant  
agmina, quis visas proclamet ab aggere Thebas,  
cuius in Ogygio stet princeps lancea muro.*

'How can "quo concita tendant agmina" be an interrogation co-ordinate with "quis proclamet" and "cuius stet lancea"? How can it be an interrogation at all? How could the direction in which the Athenians were to march be a subject of competition?' Housman was right of course; but when he goes on to find the perfect answer to the problem in *tendunt* of P and explains *quo* as ablative depending on *concita* with *certamine* as its antecedent, I can no longer keep him company. *certamine* needs no such prosaic rider. Nor is it possible to accept Housman's less favoured alternative and 'make *quo* the relative and *Thebas* its postponed antecedent'; the reader does not need to be told that the army is on its way to Thebes. And surely the tricolon should be respected. *tendant* is right and *quo* is to be replaced by a different interrogative, not *cui* (Sandstroem) but *quam*<sup>3</sup>.

3 I am indebted to Professor J. Delz for some helpful criticisms.