



A NEW READING AND A PROBABLE INTERPOLATION IN LACTANTIUS PLACIDUS' COMMENTARY ON STATIUS, *THEBAID* 5.16*

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the probability of a reading so far neglected by editors in Lactantius Placidus' late antique commentary on Stat. Theb. 5.16. Next, the article argues that, regardless of the accepted reading, this part of the scholium is likely an interpolation.

Keywords: Lactantius Placidus; Statius; *Thebaid*; textual criticism; ancient exegesis

The Argives, on their way to Thebes, are in the woods of Nemea, where they are afflicted with a terrible thirst, caused by Bacchus, who wants to stop the enemy marching against his birthplace. They encounter Hypsipyle, a stranger, who takes them to the fountain of Langia, where they can finally satisfy their thirst. Once they have refreshed themselves, the Argives leave the spring and are compared to flocks of cranes (*Theb.* 5.11–16):¹

qualia trans pontum Phariis defensa serenis
rauca Paraetonio decedunt agmina Nilo
cum fera ponit hiemps: illae clangore fugaci
umbra fretis aruisque uolant, sonat auisus aether.
iam Borean imbresque pati, iam nare solutis
amnibus et nudo iuuat aestiuare sub Haemo.

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¹ The simile of cranes has Homeric origins: *Il.* 3.2–6 (the screaming Trojans before entering the battlefield are compared to the noisy flocks of cranes fleeing the winter and its rains to wage war on the Pygmies) αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ κόσμηθεν ἄμ' ἠγεμόνεσσιν ἕκαστοι, | Τρῶες μὲν κλαγγῇ τ' ἐνοπῆ τ' ἴσαν ὄρνιθες ὡς | ἦντε περ κλαγγῇ γεράνων πέλει οὐρανόθι πρό| αἴ τ' ἐπει οὖν χειμῶνα φύγον καὶ ἀθέσφατον ὄμβρον | κλαγγῇ ταί γε πέτονται ἐπ' ὠκεανοῖο ρόων | ἀνδράσι Πυγμαίοισι φόνον καὶ κῆρα φέρουσαι, '[n]ow when they were marshaled, the several companies with their leaders, the Trojans came on with clamor and a cry, like birds, like the clamor of cranes that arises before the face of heaven when they flee from wintry storms and boundless rain, and with clamor fly toward the streams of Ocean, bringing slaughter and death to Pygmy men' (transl. G. Murray). Statius refers to the cranes only by means of a periphrasis, *rauca ... agmina* (*raucus* is later applied to the crane by Corippus, *Ioh.* 4.389), a periphrasis taken up by an imprecise *illae* with which it is necessary to imply *aves* or *grues* (in fact, in pursuit of clarity, some manuscripts add a gloss: *scilicet gruum* [ad *rauca agmina*] R T S, *grues* [ad *illae*] R T g). For the history of crane similes in Latin literature, see M. Castillo Bejarano, 'El símil de las grullas en la épica clásica', *CFC(L)* 18 (2000), 137–62; O. Monno, 'Migrazioni della gru: da Omero ai simboli medievali', *VetChr* 45 (2008), 91–111; for the Statian reworking of the simile, see C. McNelis, *Statius' Thebaid and the Poetics of Civil War* (Cambridge, 2007), 88–90.

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11–16 B D G M O P Q R S T

11 *defensa Gul cett.*: *deprensa G P b (Barthius)* 13 *cum ... ponit Gul cett., Schol.*: *cum ... cogit (et M4ul) G P, unde quo ... cogit Vollmer*²

Even as the noisy swarms sheltered overseas by Pharian calm leave Paraetionian Nile when wild winter subsides; they fly with fleeing clamour, a shadow over sea and land, the pathless ether resounds; now they are fain to suffer North Wind and rains, swim in melted rivers, and pass summer under naked Haemus (transl. Shackleton Bailey).

Besides the textual problem I have discussed elsewhere³—namely, the choice between *defensa* and *deprensa* with *cogit* and Vollmer's correction of *cum* into *quo*—I would like to analyse in more detail here the interpretation of Lactantius Placidus' late antique commentary on *nudo*.

As I argued indirectly in my previously mentioned note, the manuscript reading *nudo* is satisfactory in many respects. In fact, the explanation for *nudo* given by Sgloss. *niue*, the unpublished *Scholae privatae in Publii Papinii Statii Thebaida* by Gronovius (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek-Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. lat. 4° 522) 'non amplius tecto nivibus' (cf. Barth's 'Vetera Scholia', 'Solutio nivibus'; Amar-Lemaire: 'detecto nivibus'; Shackleton Bailey [n. ad loc.]: 'free of snow'; Micozzi: 'l'Emo che ha perso il suo manto di neve'),⁴ is convincing because it is semantically linked with *solutis amnibus*, and because the image of the thawing of Haemus is mirrored in *Theb.* 11.193–5 *ueluti cum uere reuerso | Bistoniae tepuere niues submittitur ingens | Haemus* ['Haemus is reduced', since the snowy layer melts] *et angustos Rhodope descendit in amnes*; cf. also 3.672 *exuti concreto frigore montes*, Prudent. *Apoth.* 428–9 *ut exutus glacie iam mollior amnis | Caucasea de cote fluat Rhodopeius Hebrus*. It is perhaps easier to grasp Statius' meaning if one thinks of Haemus as being conventionally covered with snow and/or ice: cf., for example, Hor. *Carm.* 1.12.6 *gelidoue in Haemo*, Verg. *G.* 2.488 *gelidis conuallibus Haemi*, Claud. 20.565 *Haemoque niuali*, 21.131 *Haemi gelidae ualles*. Furthermore, Haemus is devoid of vegetation in winter and free of snow in summer: Claud. 26.166–8 *frigida ter deciens nudatum frondibus Haemum | tendit hiemps uestire gelu totiensque solutis | uer niubus uiridem monti reparauit amictum*, '[t]hrice ten times has chill winter cast her snowy mantle over leafless Haemus' (transl. Platnauer).⁵

² Text and apparatus criticus are my own. I use the sigla and abbreviations of J.B. Hall in collaboration with A.L. Ritchie and M.J. Edwards, *P. Papinius Statius: Thebaid and Achilleid*, 3 vols. (Newcastle, 2007–2008).

³ B. Martínez Zepeda, 'Three notes on Statius, *Thebaid* 5 (11–16; 20–23; 29–32)', *Mnemosyne* 76 (2023), 630–47, at 630–6.

⁴ C. Barth, *P. Papinii Statii quae exstant*, 4 vols. (Zwickau, 1664–1665); J.A. Amar and N.E. Lemaire, *P. Papinii Statii quae exstant omnia opera*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1825–1830); D.R. Shackleton Bailey, *Statius: Thebaid and Achilleid*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA and London, 2003); L. Micozzi, *Stazio: Tebaide* (Milan, 2010).

⁵ Here *nudatum ... Haemum* is, of course, a reworking of Statius' *nudo ... Haemo*: cf. *tendit hiemps ~ ponit hiemps, solutis ... niubus ~ solutis | amnibus*. Not only does *nudatum ... Haemum* pick up *nudo ... Haemo*, but the whole passage from Claudian is an expansion of the Statian idea of 'naked Haemus', in which, however, Claudian reverses the situation: his Haemus is 'naked', not in the summer as in Statius ('naked of snow'), but 'naked' in the winter ('naked of leaves', *nudatum frondibus*)—but at the same time, paradoxically, 'dressed in ice' (cf. *uestire gelu*)—and 'dressed' in the summer (= 'rich in leaves'), cf. *uiridem ... amictum*. Cf. also Claud. *Rapt. Pros.* 2 praef. 21 *ardua nudato descendit populus Haemo*, where Haemus is devoid of *frondes quia arbores ad citharam currebant* (Parisinus lat. 8082 gloss.).

However, according to the vulgate text, Lactantius Placidus' interpretation is different:⁶

ET NVDO (... SVB HAEMO) <nudo> sine honore siluarum. Haemus est autem mons Thraciae. et bene nudo: uestiuntur enim arboribus. ut Sallustius <Iug. 48.3>: '[quasi collis] uestitus oleastro ac myrtetis aliisque generibus arborum'.

That is to say, *nudus* would mean *sine honore* ('that which gives grace or dignity to a person or thing', *OLD* s.v. 6b) *siluarum*, a use of *honos* that is well attested: cf. Verg. *G.* 2.404 *frigidus et siluis Aquilo decussit honorem*, Hor. *Epod.* 11.6 [*December*] *siluis honorem decutit*.⁷ Of course, this interpretation is wrong, because in summer the mountain cannot be 'devoid of leaves' but only 'devoid of snow', but not for the scholiast's imagination.

Nevertheless, Lactantius Placidus' MS E, which occupies an important place in the textual tradition, has another reading which has been so far neglected by the editors, but deserves attention: *sine (h)umore siluarum*.⁸ Indeed, in this way *nudus* would mean 'devoid of vegetation moisture' (in fact, winter with its rains and snow causes the vegetation to be almost always wet), a more plausible interpretation.⁹ So, *nudus* could have three interpretative possibilities: 'free of snow', 'devoid of vegetation moisture' or, less likely, 'devoid of vegetation'.

According to Sweeney,¹⁰ Lactantius Placidus' commentary was originally composed in the form of a separate commentary, then broken into marginal scholia, whereupon 'the text was probably again reconstituted as a commentary and then dispersed, sometimes as marginal scholia, sometimes as a commentary ...'.¹¹ For Hall,¹² 'what we now have in the surviving manuscripts is for the most part the variously mangled remains of an autonomous composition. First written apart from the text of the epic,

⁶ I have inspected the editions of F. Tiliobroga, *P. Papinii Surculi Statii opera quae extant. Placidi Lactantii in Thebaida et Achilleida commentarius* (Paris, 1600); R. Jahnke, *Lactantii Placidi qui dicitur commentarios in Statii Thebaida et commentarius in Achilleida* (Leipzig, 1898); and R.D. Sweeney, *Lactantii Placidi in Statii Thebaida commentum*, I (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1997). The incunabula of Milan 1476–1477, Venice 1483, Venice 1490, Venice 1494 and Venice 1498–1499 do not have this first part of the scholium: see n. 8 below.

⁷ See D. Mankin, *Horace Epodes* (Cambridge, 1995), ad loc. See also *TLL* 6.3.2929.45–52 (Mehmel) 'distinctio apparet sensibus ... fere i. q. ornamentum', quoting Lactant. Plac. ad Stat. *Theb.* 6.98–106 *quae nunquam exiunt honore foliorum*. For this use of *nudus* = 'devoid of vegetation or signs of fertility', cf. *OLD* s.v. *nudus* 7b (quoting this passage). Cf. also *Rgloss. sine arboribus*, and perhaps J.H. Mozley, *Statius with an English Translation*, 2 vols. (London and New York, 1928), 'naked Haemus'; G. Aricò (in A. Traglia and G. Aricò, *Opere di Publio Papinio Stazio* [Turin, 1983]; the *Thebaid* is edited and translated by G. Aricò: 'l'Emo ormai spoglio' (in these translations it is not specified what the mountain Haemus is 'naked' of).

⁸ For the manuscripts, I use Sweeney's sigla (n. 6). I have personally inspected A (the manuscript does not have the first part of the scholium), B (the digital reproduction offered by the Staatsbibliothek Bamberg is very poor), C (the manuscript does not have the whole scholium on line 16), f, K, k, M, m, p (the manuscript does not have the first part of the scholium), R and V (because some folios [perhaps two] are missing, the text skips from the scholium on 4.584 to the scholium on 5.237: see also H. Anderson, *The Manuscripts of Statius. Revised Edition*, 3 vols. [Arlington, VA, 2009], 1.388–9). For the stemma of Lactantius Placidus' commentary, cf. Sweeney (n. 6), LIV.

⁹ For (*h*)umor as a characteristic element of winter, cf. Isid. *Nat.* 7.4 *uer ... constat ex humore et igne, aestas ex igne et siccitate, autumnus ex siccitate et frigore, hiems ex frigore et humore*.

¹⁰ R.D. Sweeney, *Prolegomena to an Edition of the Scholia to Statius* (Leiden, 1969), 84–5.

¹¹ G. Funaioli, 'Da un codice di Valencienes', *SIFC* 21 (1915), 1–73, at 7 had already supposed that the scholia must have been in the margin: 'gli scoli di Lattanzio, nel modo che li abbiamo attualmente, risalgono tutti ad una tradizione marginale'.

¹² Hall (n. 2), 3.3.

it only later began to be added in the margins of Statius' text.' In any case, in this complex process, we can suppose that at some point Lactantius Placidus' commentary circulated as a conglomerate of glosses, some of which were interlinear (the shorter ones), in a smaller size, just as in the case of the gloss *sine humore siluarum* in MS E; others, instead, were in the margin of the copy (the longer ones), in a larger size. The confusion between *sine (h)umore siluarum* and *sine honore siluarum*, therefore, could have arisen precisely from a transcription error caused by the reduced size of the writing of this gloss in an interlinear position,¹³ or perhaps as an attempt by a scribe to adjust it to the subsequent explanation.¹⁴

I would conclude adding that, regardless of whether we accept *sine (h)umore siluarum* or *sine honore siluarum*, a further problem may arise. If we accept the scholium in the present state, the gloss would first explain the adjective *nudo* (*sine honore/(h)umore siluarum*), then Haemus (*Haemus est autem mons Thraciae*), and then again the adjective (*et bene nudo ...*), which is a rather contorted reasoning. All this, together with what has been said above, namely that in MS E this part of the scholium is in an interlinear position and not together with the rest of the explanation which is in the margin, and that not all manuscripts read it, leads one to think that it is likely an interpolation and that it should be excluded from the text.

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¹³ The same confusion between *honos* and *humor* in an interlinear gloss occurs in the gloss on *Theb.* 5.526 *pronus*, where Rgloss. reads *inclinatus ut aliquem humorem exciperet*, while the gloss of Zurich, Zentralbibliothek C. 62 (282), saec. xi ex., which has the corrupt reading *protinus* instead of *pronus*, reads *ut aliquem honorem exciperet*.

¹⁴ This can be helped by the fact that perhaps this part of the scholium circulated in an autonomous manner, as evidenced by the fact that not all manuscripts have it. See nn. 6 and 8 above.