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NOTES ON STATIUS' THEBAID

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1.231-232

*vix lucis spatio, vix noctis abactae
enumerare queam mores gentemque profanam.*

S. Bailey¹ notes that scholars have been puzzled by the meaning of the words *noctis abactae*. I would like to suggest that Statius is referring here to a night which has ended (*abactae*²). Thus the words *vix lucis spatio, vix noctis abactae* mean “scarcely in the space of a day, scarcely (in the space) of a night which has ended.”

2. 32-34

*est locus – Inachiae dixerunt Taenara gentes –
qua formidatum Maleae spumantis in auras
it caput et nullos admittit culmine visus.*

S. Bailey³ notes that the two southern extremities of the Peloponnese (i. e. Taenarus and Malea) lie some forty miles apart. I would like to suggest that perfect sense can be restored to this passage if we translate as follows:

“there is a place – which the Inachians called Taenarus –where a fearful summit (*caput*) proceeds towards the winds of foaming Malea⁴ and allows no apparitions on its peak.”

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¹Cf. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, “On Statius’ *Thebaid*”, *Harvard Studies In Classical Philology*, vol. 100, 2000, page 463. I have used S. Bailey’s interesting and informative article as the starting-point of my paper.

²Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. “abigo”, II, B: “*Abacta nox*, i.q. *finita*, finished, passed, Verg. A. 8, 407.”

³*Op. cit.*, page 464.

⁴Lucan mentions Malea together with the shades of Taenarus at 9, 36: *Malean et apertam Taenaron umbris*.

Stattius is referring to the fact that ghosts did not inhabit the promontory of Taenarus. Instead they lived in the Underworld, which they entered via a cave near Taenarus⁵. S. Bailey is therefore wrong to argue that Stattius “is taking poetic license” in this passage. Similarly, it should be noted that Stattius does not mention local farmers as Arcadians at 2.50. The words *Arcadii ... coloni*⁶ mean “Arcadian settlers”. Moreover, at l. 355 Stattius does not make any geographical error, as S. Bailey maintains. The Arcadian summits are said to be next to the Laconian forests⁷: *Taenariis contermina lucis / Arcadiae capita alta*.

In other words, Stattius points out that Arcadia borders on Laconia.

3.559- 561

*at non prior aureus ille
sanguis avum scopulisque satae vel robore gentes
mentibus his usae.*

S. Bailey⁸ comments as follows: “*mentibus*, referring to the methods of divination (entrails, etc.) mentioned in the preceding sentence, is simply a wrong word. The right word is *artibus*.” Textual alteration is, however, not necessary. Stattius states that in the past people did not have such a “modo di sentire e di pensare”⁹, i.e. did not bother about divination.

5.330-334

*sic ubi ductorem trepidae stabulique maritum,
quem penes et saltus et adulatae gloria gentis,
Massylo frangi stupuere sub hoste iuvencae,
it truncum sine honore pecus regemque peremptum
ipse ager, ipsi amnes et muta armenta queruntur.*

S. Bailey¹⁰ was puzzled by the meaning of the adjective *adulatae* in line 331, and therefore suggested the alteration *aduncae*. Textual alteration is,

⁵Cf. Lewis And Short, s. v. Taenarus: “near it a cavern, the fabled entrance to the infernal regions”.

⁶Cf. Lewis And Short, s.v. *colonus* II. Cf. also Virgil, *Aen.* I, 12 *Tyrii ... coloni* (“Tyrian settlers”).

⁷Cf. Lewis And Short, s.v. *Taenarius*: “poet. also = Laconian, Spartan.”

⁸*Op. cit.*, page 465.

⁹Cf. Forcellini, s. v. *mens*, I, quoting *hominum mentes* Cic. *Verr.* VII, 14, 35.

¹⁰*Op. cit.*, page 466.

however, not necessary, since Statius has employed adjectival *enallage*¹¹. Thus the chief bull is called the glory of the adult herd. The poet means that the bull itself is adult (i. e. mature). It should also be noted that S. Bailey proposed that *armenta* in line 334, should be altered into *arbusta*. Textual alteration is not warranted. Fields, streams and dumb animals (*muta*¹² *armenta*) are all said to lament for the bull.

5. 346-347

*illis in Scythium Borean iter oraque primi
Cyaneis artata maris.*

Line 347 *primi*: *primum* v. l.

S. Bailey¹³ noted that scholars have been puzzled by the meaning of these lines. I would like to suggest that *primi*¹⁴ means “eastern”. Thus the words *oraque primi Cyaneis artata maris* mean “the mouth of the eastern sea which is made narrow by the Cyanean rocks.” Statius is referring to the mouth of Pontus. It is also possible to print *primum*¹⁵, which means here “at first”. Thus they are said to have gone “at first (*primum*) to the mouth of the sea which is narrowed by the Cyanean rocks.”

5. 741- 743

*mansuris donandus honoribus infans.
et meruit; det pulchra suis libamina Virtus
manibus*

S. Bailey¹⁶ explains that “Amphiaraus speaks to the Argive army.” Amphiaraus suggests that Virtue (*Virtus*¹⁷) should offer libations to the shade of Opheltes. According to Statius, Opheltes should be rewarded because his death has helped the Argive army. His nurse had left him alone in the forest in order to

¹¹For another example of adjectival *enallage* cf. my *Studies In The Text of Propertius*, page 164.

¹²Cf. Lewis And Short, s. v. *mutus* (1): “Of creatures who do not possess the faculty of speech.”

¹³*Op. cit.*, page 467. Lesueur thinks that *ora primi maris* means “l' entrée de la passe maritime”, which cannot be extracted from the Latin text.

¹⁴For *primus* = “eastern” cf. *Oxf. Lat. Dict.*, s. v. *primus* (6).

¹⁵Cf. Lewis And Short, s. v. *primum*.

¹⁶*Op. cit.*, page 467.

¹⁷Cf. Lewis And Short, s. v. *virtus* II, B, 2: “Transf., Virtue, personified as a deity.”

help the Argives. Thus the honours to be paid to Opheltes' manes¹⁸ were well deserved by him.

6. 283- 285

*parte alia victor curru Neptunia tendit
lora Pelops prensatque rotas auriga natantes
Myrtilos et volucris iam iamque relinquitur axe.*

S. Bailey¹⁹ is puzzled by Statius' reference to a chariot race. I would like to point out that Statius is referring here to the fact that Pelops, who was driving his chariot, kicked Myrtilus²⁰, who fell into the sea from the chariot. Pelops, Hippodameia and Myrtilus had set off for a drive across the sea after Pelops had been victorious in the chariot race against Oenomaus. Thus the wheels of the chariot are described as *natantes*²¹ ("floating") in line 284.

6. 340- 341

*ecce et Iasonidae iuvenes, nova gloria matris
Hypsipyles, subiere iugo quo vectus uterque.*

S. Bailey²², misunderstanding Mozley and Lesueur, fails to comprehend that *iugo* is a poetic singular. Statius states that the twins "took stand upon the chariots wherein each rode." For another example of the poetic singular cf. my note on 8. 633 ff.

6.602- 605

*effugit hic oculos rapida puer ocior aura
Maenalius, quem deinde gradu premit horridus Idas
inspiratque umero, flatuque et pectoris umbra
terga premit.*

¹⁸ *Suis*, if meaning "qui sont à elle" (Lesueur, whom S. Bailey ultimately follows) presents problems: these problems are eliminated if we realize that *suis* means *eius* ("his manes"); cf. *Oxf. Lat. Dict.*, s. v. *suus*, A 2 b. For *pulchra libamina*, cf. Ovid, *Met.* 13, 695 f. *pulchris funeribus*.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, page 468.

²⁰ Cf. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, London 1971, vol. 2, page 34.

²¹ Cf. Lewis And Short, s. v. *nato* (1).

²² *Op. cit.*, page 468.

S. Bailey²³ is troubled by the repetition *premit...premit*. He therefore suggests the alteration *ferit*. Textual alteration is, however, not warranted. Verbal repetition is common in epic poetry: *cf. Mus. Phil. Lond.*, 10, 1996, page 51.

6.921- 923

*tum generum, ne laudis egens, iubet ardua necti
tempora Thebarumque ingenti voce citari
victorem: dirae recinebant omina Parcae.*

In his discussion of this passage, S. Bailey²⁴ approves of Alton's conjecture *Thebanumque*. Textual alteration is, however, not necessary. Adrastus proclaimed that Polynices would be the victor of Thebes (*Thebarumque... victorem*²⁵) in the coming conflict with his brother.

7. 700- 702

*inde viro maioraque membra diesque
laetior et numquam tanta experientia caeli,
si vacet.*

Line 701 *laetior: latior* v.l.

S. Bailey²⁶ argues that the "true reading" in line 701 is *latior*. He explains that "the heavens expanded" so that "Amphiarus could see more of them". It should be noted, however, that perfect sense is provided by the reading *laetior*. Statius states that the day was rather favourable (*laetior*) for Amphiarus²⁷.

²³ *Op. cit.*, page 469. Lesueur correctly understands that the repetition *premit ... premit* is perfectly legitimate.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, page 469.

²⁵ Cf. Lewis And Short, s. v. *victor* I, A, 2: "With gen".

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, page 470, and his Loeb edition *ad loc.*

²⁷ Cf. Lesueur, correctly: "le ciel lui sourit davantage". For *laetus* meaning "favourable, propitious", *cf.* Lewis And Short, s. v. *laetus*. II, E. Cf. also *laetum ... diem*, Virg. *Aen.* I, 732 and Sen., *Herc. Oet.* 1675, quoted by Forcellini. S. Bailey believes that "the heavens expanded because the prophet's eye took in more of them", but this is absurd because the size of the heavens remains the same, regardless of how much of them the prophet's eye could see. The words *maioraque membra* do not mean "les membres du héros grandissent" (so Lesueur, followed by S. Bailey): *membra* is used here "*pro toto corpore*", *cf.* Forcellini, s.v. It was believed that *membra metu debilia sunt* (Ter. *Ad.* 612, where *membra* means "body"). *Maiora* means here "stronger"; *cf.* *Oxf. Lat. Dict.*, s.v. *maior*, 8. The sense is that Amphiarus' body became stronger because of his courage. *Latior* is here, if correct, used in *enallage* ("a more proud day").

8.127- 130

*interea vittis lauroque insignis opima
currus et egregiis modo formidatus in armis
luce palam, fusus nulli nullique fugatus,
quaeritur.*

S. Bailey²⁸ explains that “the earth has swallowed up Amphiaraus and his chariot, and the army looks around for them”. S. Bailey is, however, puzzled by the fact that “the text mentions the chariot with no word about the rider”. Textual alteration, as suggested by S. Bailey, is once again not necessary. As S. Bailey himself realizes, *formidatus* and *fugatus* refer to Amphiaraus, not to the chariot. We are therefore faced with an elegant case of metonymy, of the type *per id quod continet (currus), id quod continetur (Amphiaraus)*; cf. Lausberg, *Handbuch lit. Rhet.* § 568, d 2 (*theatra plaudunt*).

8.544- 547

*sic ulmus vitisque, duplex iactura colenti,
Gaurano de monte cadunt; sed maestior ulmus
quaerit utrumque nemus, nec tam sua bracchia labens
Quam gemit assuetas invitaque proterit uvas.*

Line 546 *utrumque*: *utrimque* v. l.

S. Bailey²⁹ argues that sense can be restored to this passage if we print the alteration *utrimque*. Textual alteration is, however, not necessary. The elm craves the forest on both sides (*utrimque*³⁰). Statius means that the elm was surrounded by trees which it now misses. It should be noted that the elm is personified³¹, and tries to protect the vine³², which is imagined to be its wife³³.

8.633- 635

*quaenam haec dubiae praesagia cladis?
nec timeo, dum tuta domus milesque recedat
Doricus et tumidos liceat componere fratres.*

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, page 471.

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, page 471.

³⁰ Cf. Lewis And Short, s. v. *utrimque* (1).

³¹ For personification cf. my *Studies In The Text Of Propertius*, page 157.

³² For the marriage of the vine to the elm cf. Catullus 62, 54 *ulmo coniuncta marito*.

³³ Lesueur prints *utrumque*, because he does not perceive the meaning of *utrimque*.

S. Bailey³⁴ points out that scholars have been puzzled by the meaning of this passage. S. Bailey explains that Ismene has had “an alarming dream, in which her young fiancé Atys, now serving in the Theban army, came into her bedroom”. I would like to suggest that perfect sense can be restored to the text if we understand that Statius has employed the poetic singular³⁵. Ismene states that she is not afraid, provided her home is safe, and the Greek soldiers (*miles ... Doricus*) leave (*recedat*), and it is possible to reconcile her violent brothers (i. e. Polynices and Eteocles).

10. 18- 19

dux noctis opertae
sorte Meges ultroque Lycus.

S. Bailey³⁶ explains that “the Thebans plan a night attack on the Argive camp”. He adds that “translators have trouble with *opertae*”. Textual alteration is, however, not necessary, since we are faced here with another example of adjectival *enallage*³⁷. Meges is said to be the commander of the hidden night” (*dux noctis opertae*³⁸). Statius means that the activities of Meges will be hidden by the night.

10.104- 106

interius tecti in penetralibus altis
et cum Morte iacet, nullique ea tristis imago
cernitur.

S. Bailey³⁹ notes that “in the interior of the palace of Sleep is an image of him along with one of Death”. S. Bailey is, however, surprised that Death is said to be sad. It should be noted that the adjective *tristis*⁴⁰ is regularly used to describe

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, page 471.

³⁵ For other examples of the poetic singular, *cf.* my *Studies In The Text Of Propertius*, page 141.

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, page 473.

³⁷ *Cf.* my *Studies In The Text Of Propertius*, page 164.

³⁸ *Cf.* 10. 241 (of the same enterprise) *operta paramus / proelia*. For the adjectival *enallage*, *cf.* also Virgil, *Aen.* VI, 268: *sola sub nocte*.

³⁹ *Op. cit* page 474.

⁴⁰ *Cf.* Lewis And Short, *s. v. tristis* B, I ... *Acheron*, Sil. 13, 571. For the connection of Sleep and Death, *cf.* *Mus, Phil, Lond.*, 9, 1992, page 49. The adjective *tristis* also describes anything which is connected with death. *Cf.* moreover, Sen., *Octav.* 101 *tristi morte*.

death. Statius states that “that mournful sight is seen by none” (*nullique ea tristis imago cernitur*). He is referring to the fact that nobody goes near to the palace of death; *cf.* Ovid, *Met.* XI, 592 ff.

10.696- 697

*superine profanum
dignantur stimulare senem...?*

S. Bailey⁴¹ notes that Tiresias is called *profanus* again at 11. 288. He contends that *profanus* means “unclean”⁴² and alludes to Tiresias’ changes of gender. I would like to suggest that *profanus*⁴³ means “ill-omened”, and refers to the fact that Tiresias, who was a seer, prophesied misfortune⁴⁴.

11.295- 296

*in te ardens frater ferrum mortemque minatur
saevaeque portarum convellit claustra, nec audis?*

S. Bailey⁴⁵ noted that “bolts of city gates are not cruel”. He therefore suggested the alteration *saepta*. Textual alteration is, however, not warranted, since the poet has employed adjectival *enallage*⁴⁶. Statius means that the gates belonging to the enemy are cruel, and keep the attackers out.

11.548- 552

*quo retrahis, germane, gradus? hoc languida somno,
hoc regnis effeta quies, hoc longa sub umbra
imperia! Exilio rebusque exercita egenis
membra vides; disce arma pati nec fidere laetis.*

S. Bailey⁴⁷ notes that Polynices addresses these lines to Eteocles. He suggests, moreover, that *arma* should be altered into *arta* “poverty”. Textual

⁴¹*Op. cit.*, page 474.

⁴²*Cf. O.L.D.*, s. v. 3.

⁴³*Cf. Lewis And Short*, s. v. *profanus* II, C..

⁴⁴It should be noted that a change of gender does not entail impurity. For *profanus* “ill-boding”, *cf. Lewis And Short*, s. v. C. Tiresias’ prophecies were “schonungslos” and “furchtbar”, *cf. Roscher*, s. v. *Teiresias*, 190.

⁴⁵*Op. cit.*, page 475.

⁴⁶For another case of adjectival *enallage*, *cf.* my note on 5. 330 ff.

⁴⁷*Op. cit.*, page 475.

alteration is not warranted. Polynices⁴⁸ challenges Eteocles to a duel and tells him to learn to fight (*disce arma pati*).

Conclusion: The reader will see that S. Bailey tends to produce a “nombre excessif” of conjectures, like Garrod (*cf.* Roger Lesueur, *Stace, Thébaïde*, Paris 1990, vol. I, page LXXV; on this “tendance inquiétante”, *cf.* H. Van Looy, *Myrtia* 15, 2000, page 67). I hope that I have shown that his conjectures, if examined in the light of context and *Sprachgebrauch*, are unjustified. It should, moreover, be noted that Roger Lesueur has written an excellent edition of Statius' *Thebaid*.

⁴⁸Cf. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, vol. 2, page 18. According to S. Bailey, “*arma pati*” does not belong in the contrast between the two lifestyles” (i. e. “royal ease” and hard life). However, he fails to understand that the contrast is between the *effeta quies* (i. e. peace) and the hard life of warriors.