

# WHERE ARMIES CLASH: STATIUS, THEBAID 9.674

*at pugna ereptis maior crudescit utrimque* 670  
*regibus, alternosque ciet uindicta furores.*  
*Hypseos hinc turmae desolatumque magistro*  
*agmen, at hinc grauius fremit Hippomedontis adempti*  
*orba cohors; praebent obnixa corpora ferro,*  
*idem ardor rabidis externum haurire cruorem* 675  
*ac fudisse suum, nec se uestigia mutant:*  
*stat cuneo defixa acies, hostique cruento*  
*dant animas et terga negant.*  
 674 corpora Pδ : pectora ↑ I corpora t<sup>1</sup> : pectora ω

These lines describe the scene that greets Diana as she arrives at Thebes in response to Atalanta's prayers<sup>1</sup>. After the loss of their champions, the two armies are locked in a stalemate that will be broken only by Atalanta's son, Parthenopaeus, when he is granted an ἀγοστεία by Diana. At line 674 all modern editors agree in printing *corpora* with P and δ, but editions that appeared before Kohlmann's Teubner of 1884 regularly printed *pectora*, a reading broadly supported by the manuscript tradition. That this issue of text is not discussed by M. Dewar in his important edition of Book 9<sup>2</sup> might suggest that the question is settled, but Hill (ad loc.) raises the possibility that *pectora* may be right, and it seems to me that there are some positive considerations in favour of that reading.

The manuscript evidence is not decisive. Although the Puteanus has long been recognized as the earliest and most reliable witness for the text of Statius' epic, readings found in the ω MSS are not without value and on occasion are clearly superior to those of P<sup>3</sup>. As Hill notes (Appendix to 3.137), variation between pec-

1) The text follows D. E. Hill, P. Papini Stati Thebaidos Libri XII (Leiden 1983), from which I have also reproduced details from his apparatus to line 674.

2) M. Dewar, Thebaid IX, ed. with English transl. & comm. (Oxford 1991).

3) This is a point emphasized by L. Håkanson, Statius' Thebaid: Critical and Exegetical Remarks (Lund 1972–1973); for an incisive overview of the tradition see M. D. Reeve in: L. D. Reynolds (ed.), Texts and Transmission (Oxford 1983) 394 ff.

*tore/pectora* and *corpore/corpora* is common in the MSS, and it conforms to no pattern. In addition to the passage under discussion, Hill prints a form of *corpus* at 2.484, 6.840, 7.314, 531, 11.631, 12.318, while *pectore* or *pectora* is accepted at 2.327, 6.886, and 12.108. Under these circumstances it is difficult to consider the reading of P at 9.674 more likely. Similarly, we may note that *pectora ferro* is a common kind of line-ending (*ferro/pectora* in some cases)<sup>4</sup>. Accordingly, it may be that the text of  $\omega$  at 9.674 merely represents an assimilation of *corpora ferro* to a common pattern<sup>5</sup>, but it may also be possible that *corpora ferro* is a corruption of the more familiar line-ending<sup>6</sup>. In any case, the common confusion of *pectora* and *corpora* makes it hazardous to pronounce *corpora ferro* the lectio difficilior.

The issue must be decided on grounds of sense, and here *pectora* can be judged to be preferable. The noun *corpus* occurs numerous times in the *Thebaid*, and in the singular it occupies a wide semantic range. In the plural, however, its usage seems to be more restricted when applied to human beings: in the majority of instances *corpora* is used of dead bodies (1.608, 2.592, 2.713, 3.128, 3.137, 3.194, 4.508, 5.254, 7.206, 7.607, 7.761, 8.700, 9.158, 9.264, 9.370, 10.284, 11.599, 11.631, 12.24, 12.69, 12.96, 12.103, 12.137, 12.151, 12.289, 12.717, 12.796). Related to this are those passages in which *corpora* is used of passive bodies, often at the point of death (5.383f. *inertia* ... / *corpora*; 8.419f. *in corpora ferrum / omne cadit*; 10.450 *captinaque corpora*; cf. 12.68f. *captina* ... / *corpora*). This seems to constitute a general pattern, to which there are but a few exceptions. At 10.392 Amphion sees through the darkness bodies moving, but these seem to be indistinct forms (*procul* ... / *nescio quid visu dubium incertumque moueri / corporaque ire uidet*). The Theban warriors who seek to ambush Tydeus

J. B. Hall, Notes on Statius' *Thebaid* Book I and II, ICS 14 (1989) 227–241, at 227f., contends that the text of the *Thebaid* printed in modern editions is still far from sound.

4) E.g. 2.567, 5.160f., 5.214, 7.311, 9.309, 11.506; cf. Verg. Aen. 1.355; Ov. Fast. 2.831, Met. 9.614, Pont. 4.12.31, Rem. 19; Luc. 7.323, 7.528, 8.663; Sil. 6.87, 6.480f.; Val. Fl. 6.110, 6.575; see P. Venini on Stat. Theb. 11.506 (*Thebaidos liber undecimus*, Firenze 1970).

5) It is noteworthy that *pectora telo* at 2.637 is reported by  $\Sigma$  3.152 as *pectora ferro*.

6) *corpora ferro* also occurs elsewhere as a line-ending: Ov. Her. 3.145, Met. 12.490; Luc. 3.463, 7.582.

are described as *lectissima bello / corpora* (2.483f.), but this is one of the passages in which *pectora* is a variant and so the text is uncertain<sup>7</sup>.

It would be going too far to claim that Statian usage excludes *corpora* at 9.674<sup>8</sup>, and there are earlier passages that support this text. A particularly good parallel is Verg. Georg. 4.217–218, in which worker bees are described in language recalling human warriors: *et corpora bello / obiectant pulchramque petunt per uulnera mortem*. Here again, however, the *paradosis* is not unanimous; the early Palatine MS (P) reads *pectora*, thus presenting us with a familiar choice of variants<sup>9</sup>. In this case, however, *corpora* seems preferable: not only does it have better manuscript authority, but the less obviously anthropomorphic *corpora* seems more appropriate to bees, and, moreover, *bello* evokes the dangers of battle more generally than the pointed *ferro* of the Statian passage. In Thebaid 9, on the other hand, there is a more precise picture.

Dewar (ad loc.) sees in Statius' *praebent obnixi corpora ferro* an echo of Vergil's description of the death of Cupencus, *dedit obuia ferro / pectora* (Aen. 12.540f.). The language is indeed similar, and the presence of *pectora* here may give support to that reading in Statius, but the narrative context is different. Rather than the death of an individual warrior, Statius is describing two armies locked in equipoise, and, consequently, a more telling Vergilian passage is Aeneid 10.354–361:

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7) Statius' description may have been inspired by passages such as Verg. Aen. 8.606 *bello lecta iuuentus*, and 9.272f. *lectissima matrum / corpora*; cf. Catull. 64.4 *lecti iuuenes* (perhaps also 68.101, <lecta> ... *pubes*, if Eldik's supplement is correct); Val. Fl. 6.559 (of cattle) *lecta ... corpora*. None of these passages, however, can be used to establish Statius' text with certainty.

8) This is not the place to engage in a detailed investigation of the usage of *corpus* in Latin poetry, but it may be pertinent to observe that there seems to have been some narrowing of the poetic usage of the word, at least in the plural. An interesting example is the technical expression *corpora curare*, regularly used in prose of refreshing troops (Liv. 3.2.10 *corpora cibo somnoque curant*; 9.37.7, 25.38.22, 34.16.5; cf. TLL s.v. *corpus* 1012.57f.), which Vergil adapts to epic narrative (Georg. 4.187 *corpora curant*; Aen. 3.510f. *passimque in litore sicco / corpora curamus*; 8.607 *fessique et equos et corpora curant*; cf. Enn. Ann. 367 Skutsch). Neither Statius nor his contemporary Silius Italicus takes over this phrase, although both poets are much under the influence of Vergil and wrote epics with numerous battle scenes. The phrase, however, continued to be used by historians (Curt. 3.8.22), and so may have been judged inappropriate to poetry.

9) Geymonat (P. Vergili Maronis opera, Torino 1973, ad loc.) seems to suggest the influence of Georg. 4.83 (*angusto in pectore*) and Aen. 8.29 (*tristi turbatus pectora bello*), although the sense is different.

... expellere tendunt  
*nunc hi, nunc illi: certatur limine in ipso* 355  
*Ausoniae. magno discordes aethere uenti*  
*proelia ceu tollunt animis et uiribus aequis;*  
*non ipsi inter se, non nubila, non mare cedit;*  
*anceps pugna diu, stant obnixa omnia contra:*  
*haud aliter Troianae acies aciesque Latinae* 360  
*concurrunt, haeret pede pes densusque uiro uir.*

Although properly descriptive of the details of the simile, *stant obnixa omnia contra* (359) provides a succinct summation of the situation on the battlefield as the armies face each other. Statius' use of *obnixa* recalls the Vergilian passage, as does the general context: two armies stand in a deadlock that will only be broken by the ἀριστεία of a 'Heldenknabe' with a tragic future. In the *Aeneid* that young warrior will be Pallas, in Statius he will be the similarly tragic Parthenopaeus<sup>10</sup>.

With the carefully balanced chiasmus of line 360 and the polyptoton of the following line Vergil evokes and develops a tradition of martial narrative that goes back to the *Iliad*<sup>11</sup>. Statius has already exploited this τόπος earlier in the poem<sup>12</sup>, and so describes a similar narrative moment in Book 9 through a different poetic strategy, viz. by developing an antithesis between front and back. Statius' description ends with *hostique cruento / dant animas et terga negant* (676f.). This latter phrase, as Dewar notes (ad loc. and on 470), is an ingenious adaptation of an expression like *terga dant*. Showing one's back to the enemy was for the Roman a clear sign of cowardice<sup>13</sup>. The chest, in sharp contrast, was commonly

10) As is frequently noted, Parthenopaeus owes much to Vergil's Camilla (cf. D. Vessey, *Statius and the Thebaid* [Cambridge 1973] 71; Dewar, pp. xxx–xxxi), but Pallas was also an important model: see L. Legras, *Étude sur la Thebaïde de Stace* (Paris 1905) 112, 218–219; W. Schetter, *Untersuchungen zur epischen Kunst des Statius* (Wiesbaden 1960) 43–48.

11) See the passages collected by Skutsch on Enn. Ann. 584; cf. also Harrison on Verg. Aen. 10.360–361. To the texts assembled by these commentators, add Quint. Smyrn. 8.74–75 ὡς οἱ γ' ἀλλήλοισιν ἐπέχραον· ἔγχεϊ δ' ἔγχεος / συμφέρειτ', ἀσπίδι δ' ἀσπίς, ἐπ' ἀνέροα δ' ἦεν ἀνήρ.

12) Theb. 8.398–401 *iam clipeus clipeis, umbone repellitur umbo, / ense minax ensis, pede pes et cuspide cuspis: / sic obnixa acies pariter suspiria fumant, / admotaeque nitent aliena in casside cristae*. As at Verg. Aen. 10.359 and Theb. 9.674, the tense opposition between troops is expressed by *obnixa*, and Statius further clarifies the situation by the striking image of the plume reflected in the helmet of the soldier opposite.

13) A clear example is anon. fr. 28.4f. Courtney = 128.4 Blänsdorf (from a

seen as the seat of courage, and presenting the chest to the enemy was a common symbol of bravery (both literal and metaphoric), as in the closing lines of Horace, *Serm.* 2.2.135–136<sup>14</sup>: *quocirca uiuite fortes, / fortiaque aduersis opponite pectora rebus*. Ovid contrasts the Roman style of fighting with that of the Parthians, expressing the opposition of front and back in an effective chiasmus: *tergaque Parthorum Romanaque pectora* (*Ars* 1.209). Lucan also exploits this antithesis in passages that depict confused battle (an important motif in a poem that deals with civil war and its concomitant blurring of categories). At 4.467f. Vulteius, surrounded by the enemy and despairing of victory, ... *poscit spe proelia nulla / incertus qua terga daret, qua pectora bello*. Similarly, Pompey is attacked on all sides by his assassins: *cum terga sonent et pectora ferro* (8.663).

Statius' account of the deadlocked forces at Theb. 9.670ff. is built around the same contrast. With lines 676f. he rounds off the description begun at 674 by restating in general terms the tense situation described in detail in the intervening lines. In this light, we seem to have an example of ring-composition: *terga negant* would stand as the natural counterpart to a phrase like *praebent ... pectora ferro*, which sets out the specific opposition of the passage. The reading adopted by modern editors, *praebent ... corpora ferro*, fails to establish the essential point that the troops face each other in the heat of battle, a detail which colours the description that follows<sup>15</sup>. Recent translators, it seems, have sensed the inadequacy of the familiar text. Although he prints *praebent obnixa corpora ferro* in the recent Budé edition (Paris 1991–1993), R. Lesueur appears to translate *pectora* ('ils exposent obstinément leur poitrine au

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description of Diomedes' ἀχιυτεία): *pauidi tergaque dantes / petierunt trepidae moenia Troiae*.

14) Cf. Catull. 64.339 (of Achilles) *hostibus haud tergo, sed forti pectore notus*; Sen. Ep. 104.22 ... *stare fidenter ac paratum tela fortunae aduerso pectore excipere*; further examples in OLD s.v. *pectus* 2b. For the *uulnus aduersum* as a symbol of courage, see Hollis on Ov. *Ars* 1.209. In view of the symbolic charge borne by *pectus*, it would be pointless to object that *pectora* in the Statian passage would imply that the opposing forces had dropped their shields.

15) The situation is expressed succinctly by *nec se uestigia mutant: / stat cuneo defixa acies* (676f.). Dewar understands *cuneus* as 'phalanx', but that meaning seems inappropriate here. It is probable that *cuneus* brings a Roman colouring to a description of Greek battle, suggesting the block-like formation of the *cohors*, a term used by Statius at 674. For *cuneus* in this sense, see OLD s.v.

fer")<sup>16</sup>; Melville freely renders the line "They strained / To face the steel"<sup>17</sup>.

*prae bent . . . pectora ferro*, then, is more consonant with Statian usage and better serves the structure of the immediate passage than the alternative. It should be judged the more likely reading<sup>18</sup>.

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16) Lesueur, however, misses the important parallel with line 678 by giving *dant animas et terga negant* loosely as "... donnant leur vie ... et refusant de fuir".

17) A. D. Melville, Statius: Thebaid with an introduction and notes by D. W. Vessey (Oxford 1992) 237. It is unclear what edition of the Latin text formed the basis of Melville's translation.

18) I am indebted to Professors E. Fantham and C. L. Murison for commenting on an earlier version of this paper.