

MISZELLEN

A MODEST EMENDATION IN AN IMMODEST
IMITATION OF OVID (MAXIM. 5,30)

In relating a noontime rendezvous with Corinna, Ovid is tactfully ecstatic as he describes her naked beauty (Am. 1,5,19–22):

*quos umeros, quales uidi tetigique lacertos!
forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi!
quam castigato planus sub pectore uenter!
quantum et quale latus! quam iuuenale femur!*

Ovid is coy and suggestive as his description takes a downward trajectory: shoulders, breasts, belly ... side, thigh. Ovid's sixth-century imitator Maximianus has this passage in mind when he recounts his reverie about the coquettish Greek girl with whom he has become infatuated in his old age. But where Ovid takes a decorous detour, Maximianus heads due south (5,27–30):¹

*urebant oculos stantes duraeque papillae
et quas astringens clauderet una manus.
a, quantum mentem stomachi iunctura mouebat
atque sub exhausto pectore pingue femur!*

29 iunctura Baehrens iuncturaque A fultura BFLM factura GF
30 exhausto AF

Exactly what Baehrens thought the phrase *stomachi iunctura* means is not clear, but its difficulty is reflected in the exertions of later commentators. Schetter takes it as a periphrasis for 'waist', which might be possible, but the parallels he adduces do not mean this and do not account for *iunctura*.² The variant *fultura*, printed by Öberg, likewise makes for an otherwise unattested and difficult expression, since the passage in Horace adduced by her – Serm. 2,3,154 *ingens accedit stomacho fultura ruenti* – is not a parallel for the phrase,³ although the corruption to *fultura* could be explained as an unconscious reminiscence. The true reading is preserved in

1) Text and apparatus are cited from E. Baehrens (ed.), *Poetae Latini Minores*, Vol. 5 (Leipzig 1883) 313–348.

2) W. Schetter, *Studien zur Überlieferung und Kritik des Elegikers Maximian* (Wiesbaden 1970) 155 n. 51, compares Epit. Alex. 77 *Alexander item per lorica[m] pectore aduerso (circa) stomachum ac caput uehementer ictus est*, which hardly seems to support his point. Cf. F. Spaltenstein, *Commentaire des élégies de Maximien* (Vevey 1983) 255–256, who adds the equally unhelpful parallel, Prud. Perist. 3,150 *in latera stomachumque*. TLL s.v. *iunctura* 651,55 offers no help.

3) Cf. C. S. Öberg, *Versus Maximiani. Der Elegienzyklus textkritisch herausgegeben, übersetzt und neu interpretiert* (Stockholm 1999) 198.

factura, which here means ‘fashion’ or ‘make’, as in Gell. 13,30,2 *quando facies sit forma omnis et modus et factura quaedam corporis totius*.⁴

After praising Corinna’s smooth belly, Ovid deflects to her side and then her thighs, but Maximianus, it would seem, takes a more direct route, after praising the ‘make’ of his Greek girl’s belly, although in this context the expression *exhausto pectore* is unintelligible.⁵ Commentators have essayed ‘poitrine diminuée’ (Spaltenstein), a meaning which cannot be extracted from *exhausto*, while the most obvious interpretation, ‘unter erschöpfter Brust’ (Öberg), makes no sense here: exhausted from what?⁶ Watt’s *exacto*, ‘perfect’ is attractive,⁷ but it does not alleviate the anatomical confusion here. For what can it mean to characterize the ‘luscious thigh’ he admires as located ‘below her breast’, when he has just described her stomach? Maximianus is not coy in his choice of diction: later in the Greek girl’s lament over the poet’s impotence, she is not shy about mourning for his *mentula* (5,87), a word Ovid never uses. In this passage, too, I suspect Maximianus is making explicit what Ovid only implies: for *pectore* read *pectine*. *Pecten* came to mean ‘pubic hair’ or ‘pubes’, probably as a calque on Greek κτείς,⁸ and is regularly used by Celsus and other medical writers for the pubic region.⁹ It might not be impossible to retain the unflattering epithet *exhausto*: the poet represents himself throughout as simultaneously attracted and intimidated by the girl’s sexual aggressiveness; cf. Mart. 13,63,1 *ne nimis exhausto macresceret in guine gallus*. But in this context surely a more erotic or flattering epithet is called for, to balance the preceding description of her *durae papillae* and the following *pingue femur*. Two possible solutions suggest themselves. First, that Maximianus is describing the girl’s shaved pubes. The easiest correction would then be *exusto*,¹⁰ but while there are Greek parallels for singeing in depilation,¹¹ the word is not attested in Latin in this sense. The second and, in my view, more likely possibility would be to reduplicate Watt’s *exacto* and thus pair the graphic *pectine* with a conventionally flattering epithet, ‘perfect’.¹²

Scribal modesty, as well as unconscious reminiscence of the phrase *castigato... sub pectore* in Ovid, explains the corruption. Maximianus’ imitations of Ovid in this poem are not characterized by subtlety, and certainly not here, where the aged poet is fantasizing about the naked body of the sexually active Greek girl whom he cannot satisfy.¹³

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4) Cf. TLL s.v. *factura* 142,46–56.

5) As noted at TLL s.v. *exhaurio* 1406,25.

6) Most fanciful and least likely is “unter schlank eingezogenem Oberkörper”, found in W. C. Schneider, *Die elegischen Verse von Maximian: Eine letzte Widerrede gegen die neue christliche Zeit* (Wiesbaden 2003) 186.

7) W. S. Watt, *Notes on Maximianus*, *Eikasmos* 6 (1995) 247.

8) J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London 1982) 76–77.

9) Cf. TLL s.v. *pecten* 904,5–31.

10) Suggested by J. C. McKeown per litteras.

11) Cf. J. Henderson, *Aristophanes’ Lysistrata* (Oxford 1987) on Lys. 87. The referees for *RbM* suggest either *euulso* or *eraso*, either of which might be possible, even though, as they note, neither is very close palaeographically.

12) For this sense, cf. TLL s.v. *exigo* 1467,61–1468,15 and especially Sidon. *Epist.* 1,2,2 *si forma quaeratur: corpore exacto, longissimis breuior, procerior... mediocribus*.

13) I am grateful to Prof. J. C. McKeown, as well as to the editor and referees for helpful criticisms.