NATURE, IMPERIALISM, AND THE ETHICS OF WAR IN FLAVIAN EPIC

BY

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DISSERTATION

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This dissertation argues that Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*, Silius Italicus’ *Punica*, and Papinius Statius’ *Thebaid* use human encounters with nature to reflect on the morality of their poems’ central characters. Interactions and conflicts with nature occur at programmatic points in the poems, further indicating their importance for the narratives. This common thread throughout all three epics points to a deeper interest in nature and the unknown beyond the edges of the empire. As such, ecocritical theory and theories of space and place have greatly informed my approach to this topic. By examining encounters with nature such as humans crossing geographical boundaries, cutting down forests, and fighting river gods, Flavian epic is shown to comment on the military exploits of the three Flavian emperors, their interactions with nature while on campaign, and the ideology of their regime.
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For Emily, Evelyn, and Samuel

lux in tenebris
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In book 3 of Silius Italicus’ *Punica*, Hannibal and his forces approach the Alps but his soldiers are reluctant to advance (Sil. 3.500-502, 506-508):

> At miles dubio tardat uestigia gressu,
> impia ceu sacros in fines arma per orbem
> natura prohibente ferant diuisque repugnent.
>
> ...‘non pudet obsequio superum fessosque secundis
> post belli decus atque acies dare terga niuosis
> montibus et segnes summittere rupibus arma?’

But the soldiers slow their steps, hesitant to advance lest they bring impious weapons across sacred boundaries throughout the world, though *natura* forbade it, and march in opposition to the gods...“Are you not ashamed to be tired of the allegiance of the gods and your successes after the glory and battles of war and to turn your backs to snowy mountains and, sluggish, to lay down your arms to rocks?”

Hannibal rebukes his soldiers declaring that they should be ashamed to retreat beaten by mountains and cliffs and further encourages them to think that even now they are scaling Rome’s walls as they climb the Alps (3.509-510). Hannibal fights against the mountainous Alpine landscape while his soldiers fear to transgress against *natura* and the gods. This passage exemplifies the human struggle against nature that I will examine throughout Flavian epic.

This dissertation developed from the observation that Flavian epic shows a deep and abiding interest in the natural world, which in turn plays a central role in each poem’s narrative, and the intuition that the elements of nature in the poems are integral to the poems and more than mere decoration.

A topic such as “nature” in three complete, or nearly complete, epic poems can rightly be called *ingens*. However, such a thematic approach allows for a comparative reading of these

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poems which will produce a deeper analysis of the texts and how they interact with each other. The epics of Valerius Flaccus, Silius Italicus, and Papinius Statius, (hereafter Valerius, Silius, and Statius) written over a span of twenty-five years and the products of the Flavian period in Rome, demand to be read together for how they influence each other and reflect on contemporary events, such as the military campaigns of the Flavian emperors.

The Flavian dynasty, and Vespasian’s reign in particular, was founded on military experience and success. Vespasian had campaigned in Britain under Claudius and put down the revolt in Judaea along with his son Titus. Domitian later campaigned in Germany and Dacia. Flavian ideology, iconography, and literature cast these campaigns as conflicts with peoples and landscapes far from Rome and foreign to Roman experience. All three Flavian epicists nod toward the military achievements of the Flavian dynasty both at home during the civil war of 69 CE and abroad in Britain, Judaea, Dacia, and Germany. It can hardly be a coincidence that Valerius chose to write a Latin Argonautica, a story about the first ship making the first journey on the ocean, during the reign of Vespasian who crossed the English Channel to fight the Britons.

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2 While I make reference to Statius’ Achilleid on occasion, the infrequent appearances of topics of interest to this dissertation and especially its truncated nature make it a difficult text to incorporate. Flavian epic has been greatly influenced by earlier epic as well and many studies of the Flavian epics have focused on their debt to earlier Latin epic. See Augoustakis (2016, 1-14) for a concise overview of the recent “Flavian renaissance.” Philip Hardie (1993) writes about Vergil’s influence on later epic from Ovid to Silius and notes similarities among Latin epics including a focus on sacrifice, dualisms of pietas and furor, the confusion of Heaven and Hell, and the importance of familial, political, and poetic succession. Many comparative studies on all three epics focus on the socio-political and cultural context of Flavian Rome, such as the collections of essays by Boyle and Dominik (2003) and by Nauta, van Dam, and Smolenaars (2006). Other scholars have approached Flavian epic thematically. Neil Bernstein (2008) writes about the challenges faced by the Roman upper-class in the Flavian era which he argues are reflected in the representations of kinship in Flavian epic. An even broader study is Pramit Chaudhuri’s (2014) monograph in which he takes Statius’ Capaneus as his starting point in examining theomachy in Greek and Roman epic, though Statius and Flavian epic is his main focus. Chaudhuri argues that theomachy in Flavian epic is a reflection of concerns about power and the representation of emperors as gods. In this way, Chaudhuri taps into one of the main aspects of Flavian scholarship. See also works on religion and divine machinery (Feeney 1991, Baier 2012, Augoustakis 2013a); gender (Keith 2000, Augoustakis 2010a); heroism and the epic heroic code (Ripoll 1998); kinship and family (Bernstein 2008); suicide and civil war (McGuire 1997); geography (Morzadec 2009); gaze (Lovatt 2013); the interactive relationship between the three poets (Manuwald and Voigt 2013); Stoicism (Billerbeck 1986a and 1986b); the influence of Greek literature on Flavian literature (Augoustakis 2014); the development of literary genres in Flavian literature (Bessone and Fucecchi 2017); Campania (Augoustakis and Littlewood 2019); and fides in Flavian literature (Augoustakis, Buckley, and Stocks 2019).
at the ends of the earth. Silius casts the achievements of both Scipio and Vespasian in terms of the conquest of lands: Vespasian dominates the Rhine (compescet ripis Rhenum, Sil. 3.599) and Scipio celebrates a triumph trailing the images of conquered lands and rivers (Sil. 17.625-650) while Hannibal’s troops conquer the Alps (Sil. 3.477-556, 630-646). Statius makes his theme civil war and fraternas acies, hardly an oblique reference to the civil war of 69 and makes direct reference to Domitian’s military achievements in the poem.

³ Britain was often called ultima Thyle and considered so far from Rome as to exist almost in a different dimension; see Sil. 3.598. Valerius Flaccus’ Argonautica has received scholarly attention aimed at redeeming the poem. James Shelton (1971) provided an early narrative commentary of the poem in its entirety. Denis Feeney’s (1991) monograph presents an overview of the main themes of the poem with a particular focus on the role of the gods. Debra Hershkowitz’s (1998b) monograph discusses the poem in its entirety focusing on the poem in its own right and on Valerius’ debt to earlier writers. Hershkowitz assumes a Domitianic date for the poem resulting in a more pessimistic reading of the poem. Tim Stover (2012), however, places the poem in Vespasian’s reign and sees the poem as a counterpart to Lucan’s Bellum Ciuile and argues that the poem presents a rebirth and recuperation of epic which is a reflection of the political realities of Vespasianic Rome. Buckley (2018) offers a pessimistic view of the poem by reflecting on its Stoic aspects and using Seneca’s Naturales Quaestiones as an interpretive model. There are also a number of studies covering individual topics such as prophecy and prodigies (Groß 2003), the influence of the gods on Jason’s and Medea’s relationship (von der Osten 2007), battle narratives (Schenk 1999, Manuwald 1999), and similes (Gärtner 1994). Martha Davis’ (1989) article is particularly important for me as it examines not only Valerius’ debt to earlier poets but also the theme of Rome’s expansion in the poem.

⁴ Von Albrecht’s (1964) monograph breathed new life into scholarship on Silius Italicus’ Punica. More recent scholarship on the Punica has been dominated by the figures of Scipio Africanus and Hannibal. Ray Mark’s (2005a) monograph puts the epic in its Flavian context and focuses specifically on Scipio, whom he argues is a fundamentally good king, as a critical link to the Flavian period and as an example for Domitian. Ben Tipping (2010) expands on this reading to analyze the exemplary figures in the Punica including Scipio, Hannibal, Hercules, and Fabius. Tipping argues that the Punica is a poem full of examples, both positive and negative, and as a poem that glorifies Roman victory over an external enemy. Tipping sees ambiguity in Hannibal’s character and argues his “intra- and intertextuality…call[s] into question cultural distinctions and oppositions” (2010, 92). Claire Stocks (2014) analyzes Hannibal as a cultural icon in Roman literature with a specific focus on Silius’ Punica in which Hannibal “emerges not only as the ‘other’ in which Rome sees a reflection of itself, but as a figure at times more Roman than the state’s own viri” (232).

⁵ After Frederick Ahl’s (1967) dissertation and David Vessey’s (1973) monograph, Ahl (1986) gave an important reappraisal of the Thebaid and William Dominik wrote two important early monographs on the Thebaid, publishing both in the same year. His first book (1994a) analyzed the speeches of the Thebaid and the second (1994b) more conventionally covered the use and abuse of power in the entire poem and also argued for the political relevance of the poem to contemporary Rome. Randall Ganiban (2007) focuses specifically on Statius and Vergil, arguing that the Thebaid is a political critique of the Aeneid that features an overarching moral and political pessimism characterized by a triumph of nefas over pietas; see also Burgess (1971). Charles McNelis (2007) examines Callimachean poetics present in Statius’ Thebaid and argues that aspects of contemporary civil war are reproduced in the poem. Ganiban (2007), McNelis (2007), and others (Dominik 1994b, McGuire 1997, Hershkowitz 1998a, Criado 2000, Keith 2000, Coffee 2009, and Augustakis 2010a) pick up on a significantly pessimistic strain in Statius’ Thebaid, while others such as Ripoll (1998) focus on the poem’s optimism. Still others have focused on certain aspects or episodes from the Thebaid. See Taisne (1999) on Lucretius’ influence on the Thebaid; Ganiban
The role of nature in Flavian epic has been underappreciated, especially for how it influences the poems’ central characters and themes. I find a connection between the Flavian epic and the Flavian emperors’ military campaigns with which they sought to control the boundaries of the empire and in doing so interacted with new and wild landscapes. Human encounters with nature are central to each of the Flavian epics and, while reflecting contemporary literary interests in the natural world, are used by the poets to interrogate the positive and negative aspects of the military accomplishments of the Flavian dynasty. Valerius, Silius, and Statius not only present human encounters with nonhuman entities, both animate and inanimate, as significant to the poems but also grant agency to and focalize through nature showing their concern with the role that nature plays in shaping human experience. Whether the Argives fighting the Nemea landscape in the Thebaid, Hannibal crossing the Alps in the Punica, or the Argonauts venturing onto the sea in the Argonautica, human encounters with nature are a driving force of these epic narratives. Although in Flavian epic human activity sometimes damages nature, it is not simply a victim of human violence to be polluted or destroyed. For example, in the Punica the Trebia River aids Hannibal and fights Scipio, complicating the

6 Tacitus speaks of Agricola fighting against nature in Britain (Tac. Ag. 33). The Agricola is, for all intents and purposes, a Flavian text. See Evans (2003) and chapter 4 below. These recent events augmented the already existing literary tradition upon which the Flavian epic poets could draw. Interactions of all kinds between humans and nonhuman nature are central to Roman culture and literature. The earliest extant Latin texts illustrate the importance of such interactions. Cato’s De Agricultura not only discusses cultivation and farm management but also quotes prayers to be recited in order to propitiate the mysterious deities beyond the farm and before thinning a grove (Agr. 139). Lucretius’ De Rerum Natura and Vergil’s Georgics and Eclogues are concerned with nature and the place of humans in the cosmos, in the countryside, and on the farm. Latin epic is full of human/nature interactions that indicate that humans and nature are fundamentally interconnected and that there are potential dangers of human violence against nature. Vergil’s Aeneid features, for example, Aeneas’ encounter with the dead “tree” Polydorus and the landscape of the future site of Rome. Ovid’s Metamorphoses is full of examples of human/nature interactions, the most famous being the story of Erysichthon. Lucan’s Bellum Ciuile portrays Caesar as a transgressor of human and natural law when he cuts down the Gallic grove in book 3 and tramples over Troy in book 9.

7 Credit to Clara Bosak-Schroeder for suggesting “encounter” as a more meaningful and dynamic alternative for the somewhat dull “interaction.”
simplistic reading that nature is only a victim of human action. Instead nature is often an active opponent of humans that is granted the agency to in turn affect them. This is seen after Hannibal conquers the Alps: throughout the poem he hearkens back to the crossing as one of his greatest triumphs, illustrating the mountains’ agency in shaping Hannibal’s self-fashioning. This back and forth between humans and nature points to a deep interconnection between them in Latin epic, which the poems exploit.

1. Terms and Definitions

It is not the purpose of this dissertation to perform a complete analysis of the term nature and its Latin and Greek cognates natura and physis or to do a complete accounting of the appearances of aspects of nature in Flavian epic. However, it is necessary to provide a definition of these and other terms dense with meaning so as to make it as clear as possible how I am using them.

Nature is essentially what is nonhuman. It is a descriptor of what exists that is not the product of human activity and refers to nonhuman animate or inanimate elements, features, or inhabitants of naturescapes that come into being without human intervention. Nature, as I use it, is a term for mountains, rivers, lakes, oceans, forests, fields, and all the flora and fauna that inhabit them. While it is right to question whether a category such as nature is even applicable, a few examples from Flavian epic and contemporary texts should answer this question satisfactorily. In Valerius’ Argonautica, Jupiter groups together mountains, rivers, lakes, and the sea when declaring the world open to human expansion (pateant montes siluaeque lacusque /

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8 I do see humans as part of nature as did the Romans, as evidenced, for example, by humans’ place in Pliny’s Natural History. However, humans should be seen as superior or elevated members of nature for a variety of reasons: we are merely primates but ones that are superior in intellect, ability to cooperate, language, etc., and the civilizational achievements that these abilities enable. Indeed this was understood in antiquity as seen in the opposition between nature/the natural world and human civilization throughout ancient thought. Some commentators anachronistically seek to break down this binary but, while it can be problematized, it cannot and should not be eliminated entirely. See Beagon (1992) and (2007), French (1994), and Murphy (2004).
cunctaque clastra maris, V. Fl. 1.556-557). In Tacitus’ *Agricola*, published in 98 CE, the author thematizes conflict with nature and differentiates nature from human enemies (*seu fortitudine aduersus hostes seu patientia ac labore paene aduersus ipsam rerum naturam opus fuit*, Tac. Ag. 33.2). Tacitus further defines nature as features of a naturescape such as swamps, mountains, and rivers (*saepe in agmine, cum uos paludes montesue et flumina fatigarent*, Tac. Ag. 33.4).

However, the term nature is laden with post-Romantic notions of a place to which one can “go” to be “one with nature” which is essentially a pristine wilderness untouched by humans and inhabited only by nonhuman animals. While such spaces exist in Flavian epic, they are not romanticized in the same way and I use other terms to refer to them. Latin *natura* has many definitions but its meanings are generally (1) an abstract, governing, generative force; (2) the features and attributes of a place; (3) the character of a person. Because of the huge semantic range of the word *natura* I argue that it cannot simply be translated as “nature” and that it is untranslatable except as dictated by the context of each usage.9

For spaces characterized primarily by their nature-aspects, I use naturescape or, to be more specific, landscape or waterscape to denote a space and its primary features. Naturescapes are not merely spaces but places that are symbolically charged and mediated through subjective human experience, to use Cosgrove’s definition of landscape (see McInerney and Sluiter 2016, 1). Wilderness is another important term for this dissertation which I use for Latin *auia* and its synonyms (*deuia, inuiia*) to denote a type of naturescape that is devoid of human cultivation or unknown to human experience, despite objections to the term from Cronon and others.10 For example, a farm is a kind of landscape but is not a wilderness while an uncut forest, uncultivated

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9 On *natura* see Pellicer’s (1966) incomparable study; although by no means an exhaustive list, see also Merrill (1891), Boyle (1985), Catto (1988/1989), and Kreuzweiser (2016).

10 Cronon (1996a).
I define space as ‘pure location’ or ‘setting’ and place as ‘space made symbolically charged through meaning brought from human experience,’ making naturescape a type of place. The types of naturescapes I examine include mountains and hills (e.g. *mons, collis*), forests and groves (e.g. *silua, nemus, lustrum*), rivers, streams, and lakes (e.g. *amnis, flumen, aqua, fluuius, lacus*), and seas and oceans (e.g. *aequor, oceanus, mare*).

2. Limits of Inquiry

Since my analysis spans all three relatively complete Flavian epics, I have necessarily had to limit the scope of my inquiry as well as the number of passages and aspects of nature that I examine. However, this limit came about from the themes, patterns, and motifs that emerged from the texts, rather than being imposed by me on the texts. For example, the significance of a purple passage like the building of the Argo led me to read passages like the tree-cutting in Nemea in *Thebaid* 6 and the trees burned at Trasimene in *Punica* 5. I have not, however, discussed every grove or forest mentioned in the poem. Similarly, chapter 3 focuses on two river-battles, not all bodies of water and waterways in the poems. This dissertation is thus not a natural history of Flavian epic, nor is it an analysis of Flavian epic’s interaction with philosophical thinking about the nature of the world.

3. Theory

At its heart, my project is philologically oriented involving close readings of the texts with a focus on language and on the intertexts between the poems and their influence on each other. Specifically, Valerius’ *Argonautica*, the earliest of the three, is now acknowledged to have greatly influenced both Statius and Silius and they in turn, since they were writing roughly contemporaneously, likely influenced each other.

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11 *Auia* literally means ‘pathless.’
In addition, I bring to this dissertation some ideas that have emerged from modern theory, mainly ecocriticism which is a newer field that developed in the 1990s and has only recently been adopted by classicists. At its simplest, ecocriticism is as Cheryl Glotfelty writes, “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.”12 Greg Garrard defines ecocriticism at its broadest as “the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human” and goes on to note that “the challenge for ecocritics is to keep one eye on the ways in which ‘nature’ is always in some ways culturally constructed, and the other on the fact that nature really exists.”13 As Buell argues, ecocriticism, like feminist theory, is “more issue-driven than methodology-driven.”14 There are, very broadly speaking, two waves of ecocriticism: the first focuses on nature writing and environmental activism, the second focuses on questioning “nature” and “environment” as concepts and breaking down human/nonhuman distinctions.15 Ecocritical scholarship asks questions of literature such as: How is nature represented in the text? How has the concept of nature changed over time? What is the relationship between humans and nature? I will ask some of these and other related questions of Flavian epic.

I could not proceed to more recent scholarship without mentioning Clarence Glacken’s (1967) monumental achievement, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, which focuses on the massive question of the opposition of nature and culture across. In another broad study, Paolo Fedeli (1990) examines the concept of the violation of nature throughout Latin literature. More recently there has been more explicit engagement with ecocriticism in classical scholarship, especially in

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13 Garrard (2012, 5, 10); see also Garrard (2014, 1-26).
14 Buell (1999, 700); he further argues that ecocritical scholarship has “focused overwhelmingly on nonmetropolitan landscapes, but there is no inherent reason why it should continue to do so” (1999, 706).
15 Gifford (2017, 163) claims (already in 2003 with Dana Philips’ *The Truth of Ecology*) the existence of a “third wave of ecocriticism in which its first internal critiques shook up the first wave celebration of American nature writing in the pastoral tradition of retreat and return.”
the last five to ten years. Donald Hughes (2014) weaves analysis of ancient literary texts with archaeological research to examine ancient environmental crises. The volume of essays edited by Christopher Schliephake (2017) features ecocritical readings of ancient, and early-modern, texts and as such is a welcome addition to ecocritical work on the ancient world. Ricardo Apostol (2015) takes an ecocritical approach to Vergil’s second *Eclogue* in which the author acknowledges that ecocriticism is a contested term which could develop as an activist movement or in “a more poststructuralist direction...[as] a locus for the study and deconstruction of the concept “nature,” as other schools have come to study fundamental categories such as gender, sexuality, power, and alterity.” Apostol chooses the latter and uses this approach to deconstruct post-Romantic notions of nature and their influence on the interpretation of the *Eclogues*.

Finally, Clara Bosak-Schroeder has done important work on encounters between humans and nature in Greek ethnography. Her *Other Natures* (2020) illustrates how ethnographies in Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus show that non-Greeks affected and were in turn greatly influenced by the local animals, plants, and climate. I have been deeply influenced by Clara Bosak-Schroeder’s thinking about nature and ecocriticism. *Other Natures*, which I saw in its early stages and throughout its development, paved the way for my thinking about and approach to the interrelation between ancient literature and the natural world. Although we differ in our thinking on various topics, her work is a tremendously important contribution to ecocritical, new materialist, feminist, and biopolitical work in Classics.

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17 Though the identification of these crises is a fraught issue; see n.126.

18 Apostol (2015, 4).
Despite my intuitions about the role of nature in Flavian epic, I was determined from the outset to let my readings emerge from the texts themselves and inform my analysis and its theoretical approaches, rather than vice versa. As such, I see myself as coaxing a reading from the poems rather than reading them through a particular lens. I use ecocriticism as a rough framework to guide my thinking and examine how Statius, Silius, and Valerius construct literary naturescapes and how they represent human/nonhuman encounters. By focusing on the role and portrayal of nature in the poems, my approach is inherently ecocritical but not dogmatically so. I employ a non-Romantic concept of nature so as to attempt to avoid anachronism and, for that same reason, I eschew ecocriticism’s focus on modern issues and concepts such as climate change, the Anthropocene, and sustainability.

I also find useful methodologies emerging from the impact of the so-called “spatial turn” on classical scholarship. Claude Nicolet (1991) is foundational for examining space and place in ancient thought. In a work that has been very influential for me, Ricardo Apostol (2009) analyzes the bucolic landscapes of Aeneid 8 and their reflection of contemporary concerns about Roman power. Diana Spencer (2010), who argues space is turned into landscape by “defining a frame and imposing points of view (whether physical or cognitive),” provides an excellent survey of Roman landscape that is more in-depth than the label “survey” implies. Alex Purves (2010) argues for the importance of space in ancient Greek narrative, including Homer and Herodotus, and her monograph was followed by Irene de Jong’s (2012a) edited collection, Space in Ancient Greek Literature. In the introduction to the recent volume edited by Marios Skempis

19 Nicolet’s (1991, 5) exhortation to “forget our vision, exact and irrevocable, of the physical world in order to attempt to reconstruct, recreate, and relive that of the ancients,” although unachievable, is especially instructive. See also Simon Schama’s (1995) gigantic tome on landscape and memory and Richard Thomas’ (1982) book on landscape in Roman poetry.

20 Spencer (2010, 106), see p.104-113 on Statius’ Silvae.
and Ioannis Ziogas (2014b), the editors posit space as “the arena of social interface par excellence” and see views of space shift in the transition from Greek to Roman epic. Building on this, McInerney and Sluiter’s (2016) volume of essays takes on the landscapes of nature in Greek and Latin literature and various real landscapes throughout the Mediterranean, including Troy, Actium, and Rome.


Although scholarship on Flavian epic abounds, it mainly focuses on the human actors in the poems and there have been few investigations of representations of nature in Flavian epic, or in Latin epic in general. In addition to those already mentioned above, there are a few more worth noting. Richard Thomas (1988) addresses the issue of tree violation in Vergil’s *Aeneid* arguing that Vergil presents tree-cutting as a negative act and that he draws on prevalent cultural ideas about tree-violation, namely that the cutting of any tree was seen as a potential violation. For Thomas, Vergil makes trees animate and casts tree-cutting scenes in the *Aeneid* as violations but he does not include any mention of punishment for those who cut trees. Daniel Garrison (1992) argues that Roman interactions with environments outside of Italy strongly influenced cultural conceptions of forests. For example, Caesar’s legions encountered dense, dark forests in Gaul and Varus and his legions were slaughtered in a similarly pathless forest across the Rhine. Garrison argues that “the horror silvestris beyond the Rhine became generalized into a region of the imagination...[and] with the Silver poets, the dark and dangerous forests of the north

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21 Skempis and Ziogas (2014a, 1, 5). See especially Parkes (2014a, 405-426) on the geography of journeys in Statius’ *Thebaid*, Slaney (2014, 427-461) on imperialism and space in Valerius’ *Argonautica*, and Manuwald (2014, 463-485) on themes of discovery, the unknown, and the presentation of geographic information in Valerius’ *Argonautica*. See also Hardie (1993, 3) who argues “in spatial terms Virgilian and post-Virgilian epic attempts to construct a comprehensive and orderly model of the world, but it turns out that such models are inherently unstable. The instability of the Virgilian world is an open-ended invitation for succeeding epic poets to revise and redefine.”

22 Thomas (1988, 270).
hardened into a rhetorical *topos.*” Garrison deems this type of forest a *locus inamoenus* that is distinctly different from the light and airy forests typical of the Mediterranean. Carole Newlands (2004) examines Statius’ depiction of landscape and compares it with Ovid’s, concluding that Statius creates Ovidian *loci amoeni* that are paradises disconnected from the gods and destroyed by the warring Thebans and Argives. Antony Augoustakis (2006) touches on issues of tree-violation in analyzing the felling of the sacred grove in Lucan book 3, noting that it is a definite violation for which Caesar will ultimately have to face punishment, though he reaches this conclusion not exclusively from the Lucan passage but by reading it in conjunction with passages from Valerius Maximus and Dio Cassius. Ailsa Hunt (2016) examines the concept of sacred trees in Roman religion and, rethinking ideas of sacrality, demonstrates that Romans were not tree-worshippers but that they did view sacred trees as representing the divine.

More than trees and forests, the importance of waterscapes, rivers, and oceans has been recognized by scholars. Carlo Santini’s (1991) book on Silius’ *Punica* is one of the few that examines rivers in late 1st century literature with a focus on the larger ecological concerns of the period, including human violence against nature. Santini sees human violence against nature on both sides of the war with both the Romans and Carthaginians responsible for the pollution that results from human violence. For example, after the battle of Lake Trasimene the god of the lake fears that his waters will putrefy because of the blood and gore from the dead. Isabella Bona (1998) catalogues rivers and lakes in the *Punica* while Piet Schrijvers (2006) examines how Silius connects historical events with natural phenomena. Eleni Manolaraki (2009) follows Frances Muecke (2007) in acknowledging that geographical ekphrases have received less attention than other types of ekphrasis and focuses on how Hannibal visually interacts with the

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23 Garrison (1992, 112).

24 See also Leigh (1999).
tides and the role of the tides in foreshadowing Hannibal’s failure in the war. Prudence Jones (2005) reads rivers in Roman literature and culture, with a particular focus on Vergil, as a complex literary device that provide authorial comment on the progress or structure of a narrative. James McIntyre’s (2008) dissertation focuses on “the depiction and refiguration of the locus amoenus landscape in the post-Augustan epics of the first century AD,” in particular how Lucan’s infusion of loci amoeni with the nefas of civil war impacts the locus amoenus motif in later epic.\textsuperscript{25} Dustin Heinen’s (2011) dissertation examines the human domination of nature in the Georgics and Silvae and problematizes nature and natura as concepts, showing them to be both culturally constructed and culturally significant. Henning Haselmann’s (2018) monograph is a welcome addition to Silian scholarship that, as the title (Gewässer als Schauplätze und Akteure in den Punica des Silius Italicus) suggests, reads rivers in the Punica as agents that function as more than simple settings for the action of the narrative but in fact provide the central structure of the poem.

5. Chapter Summaries

In chapter 1, I argue that all three Flavian epics feature explicit crossings of geographical boundaries which thematize nature as an opponent for humans. This is seen in particular with the ocean in the Argonautica, mountains in the Punica, and the Nemean forest in the Thebaid. Jupiter’s declaration in the Argonautica that the mountains, forests, lakes, and seas should be open (V. Fl. 1.556-557) specifically makes nature an obstacle to human activity and expansion. The Argonauts fear that they have profaned the seas by sailing on the first ship but Jupiter absolves them of this crime, declaring their voyage an essential step in the development of the peoples that will rule the Mediterranean (V. Fl. 1.558-560). However, although Jupiter removes the threat of transgressing against nature and the gods, crossing geographic barriers remains

\textsuperscript{25} McIntyre (2008, ii).
dangerous and has potentially negative consequences, as Neptune’s speech reveals (V. Fl. 1.644-650). Hannibal’s crossing of the Pyrenees and the Alps (Sil. 3.477-556, 630-646) are crucial steps in fulfilling Jupiter’s aim of challenging Rome in the Punic which look back to the Argo’s voyage in Valerius’ Argonautica, an intertext that complicates Hannibal’s characterization as a violator of natural boundaries. In the Thebaid, to accomplish their goal the Argives must traverse the space between Argos and Thebes, an area that Bacchus turns into an obstacle by causing a drought and turning the Nemean naturescape against them. Unlike in the Argonautica and Punic, the Argives are not transgressors of sacred boundaries but an army that invades and damages Nemea in their search for water. The Argives’ damage to Nemea and killing of the sacred snake of Jupiter reveal their violent and theomachic tendencies, undermining Polynices’ claim to the moral high ground.

In chapter 2, I examine some of the effects of the boundary crossings in chapter 1 on the naturescapes of Flavian epic and expand on the themes of ignorance and transgression by examining forests and tree-cutting passages. I argue that human encounters with forests and tree-cutting in particular reflect on the morality and character of the poems’ human protagonists. The various tree-cutting scenes of Flavian epic share obvious similarities with respect to theme, structure, and language but play different roles in each poem, showing not only the timeless nature of this epic topos but also its malleability and versatility. Trees can be innocent and symbolic victims (Thebaid), treacherous enemies (Punic), and useful tools (Argonautica). For example, in Punic 5 Roman soldiers take refuge in trees believing they will be safe but the trees are their undoing (Sil. 5.492-509). Trees and forests are also important aspects of geographical boundaries and become objects of human violence. In Thebaid 4-6 after the Argives are led by Hypsipyle through the wilderness of Nemea they cut down the Nemean forest like soldiers
sacking a city (Theb. 6.90-117), revealing their violent impulses and contrasting Valerius’ positive, and celebrated, tree-cutting undertaken to build the Argo (V. Fl. 1.91-129). The construction of the Argo is crucial for the poem as the ship is identified with Valerius’ poetic project. However, Valerius contrasts the forests of Thessaly where it is built with the dangerous forests encountered by the Argonauts in Asia like the forest of Mysia where Hylas is abducted (V. Fl. 3.521-597), which are portrayed as dangerous, pathless wildernesses (auia).

In chapter 3, I continue exploring the themes of human ignorance and conflict with nature by examining the rivers of the Punica and Thebaid, with a particular focus on the river-battles of Scipio the Elder against the god Eridanus in Punica 4 and Hippomedon against the god Ismenos in Thebaid 9. As anthropomorphized rivers, the river gods Eridanus and Ismenos bridge the gap between nature and the divine and both gods emerge to protect their rivers against human incursions. Silius and Statius are the first to take on this epic topos since Homer but, rather than simply rehashing the battle between Achilles and Scamander, their compositions emerge as conflicts over identity and loyalty.

In both poems, humans enter inhospitable riverine environments and come into conflict with rivers and their gods. On the way to Italy, Hannibal crosses numerous rivers that react violently to his invasion and foreshadow the crossing of the Alps (Sil. 3.445-476). Hannibal’s conquest of the Alps enables his control of the rivers that have their source in the Alps, including the Po. At the battle of the Trebia, Scipio the Elder rebukes Eridanus (god of the Trebia and Po) for siding with Hannibal and the Carthaginians even though the Po is an Italian river and should therefore be allied with Rome. Ismenos is geographically and genealogically linked to Thebes and when Hippomedon kills his grandson Crenaeus, he attacks Hippomedon whom he sees as embodying the poisonous waters of Lerna near Hippomedon’s home of Argos. Both Scipio the
Elder and Hippomedon are forced to come to terms with their limitations and are ultimately overwhelmed by the river gods.

In chapter 4, I put the observations of the previous three chapters in the context of contemporary events and argue that the conflicts with nature in Flavian epic reflect on the ideology and military campaigns of the Flavian emperors. Encounters and conflicts with nature are often put in terms of military conquest and the language and imagery of the conquest of nature appears regularly in Flavian iconography and in references to the emperors by Valerius, Statius, and Silius. For example, Silius makes conflict with nature a part of the Flavians’ successes and communicates their achievements in terms of conquest of lands and rivers (Sil. 3.597-617). Valerius’ recusatio shows Vespasian opening up the seas to expansion like Jason, thereby making cooperation with nature, as seen in the construction of the Argo, a part of Flavian conquest (V. Fl. 1.7-11). Statius’ recusatio also puts Domitian’s achievements in natural/geographic terms but they are at odds with the portrayal of conflicts with nature in the poem (Theb. 1.17-22).
CHAPTER 1
THE PATH WHERE NO ONE GOES: CROSSING BOUNDARIES

This chapter examines the crossing of natural boundaries in Flavian epic and the role of ignorance in these human encounters with boundaries. Transgression is a consistent theme in post-Ovidian epic as seen especially in Lucan and the Flavian epics. Geography and knowledge of it, or lack thereof, is of crucial importance to Flavian epic as all three epics are essentially journeys that require the crossing of boundaries into unknown spaces. This is a theme that would have appealed to contemporary audiences due to their interest in geographic and scientific knowledge as evidenced by the proliferation of maps and texts such as Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis* and Seneca’s *Naturales Quaestiones*. Geographic boundaries are important because they specifically thematize conflict with nature at programmatic points in the narratives of the *Argonautica*, *Punica*, and *Thebaid* and similarities between them invite comparison. These boundaries are divisions between spaces or even thresholds for the characters’ progress: mountain ranges, the division between land and sea, pathless wildernesses.

I will focus on humans crossing natural or geographic boundaries as well as the language that each poet uses to describe these crossings. In Flavian epic, boundary-crossings become points where human ignorance and the will to explore meet the unknown. While some crossings, such as Hannibal crossing the Alps and the Argives entering Nemea, are transgressions, with all of the moral implications that the word connotes, others, like the journey of the Argo, are viewed as transgressions by some (Boreas, Aeolus) and as positive, necessary expansion by others (Jupiter). Although Statius and Silius are more focused on the consequences of war, all three poets explore the tension between primitivism and progressivism, between the apparent violation
of natural boundaries, on the one hand, and the human need to explore and the benefits of human expansion, on the other. These themes were especially relevant to their contemporary audience because of the renewed promise presented by the Flavian emperors and their military record and aspirations. In chapter 4, I will discuss how the poets connect the theme of expansion with the Flavian emperors and Flavian political ideology.

The narratives of all three poems involve extensive travel throughout the Mediterranean (Argonautica, Punica) and Greece (Thebaid). The scale of the Argonautica and Punica in particular make them prime places to interrogate the role of geography and geographic boundaries vis a vis human movement across large-scale naturescapes. The middle books of the Thebaid (books 4-7), while lacking the same geographical scale of the other two epics, feature a significant environmental barrier in the form of the forested naturescape of Nemea. I will focus on the significance of the ocean in the Argonautica, mountains in the Punica, and forests in the Thebaid. Although these are very different geographic features, they all function in part as boundaries and impediments to movement and thus barriers to the progress of each poem’s narrative and human-centered telos. Inherent in the problem that geographic barriers present is human ignorance, whether ignorance of the nature of the barrier and its purpose or ignorance of the consequences of crossing such a barrier.

Finally, I will also focus on the abundant language of the unknown in these passages in all three epics, in particular the words inuius, deuius, and auuius which denote pathlessness and a sense of venturing into the unknown, and their opposites like peruiia (V. Fl. 1.1). That all three poems use this language suggests it was significant for the contemporary Flavian audience to

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26 Oceans, mountains, rivers, and forests also execute other functions as well, whether in combat scenes (rivers as the setting for a mache parapotamios) or as a locus amoenus (e.g. the forests of Nemea in the Thebaid) or as the setting for a mythological excursus (e.g. the Pyrenees in the Punica). On rivers and lakes as places and actors in the Punica see Haselmann (2018).
whom exploring the unknown, albeit from the safety of home, seems to have had a particular appeal.\textsuperscript{27} Intimately connected with the language of pathlessness is the language of sacrality and violation, specifically words like \textit{temero} and \textit{sacer}. As they enter \textit{inuia loca}, characters are ignorant of the consequences of their actions (Argives), struggle with the apparent violation inherent in their actions (Argonauts), or alternatively, delight in the violation (Hannibal). The poets use the language of pathlessness to present human characters as exploring the unknown. Underlying these boundary-crossings is the ethical debate, sometimes made explicit, of whether or not a violation or transgression of nature has occurred, with most of them falling in a gray area between the progressivist and primitivist extremes.

1. The Ocean in the \textit{Argonautica}

Despite some of the negative consequences of the Argo’s voyage, Valerius’ \textit{Argonautica} seeks to cautiously rehabilitate the promise of Vergil’s \textit{imperium sine fine} and presents a renewed hope in the office of the \textit{princeps} to yet again restore order after civil war.\textsuperscript{28} Jupiter’s prophecy in \textit{Argonautica} 1 sets out his plan for the decline of the Greeks which will allow for the eventual rise of Rome (V. Fl. 1.555-560). For Rome to emerge and achieve \textit{imperium sine fine}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Braund (1993) has suggested that Varro’s \textit{Argonautica} held a similar appeal for Republican readers.
\item Stover (2012). Vergil’s successors are strongly influenced by the idea of the large-scale, cosmic character of epic. Jupiter in Vergil’s \textit{Aeneid} equates Roman \textit{imperium} with the entire cosmos making them one and the same, famously promising \textit{imperium sine fine} to the Romans (Verg. Aen. 1.279). Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses}, although not a martial epic, has as its topic the entire span of time from the origins of the universe to the present. Lucan’s \textit{Bellum Civile} presents the dissolution of the cosmic order that Vergil’s Jupiter imagines in the \textit{Aeneid} and criticizes the use and abuse of absolute power and the Roman inclination towards civil war. Davis (2010, 11) is not wrong in looking at the second-order consequences of the Argo’s construction as mostly negative: “for they include the theft of Medea, the personal and familial havoc that she will cause and the subsequent series of wars between Europe and Asia. The invention of sailing, moreover, is treated as one of a series of technological firsts, including the creation of riding and the invention of war, which have proved wholly destructive for humankind.” However, it is wrong to call sailing, riding, and even war wholly destructive. Surely no one would deny the obvious benefits of riding and sailing: faster travel, increased trade, etc., and the Romans were wholly dependent on their trade fleet to bring grain to Rome. Indeed, even war can be necessary and good: I doubt the Athenians would have felt the same way about war given what war gained them in 490 and 480 BCE and the same goes for WWII.
\end{itemize}
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the geographical *fines* that impede human expansion must be dismantled; this is one of the key achievements of the Argonauts, although they remain largely ignorant of the nature of the ocean that they cross and of the consequences of passing the Symplegades. The Argonauts’ ignorance heightens the tension of the series of boundary-crossings that dominate the first half of the poem as they gradually break down the barriers between Europe and Asia with the help of the gods. Their ignorance is contrasted with the Flavian audience’s implied knowledge about the poem and the ultimate *telos* of its narrative and Jupiter’s prophecy.

The Argo’s voyage in the *Argonautica* has been read as both the first human transgression of natural boundaries (primitivism) and as the legitimation of human progress (progressivism). Andrew Zissos has shown how Valerius plays with these two interpretations and “simultaneously posits and exasperates the conventional paradigms of ethical judgment—namely, primitivism and progressivism—that inform the ancient literary debate.”29 However, this downplays Jupiter’s role in the poem and his message that the *translatio imperii* from Greece to Rome and progress toward Roman rule will require the Argonauts’ voyage and the waning of Greek power (1.555-560):

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'hinc Danaum de fine sedet gentesque fouebo
mox alias. pateant montes silvaecae lacusque
cunctaque claustra maris, spes et metus omnibus esto.
arbiter ipse locos terrenaque summa mouendo
experiar, quaenam populis longissima cunctis
555
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29 Zissos (2006, 79). Although Zissos (1997, iii) had viewed Valerius’ message in poem more positively: “It is significant that Valerius, though scrupulously faithful to much of Apollonius’ initial story-line, endorses the epoch-defining implications of the myth by making the Argo the first ship. The Argo thus stands as both symbol and manifestation of the advance of technology in Valerius’ poem.” He continues: “Though rejecting neither moral discourse outright, the principal tendency of the Roman *Argonautica* is to endorse the invention of sea navigation as a positive event in human history, and subtly to undermine those voices within the poem that condemn it.” On the primitivist interpretation see Davis (1989, 62). On progressivism see Shelton (1974/75, 22), Hershkowitz (1998b, 217), and Stover (2012, 27-78). More balanced discussions are offered by Adamietz (1976, 25), Schubert (1984, 24-25), Feeney (1991, 330-335), and Hardie (1993, 83-86).

30 On *translatio imperii* see Ripoll (1998, 509). At V. Fl. 1.542 Jupiter declares that the last day (*summa dies*) is approaching for Asia with Greece on the rise; cf. Verg. *Aen.* 2.324-325 *Venit summa dies et ineluctabile tempus / Dardaniae.*
“Then, I have decided on the end of the Danaids and I will soon favor another people. Let the mountains and forests and lakes and all the barriers of the sea be open; let all have hope and fear. In judgment and by provocation I will test lands and the greatest earthly powers to decide who I want to rule over all peoples the longest and where I can be sure about leaving the reins of power.”

Although he doesn not mention Rome by name, Jupiter declares the world open for human expansion and that inevitably Greek power will give way to Roman domination of the Mediterranean. While Valerius might not see Rome’s principate as the ultimate telos of world history, for better or worse, it was the present reality toward which time had marched. Thus the Argonauts are taking the first necessary step toward the Roman Empire and sea-power will eventually come to be the ultimate tool of expansion for the Romans throughout the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and into Britain. The verb patere typically has as its subject ‘a road without obstacles’ or ‘a space into which entrance is open,’ but here the obstacles themselves are the subject. Valerius thus draws attention to the opening of these barriers and specifically groups together clear geographic barriers like mountains and the sea with forests and lakes. This puts forests and lakes, (rivers could be included as well), on par with mountains and the sea creating a category of “natural” obstacles to human expansion that are part of the natural

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31 Hershkowitz (1998b, 240): “This may not be so much another instance of the Romanization of the Argonautica as it is of the narrative’s ’epic’-ization...The foundation of the Roman empire, or even the establishment of Greek dominance, may not rest on Jason’s shoulders, but his ship and its successful voyage are unambiguously presented as an important and necessary link in a wider chain of events.”

32 Nicolet (1991, 15) argues that the boundaries of the Roman Empire established by the time of Augustus’ death were boundaries that “one could not, nor should, go beyond.” Claudius, Vespasian, Domitian, and Trajan surely proved this wrong. Valerius plays with this notion of where boundaries are or should be by presenting both primitivist and progressivist angles of the Argonautic voyage.

33 An apparently unique use of patere; see Kleywegt (2005, 326).
Valerius specifically thematizes nature as an agent in the poem and a perennial obstacle to human expansion and Jupiter’s prophecy makes interactions and conflict with nature essential to gaining power.

Even though Valerius only alludes to Roman imperialism and dominance of the Mediterranean, in mythological time Jupiter’s declaration predates and anticipates his prophecy to Venus in Aeneid 1, while Valerius looks back in time to his literary predecessor. Valerius gives new meaning to Vergil’s imperium sine fine by declaring an end (fine) for the time of the Greeks beginning with Jason’s expedition and ending with the destruction of Troy (1.551-556). Crucially, the beginning of the end for the Greeks and the rise of Rome start with the opening of natural (i.e. geographic) boundaries to human movement (pateant montes siluaeque lacusque / cunctaque claustra maris, 1.556-557). Despite Zissos’ analysis of the primitivism/progressivism debate, as Randall Ganiban argues:

Jupiter’s prophecy sidesteps or even rejects the two dominant ways that the Argonautic expedition might be interpreted—as either a great moment in human achievement or a criminal and punishable violation of existing physical boundaries. Instead he uses the introduction of navigation with the Argo as a defining element for his regime: with it, he establishes war as constitutive of his worldview and assigns himself the ability to decide where international dominance among mortals will reside after the decline of Greek power.

Jupiter’s drive to international dominance requires transgression and humans must expand beyond natural boundaries in order for Rome to come to power. This puts humans in conflict with nature.

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34 As Manuwald (2014, 463-464) notes, unlike Vergil, Statius, Lucan, or Silius whose proemias begin with themes of men, arms, and war, Valerius writes of the prima...freta peruia and the fatidicemque ratem, clearly thematizing from the beginning not only the voyage of the Argo but also the physical obstacles in the way of its, and the Argonauts’, progress: the ocean, the Symplegades, etc. There are also human obstacles, like Amycus’ hostile kingdom (V. Fl. 4.209-221).

35 On the identity of the gentes...alias see Spaltenstein (2002, 223), “les critiques s’égarent en croyant à une incertitude réelle.” Also, Kleywegt (2005, 326) who concludes Valerius is “subtle enough to not name the future world empire.” As Spaltenstein (2002, 223) notes montes, lacus, and claustra maris “fait écho à l’étendue mondiale de ce conflit.”

36 Ganiban (2014, 267). The Argo’s voyage may even be read as simultaneously a great moment in human achievement and a violation.
with some aspects of nature, specifically geographic boundaries, but the responses vary. The Fauns and Nymphs that inhabit the forest that is cut down in order to build the Argo rejoice at the tree-cutting and what the Argo represents, whereas the winds, Boreas in particular, attack the Argonauts when they set sail and cross the ocean previously closed to them. The Argonauts themselves express concern about committing a transgression by sailing on the ocean (1.627-632) but Jupiter’s prophecy shows this concern to be unfounded for the moment. The Argonauts, however, remain ignorant of this fact.

The Argonauts view their voyage as potentially sacrilegious and from the beginning Jason seeks to avoid any intentional violation of the sea or offense against the gods (1.194-203):

sic ait Aesonides: ‘o qui spumantia nutu
regna quatis terrasque salo complecteris omnes,
da ueniam! scio me cunctis e gentibus unum
inlicitas temptare uias hiememque mereri:
sed non sponte fero nec nunc mihi iungere montes
mens †tamen† aut summio deosceri fulmen Olympo.
ne Peliae te vota trahant! ille aspera iussa
repperit et Colchos in me luctumque meorum.
illum ego – tu tantum non indignantibus undis
hoc caput accipias et pressam regibus alnum.’

Thus speaks the son of Aeson: “O you, who shake the foaming kingdom with your nod and embrace all the lands with your salt sea, grant permission! I know that I, one man out of all the races, make an attempt of forbidden ways and that I deserve a storm: But I go not of my own will nor do I have a plan to pile up the mountains or call down the thunderbolt on high Olympus. May the prayers of Pelias not sway you! He has devised a cruel task, going to Colchis, to bring grief to me and my kin. Him, I – may you only receive my life, not with resentful waters, and this alder ship manned by kings.”

Jason explicitly asks for the favor (uenniam) of the sea god knowing (scio me) that he is undertaking a sacrilegious voyage. Here Valerius introduces the theme of human ignorance, for Jason speaks confidently that he knows his voyage will inlicitas temptare uias and that he and

37 Not only are geographic boundaries opening up to the Argonauts but, as the poem makes clear, even the boundary between the earth and the heavens will open up to allow the Argo to come to a rest among the stars (flammifero tandem consedit Olympo, V. Fl. 1.4).
the Argonauts will be deserving of whatever punishment (*hiemem mereri*) comes their way.\(^\text{38}\) While he initially addresses Neptune, he puts the next part of his prayer in terms that are most applicable to Jupiter, rather than Neptune, for he declares that he is not threatening war (gigantomachy) against Jupiter, to whom the the Giants were a threat.\(^\text{39}\) This crystalizes the unprecedented nature of the Argo’s voyage: Jason has no other terms with which to express his potential violation of the sea than to compare it to a Gigantomachic assault on Olympus. Jason concludes by praying for welcoming waters (*non indignantibus undis*) for himself and his crew.\(^\text{40}\)

Jason’s prayer is seemingly answered in the form of two prophecies, one from each of the seers Mopsus and Idmon, Mopsus giving a tragic, negative prophecy and Idmon an epic, positive prophecy.\(^\text{41}\) While Mopsus tells of the hardships of the Argonauts’ voyage, including Pollux’s fight with Amycus, the fire-breathing bulls, and the earth-born men, Idmon sees “hardships full of labor, but the hardy ship will overcome all of them,” (*praeduri plena laboris / cerno equidem, patiens sed quae ratis omnia uincet*, V. Fl. 1.235-236).\(^\text{42}\) As noted by Fabre-Serris, Valerius is invoking Vergil’s *labor omnia uicit / improbus* (*G*. 1.145-146) to correct the condemnation of

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\(^{38}\) Cf. *temptare* (1.197) with *temerare* (1.627) below. Stover notes (2012, 96) that “Jason’s words can be read as self-conscious commentary on the poem itself: Jason, like all great heroes by this point in the epic tradition, claims that he too deserves a storm, thus asserting that his story merits an engagement with the time-honoured epic theme of a cataclysmic storm at sea.”

\(^{39}\) See Feeney (1991, 333), Zissos (2006, 80-81), and Stover (2012) for the Gigantomachic imagery of this scene.

\(^{40}\) These are precisely the same kind of waves that in the proem greeted Vespasian when he sailed to Britain, namely ones that welcomed him but had previously rejected the Julio-Claudians (*Caledonius postquam tua carbasae uexit / Oceanus Phrygios prius indignatus Iulos*, V. Fl. 1.8-9). See Davis (1989, 62) and chapter 4 below.

\(^{41}\) Fabre-Serris (2017, 190): “[Valerius] presents tragic and epic views of the expedition as equally valid, even if the order in which he has the two seers speak implies a preference, inasmuch as the reassuring words of the second counterbalance, in a way, the menacing elements in the prophecy of the first.”

sailing seen in Horace and Seneca.\textsuperscript{43} Jason is seemingly convinced by Idmon and he encourages his fellow Argonauts to summon their strength and achieve great things with Jupiter’s blessing (\textit{ipse suo uoluit commercia mundo / Iuppiter et tantos hominin miscere labores. / ite, uiri, mecum dubisique euincite rebus / quae meminisse iuuet nostrisque nepotibus instent}, V. Fl. 1.246-249).\textsuperscript{44}

Despite Jupiter’s declaration, the Argonauts nevertheless meet resistance from the winds when they set sail. Boreas sees the Argonauts sailing on the ocean from his citadel on Pangaeus (V. Fl. 1.574-577) and, flying to Pelorum on the island of Aeolia, addresses Aeolus and asks to be released (1.598-607).\textsuperscript{45}

\begin{quote}
‘Pangaea quod ab arce nefas’ ait, ‘Aeole, uidi! Graia novam ferro molem commenta iuuenus pergit et ingenti gaudens domat aequora uelo. nec mihi libertas imis freta tollere harenis qualis eram nondum uinclis et carcere clausus. hinc animi structaeque uiris fiducia puppis, quod Borean sub rege uident. da mergere Graios insanamque ratem! nil me mea pignora tangunt. tantum hominum compesce minas dum litora iuxta Thessala neccdum aliai uiderunt carbasa terrae.’
\end{quote}

“Aeolus,” he says, “I have seen such a violation from my citadel Pangaeus! Greek soldiers, having invented some new monstrosity with the axe, go forth and rejoice to conquer the sea with their huge sail. I am not now free to lift the sea from the deepest

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\textsuperscript{43} Fabre-Serris (2017, 191); Hor. Carm. 1.3.9-11 \textit{Illi robur et aes triplex / circa pectus erat, qui fragilem truci / commisit pelago ratem / primus}; Sen. Med. 301-302 \textit{Audax nimium qui freta primus / rate tam fragili perfida rupit}. However Fabre-Serris (2017, 200) concludes that the “moral blurring which operates throughout the latter books of the \textit{Argonautica} impairs irretrievably the \textit{fama} of Jason and his companions...[and] Valerius does not connote human fate in general terms, either in the negative sense proposed by Catullus and Seneca...or in the positive sense proposed by Virgil’s epic.”

\textsuperscript{44} Cf. Hannibal’s encouragement of his men, Sil. 3.506-511.

\textsuperscript{45} Aeolia is the mythical island home of the winds where Odysseus encountered Aeolus, not to be confused with Aeolia, another name for Thessaly. See below in section 3 of this chapter for how Statius plays with these names. Boreas observes the Argonauts in a kind of \textit{teichoscopy}. See Augoustakis (2013b) on \textit{teichoscopy} in Flavian epic. On Boreas’ description as \textit{saeeus}, Kleywegt (2005, 343) notes it “indicates beforehand the harsh nature of Boreas’ attitude towards the reckless humans venturing upon the sea.” On sailing as a transgression of the sea, see Hor. Carm. 1.3, Sen. Med. 301ff, and Heydenreich (1970). On the language of conquering the sea (\textit{domat aequora}, 1.600) see V. Fl. 1.57, 5.299; Prop. 2.26.52; Sen. Pha. 307, Med. 2.
sands as I was when not yet chained and imprisoned. This gives them courage and faith in the ship they have built, that they see Boreas under the rule of a king. Let me sink the Greeks and their mad ship! My children do not concern me. Just check the threats of humanity while the Thessalian shore is near and no other lands yet see their sails.”

Boreas deems the voyage of the Argonauts a nefas and calls the Argo an insana ratis. Ironically, Boreas is confined, clausus, whereas the Argonauts have been permitted to sail by Jupiter since all physical obstacles (claustra) have been opened. Tim Stover has argued that Boreas and Aeolus are anti-Jovian dissenters whose opposition to the Argo’s voyage can be read as a gigantomachic assault on Olympus with the Argonauts portrayed as “pious enforcers to Jupiter’s imperial agenda.”46 This reading stems, and rightly so, from Jupiter’s prophecy earlier in Book 1. Yet there is a significant disconnect between Jupiter’s and the reader’s knowledge, on one hand, and the Argonauts’ knowledge, on the other hand. Set upon by the storm, the Argonauts despair. The Argonauts have no direct knowledge of the divine approval of their voyage or the divine opposition to it, or even knowledge of the sea, and thus do not understand the significance of the storm.47 Indeed, even Boreas and Aeolus seem to be ignorant of Jupiter’s declaration and incorrectly believe that a transgression has taken place.48 The reader receives no clear indication that Boreas and Aeolus are aware of Jupiter’s declaration, but regardless of whether they are ignorant or actively opposing Jupiter, their opposition to the Argonauts illustrates the dangers inherent in sailing.49 Not only are they defensive, but Boreas is particularly hostile to the Argonauts as made clear from the fact that he does not even care that his own children are among

46 Stover (2012, 79); see all of Stover (2012), esp. chapter 3.

47 Unlike Aeneas in Aeneid 1: despite his despair during the storm, Aeneas has already received prophecies sanctioning his voyage and his quest, as seen in books 2 and 3.

48 Kleywegt (2005, 358) notes that “Boreas is excused in assuming a transgression of the bounds set to humankind: even his ‘king’ Aeolus does not know better.” Boreas also views the Argonauts as conquering the sea with their ship’s sail (domat uelo).

49 This goes as far back as Hesiod (Op. 618-694).
them (*nil me mea pignora tangunt*, 1.605). From Achilles to Aeneas and beyond, the gods’
children always get special treatment in epic, but Boreas shows the ultimate antagonism toward
humanity by being hostile toward his own children.50

**Boreas’ Storm**

Boreas then drives a storm against the Argonauts who are ignorant of the fact that Jupiter
has blessed their mission and that Boreas, not Neptune, opposes them (1.618-626):

```
excussi manibus remi conuersaque frontem
puppis in obliquum resonos latus accipit ictus,
uela super tremulum subitus uolitantia malum
turbo rapit. qui tum Minyis trepidantibus horror
cum picei fulsere poli pauidamque coruscae
ante ratem cecidere faces antemnaque laeuo
prona dehiscentem cornu cum sustulit undam.
non hiemem missosque putant consurgere
620
ignari, sed tale fretum.
```

The oars were dashed from their hands and the ship, its bow turned, receives resounding
blows against its angled side. A sudden whirlwind whips the flying sails over the
trembling mast. The trembling Minyae felt fear then when black sky shone and flashing
thunderbolts fell in front of the fearful ship and when the yardarm leaned to the left and,
lifting the waves, split them with its tip. Ignorant, they do not think that this is a storm or
that the freed winds have risen, but that such is the sea.

By presenting the Argonauts as helpless since their oars have been dashed from their hands,
Valerius closely connects the storm, the Argonauts’ fear and ignorance, and their inability to
act.51 Valerius shows them to be totally ignorant of the nature of the sea as they do not realize
that they are in the middle of a storm and that the sea is not always this way (*sed tale fretum*).52

50 *Pignora* is an emendation made by Sabellicus. The manuscripts all read *pectora*, but *mea pectora* does not make
sense. On familial relationships in Flavian epic, see Bernstein (2008).

51 Cf. the Cyaenean Rocks passage below in which the Argonauts seem to simply drop their oars in fear.

52 Valerius emphasizes their ignorance through enjambment by placing *ignari* at the beginning of 626. As
Spaltenstein (2002, 243) notes “Les Argonautes croient qu’il ne s’agit pas d’une tempête, qui serait par nature
momentanée, mais que la mer, au large, est toujours telle.” Cf. Hannibal’s ignorance of the gods, Sil. 4.792-793.
For Jason, the storm seems to immediately contradict the terms of his prayer and conveys to him that Neptune was not appeased by it (1.626-632):  

\[
\text{tum murmure maesto:}
\]
\[
\text{‘hoc erat inlicitas temerare rudentibus undas quod nostri timuere patres. uix litore puppem soluimus et quanto fremitu se sustulit Aegon!}
\]
\[
\text{hocine Cyaneae concurrunt aequore cautes? 630}
\]
\[
\text{tristius an miseris superest mare? linquite, terrae, spem pelagi sacrosque iterum seponite fluctus!’}
\]

Then an unhappy murmuring arose: “This is why our fathers feared to violate the forbidden waters with ships. We have scarcely loosened the ship from shore and the Aegean has swelled itself with such a great storm! Is this the sea where the Cyanean rocks crash together? Or does a more terrible sea remain for us miserable men? You on land, give up hope of sailing and set aside the waves, sacred once again!”

The Argonauts immediately seize on the storm as proof of why their ancestors did not sail on the seas. The speaker, anonymized to speak collectively for all the Argonauts, specifically uses the language of transgression and pollution to describe their actions: the waves of the ocean are “forbidden,” inlicitas, and sailing is an act of pollution or violation, temerare.\(^\text{54}\) The speaker worries that this is not even the worst that the sea has to offer. Finally he declares to the others to “set aside the waves, sacred once again.” The speaker’s declaration that the waves are sacred, sacros, echoes the earlier inlicitas, indicating that sailing on the ocean is not only prohibited but that it should be regarded as specifically sacred. The direct speech of the unnamed Argonaut conveys the exact thoughts of the character, dramatizing the aporia of the Argonauts and making ignorance of natural phenomena such a significant obstacle that they regret their voyage and

\(^{53}\) On the uncommon word inlicitus, see Pollini (1984, 55). Cf. Stat. Theb. 1.223 and Sil. 14.244 where it is used of the violation of space and is comparable to Valerius’ usage. Cf. Luc. 6.454, 10.76; Stat. Theb. 8.96, Achil. 2.68, where it is used of forbidden love.

consider turning back. Even Hercules sits staring at his useless weapons (*magnanimous spectat pharetras et inutile robur / Amphitryoniades*, V. Fl. 1.634-635). Whereas in the *Punica* Hercules is the first to cross the Alps, a fearless trailblazer, here he and the other Argonauts are out of their depth. Even the Argo itself takes on water (*cum protinus alnus / soluitur et vasto puppis mare sorbet hiatus*, V. Fl. 1.637-638) suggesting not only that the voyage (and Valerius’ poetic project) are in danger, but even that Argus, having never sailed on the open sea, may have had insufficient knowledge to build a ship that could withstand the true power and dangers of the ocean.

It is Neptune who ultimately saves the Argo. Just as in *Aeneid* 1 where Neptune calms the ocean that has been stirred up without his approval, here he also exercises his control over the seas and overcomes the power of the winds. Yet his reasoning is very different for, whereas Neptune is angry at the storm having been caused without his permission in *Aeneid* 1, here Neptune speaks as if he has been convinced to intercede by Pallas and Juno (*’hanc mihi Pallas / et soror hanc, ’ inquit, ’mulcens mea pectora fletu / abstulerint;’* V. Fl. 1.642-644), yet, strangely, they are nowhere to be seen. Neptune quickly clarifies his true motivation (1.644-650):

\[\text{‘ueniant Phariae Tyriacae carinae permissumque patent. quotiens mox rapta uidebo uela notis plenasque malis clamoribus undas! non meus Orion aut saeuis Pliade Taurus mortis causa nouae; miseris tu gentibus, Argo, fata paras nec iam merito tibi, Tiphy, quietum ulla pares uolet Elysium manesque piorum.’} \]

\[\text{‘let the ships come from Pharos and Tyre and let them think it is permitted. Soon, so often I will see sails ripped by the south winds and the waves full of terrible cries! Not my Orion or cruel Taurus with the Pleiades will be the cause of a new kind of death. You,} \]

\[\text{haec ait et pontum pater ac turbata reponit litora depellitque Notos, quos caerulus horror et madido grauis unda sinu longeque secutus imber ad Aeoliae tendunt simul aequora portae.} \]

\[\text{645} \]

\[\text{650} \]

\[\text{55 Cf. Verg. Aen. 1.142. See Zissos (2006, 85 n.19; 91-95).} \]
Argo, prepare the fates of wretched humans [and] Tiphys, no longer do you deserve any mother to wish for you quiet Elysium and the shades of the righteous.” The Father says this and restores the sea and the disturbed shores and banishes the south winds, which the terrifying sky and waves heavy with their damp swell and the rain following at a distance simultaneously held toward the waters of the Aeolian gate.

Neptune wants the Argo to continue its journey in order that many more ships will follow where it leads and sail across the oceans. But he wants this precisely because it will lead to more shipwrecks (*rapta uela*) and human suffering (*malis clamoribus, miseris gentibus*). He argues that the cause of future shipwrecks will not be the constellations, which will be ignorantly blamed, but rather the human belief that sailing is permitted (*permissumque putent*). Certainly Neptune has a very different understanding of Jupiter’s declaration or is even actively ignoring it because the sea is his domain. Jupiter may have sanctioned the Argo’s voyage but Neptune could easily have ended it. Although Jupiter is likely aware of the consequences for humanity caused by the Argo’s voyage, the Argonauts certainly are not. Neptune is very clear about this and addresses the Argo itself, blaming it for the suffering of all future peoples sailing on the ocean (*miseris tu gentibus, Argo, / fata paras*). Thus Neptune confirms the fears of the Argonauts themselves who worry that they have violated (*temerare*) sacred waters (*sacros fluctus*). The Argo and the Argonauts are spared in the short term but they have doomed future generations to die horrible deaths at sea while Neptune will receive their corpses as well as the sacrifices and libations of those who manage to survive their voyages.

Jason confirms this when he proceeds to pour a libation to thank the gods, and Neptune in particular, for ending the storm and saving them. Jason’s prayer makes it clear that he is unaware of the storm’s origin (V. Fl. 1.670-675):

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'seu casus nox ista fuit seu, uoluitur axis
ut superum, sic stare †t opus† tollique uicissim
pontus habet seu te subitae noua puppis imago
armorumque hominumque truces consurgere in iras
```

30
impulit, haec luerim satis et tua numina, rector, iam fuerint meliora mihi.’

“Whether night was the cause or, as the axis of the heavens turns, thus the sea in turn stands still and is raised up or the sudden appearance of a ship and armed men drove you to savage anger, let this have been enough payment and, lord, may your divinity now become more favorable to me.”

Jason offers multiple explanations for the storm from chance to the influence of the constellations to the gods’ anger at the sudden appearance of armed men on the ocean. He addresses Neptune directly calling him rector, asking that they may safely reach land once again, and promising that sacrifices will be made and altars to Neptune established wherever they go. Jason has Neptune to thank for saving them but once again he is mistaken as to the cause of the storm, attributing it to Neptune’s anger rather than that of Boreas and the other winds. This again shows the Argonauts’ ignorance about the sea and the workings and motivations of the gods, a common theme in epic.56

Furthermore, the distinction between armorum and hominum (1.673) in Neptune’s speech is crucial since the two are not the same and are not interchangeable. Armorum is literally “arms” but is best construed as “armed men” (uirorum armatorum). Hominum is not the same as uirorum, which, as Spaltenstein argues, would denote only the Argonauts, whereas hominum denotes all humankind.57 Thus humankind is placed in opposition to nature, Neptune, Boreas, and the other wind gods. Jason offers as one possibility that the presence of armed men and humans in general on the sea offended Neptune but he shows his piety by offering to honor Neptune, thereby mitigating any real or perceived transgression. The simile at 1.682-685 comparing Jason to a priest highlights his piety and the effectiveness of his prayer.

56 Cf. Hannibal’s crossing of the Alps in the Punic and the Argives’ journey through Nemea in the Thebaid.

57 Spaltenstein (2002, 256) “Hominum n’est pas vironum, lequel montrerait les seuls Argonautes, en guerriers...et ce terme generalise avec l’idee traditionnelle que les humains n’avaient pas le droit de s’aventurer sur la mer (n.1,193).”
Rupes Cyaneae in Argonautica 4

The Argonauts’ will to continue on their journey is tested by the Cyanean Rocks, also called the Symplegades, which crash together smashing any ship that attempts to sail between them. In the preceding part of the poem, the Argonauts receive a prophecy from Phineus who tells them what they will encounter at the Cyanean Rocks and beyond (4.553-624). Phineus does not, however, reveal to Jason what will happen once they reach the rocks, instead limiting his information to geographical and ethnographical information about the area. Valerius uses this prophecy to build suspense in anticipation of the Argonauts reaching the rocks. The Argonauts’ passage through the Cyanaean Rocks is thematically similar to the beginning of their voyage in book 1 but with key differences. In book 1, Jason and the Argonauts were concerned that their voyage was a transgression both of the sea and of natural laws decreeing that humans should stay on land. Jason’s initial prayer before the voyage (1.194-203), the Argonauts’ complaints once they were at sea (1.627-632), and the reaction of Boreas to their presence on the sea (1.598-607) illustrate this clearly as does the repeated language of transgression (e.g. *inlicitas undas*). Although the crossing of the Cyanean Rocks seems like it might be an appropriate scene to repeat such language, Valerius instead takes the opportunity to illustrate the gods’ continued approval of their voyage and Jason’s growth as a hero in contrast to the other Argonauts. When they approach the Cyanean Rocks all of the Argonauts, except Jason, are struck with a sudden fear (4.637-646):

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Omnibus extemplo saeua sub imagine rupes
Cyaneae propior[que] labor. quando adfore quaque
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58 On human ignorance in the Symplegades passage see Ferenczi (2014, 147).

59 On the passage in general see Murgatroyd (2009, 305-337). Valerius makes a number of changes to Apollonius’ model to increase the suspense of the scene including delaying Athena’s approach to leave it uncertain whether or not she will come to the Argonauts’ aid and eliminating Apollonius’ dove that flies between the Cyanean Rocks in advance of the Argonauts thereby deflating the anticipation and suspense of their passage by showing they will succeed.
parte putent? stant ora metu nec fessa recedunt lumina diuerras circum seruantibus undas, cum procul audit sonitus insanaque saxa, saxa neque illa uiris, sed praecipitata profundo siderei pars uisa poli. dumque oclus instant, ferre fugam maria ante ratem, maria ipsa repente deficere aduersosque uident discedere montes, omnibus et gelida rapti formidine remi.

Immediately there appears in their minds the cruel image of the Cyanean Rocks and the nearing labor. When and on which side should they think they will be? Their faces stand still with fear nor do the watchers remove their gaze from the waves tossing around them, when from far off the sounds and the raging rocks are heard, nor did they seem like rocks to the men but rather like part of the pole of heaven cast into the deep. While their approach quickens, they see the ocean flee from before the ship [and] the sea itself suddenly coming to an end and they see the opposing mountains separate, and every man’s oar was seized by icy fear.

Unlike the storm with which Boreas attacked the Argonauts in book 1, the mere thought of the Cyanean Rocks terrifies them. Valerius builds the suspense by then adding the sounds of the Symplegades as heard from afar (procul audit sonitus) before they finally come into view for the Argonauts (siderei pars uisa poli). The sight of the sea being sucked away before them by the separating rocks is too much for the crew and they drop their oars in fear. This repeats the Argonauts’ earlier helplessness when their oars were torn from their hands by the storm in book 1 (excussi manibus remi, 1.618) but leaves them looking fainthearted and cowardly. This provides Jason with the opportunity to prove his leadership abilities and exhort his men to continue (4.649-655):

‘ubi nunc promissa superba ingentesque minae, mecum quibus ista secuti? idem Amyci certe uiso timor omnibus antro.\(^{60}\) perculerat; stetimus tamen et deus adfuit ausis. quin iterum idem aderit, credo, deus.’ haec ubi fatus corripit abieti remumque locumque Phaleri et trahit, insequitur flamma pudore iuuentus.  

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\(^{60}\) The manuscripts have uiso which Ehlers emends to uisus but Murgatroyd (2009, 312-313) maintains the manuscripts’ uiso with a full stop after antro.
“Where now is your promised pride and great threats with which you pursued this task with me? Certainly it was the same fear for us all when we saw the cave of Amycus. It struck us but nevertheless we stood strong and the god was favorable to our undertaking. And once again the same god, I believe, will aid us.” Saying this, he takes the oar and the place of downcast Phalerus and rows while the crew, their shame inflamed, follows.

Unlike his earlier prayer (1.194-203) in which he was concerned about the apparent transgression he was about to commit, here Jason is absolutely convinced, or hopeful in order to reassure his crew, that the gods are on his side and that they will come to his aid, as Phineus hinted (di tibi progresso propius, di forsitan ipsi / auxilium mentemque dabunt, V. Fl. 4.567-568). Jason stands out from the other Argonauts for his leadership and courage and replaces a certain Phalerus at his oar to set an example for the men. Whereas in the storm in book 1 the Argonauts fear for their lives and believe that they have profaned the sea, once they overcome their initial fear of the Cyanean Rocks they are driven by shame (pudor) to follow Jason’s example and trust that the gods will help them.

Let us step back for a moment and compare the Argonauts’ crossing of these two different boundaries: the land/ocean boundary and the Cyanean Rocks. The former is much more important both for the narrative and for the larger implications of the Argonauts’ voyage. The land/ocean boundary marks a significant transition for human expansion and travel throughout the world as it represents the beginning of sailing while the Cyanean Rocks are a barrier to the Black Sea alone. Despite Helen Slaney’s assertion that in the Argonautica others have already sailed (e.g. the Lemnians, Hypsipyle’s father Thoas) before the Argo, she acknowledges the irony of Valerius’ Argo being the first ship due to the literary precedents for the story, especially Apollonius, and that Valerius plays with his own literary belatedness. Any competing 

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61 Murgatroyd (2009, 313) notes that “Deus here (and in 653) is intentionally vague (Jason does not know which deity), and he is careful to act quickly (at 654 f.), before the crew have time to question which deus he means and how he knows about the intervention.”
narratives in the story fail to obscure the dominant narrative of the voyage of the Argo. Furthermore, the crossing of the Cyanean Rocks is an unprecedented event within the narrative and shows Valerius’ Argo truly breaking new ground with the Cyaneans opened and thereafter never moving again. As mentioned above, there is a significant contrast between the Argonauts’ ignorance in book 1 and Jason’s knowledge, or educated guess, that the gods will aid them which, while not undermining the importance of the Cyanean Rocks, removes some of the uncertainty of whether they will cross the Cyaneans as already hinted by Phineus. This points to a pattern of developing experience and knowledge, a sure sign of progress, and Jason’s increased confidence in the gods who, despite Neptune’s ulterior motives, have not yet let him down in his voyage across the unknown sea.

2. Hannibal and Crossing Mountains in *Punica 3*

Geographical boundaries also play an important role in Silius Italicus’ *Punica* and illustrate its world-spanning nature. Geographic boundaries like the Pyrenees and Alps are of vital importance specifically as dividers between peoples and regions. The Alps in the *Punica* are the most important geographic barrier, one which is closed to mortals, equated with the very walls of Rome (Sil. 3.509), and is supposed to be a bulwark against invaders such as Hannibal. Valerius’ Jupiter declares that all boundaries should be opened (*pateant montes siluaeque lacusque / cunctaque clastra maris*, V. Fl. 1.556-557) and his declaration *pateant* seems to be echoed later by Hannibal on the field of Cannae boasting that he opened the Alps (*cui patuere Alpes*, Sil. 11.217). In a sense Silius’ Jupiter does open this boundary by allowing Hannibal to cross the Alps to test the Romans, as he makes clear in his prophecy (*hac ego Martis / mole uiros*)

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63 See exempla of this motif in n.97.
spectare paro atque expendere bello, Sil. 3.573-574). Just as in the Argonautica, however, there is resistance to this expansion, albeit less explicit. While Boreas and the other winds attack the Argonauts and clearly challenge their expedition and, as they see it, profaning of the seas, natura itself seems to stand in Hannibal’s way. Upon approaching the Alps, Hannibal’s soldiers, just like the Argonauts, become nervous and hesitate to cross a sacred boundary (sacros in fines) while bearing arms since natura was preventing them (natura prohibente, Sil. 3.502). Here again we hear of an end or boundary defined as a finis. Unlike Vergil’s imperium sine fine or the finis that Jupiter declares for the Greeks in the Argonautica, Hannibal’s soldiers come up against a physical boundary in their way in the Punica and elements of his crossing of the Alps connect it with Valerius’ Argonautica.

From the beginning of the Punica, Silius establishes the Carthaginians and Hannibal as transgressors of treaties and norms.⁶⁴ Indeed, in his oath to his father as a young boy Hannibal swears to break the treaty that binds the peace between Carthage and Rome (Martem cohibentia pacta, Sil. 1.116).⁶⁵ Silius furthermore shows that transgression of natural law is innate in Hannibal’s character by stating that he he never gets tired and even denies sleep to natura and stays up the whole night armed (somnumque negabat / naturae noctemque uigil ducebat in armis, Sil. 1.245-246).⁶⁶ Although this characteristic of Hannibal appears in a list of otherwise laudable traits for any general, his excess is noteworthy and marks Hannibal as abnormal or even inhuman. This description comes right after Silius states that Hannibal was the first to undertake

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⁶⁴ Sil. 1.5-6, sacri cum perfida pacti / gens Cadmea super regno certamina mouit; cf. Livy 26.17.5, 30.22.6. On Carthaginian perfidia see Feeney (1982, 14).

⁶⁵ Hannibal is very much a tool of Juno whose “enmity toward Rome in the Punica is an extension of her ancient hatred of Troy, and her role in the epic is in many respects a reprisal of her role in the Aeneid” (Marks 2005a, 15); see also von Albrecht (1964, 167-171), Laudizi (1989, 73-92), and Feeney (1991, 303-304).

⁶⁶ As noted by Marks (2005a, 15) this is part of his characterization as someone “marked by restlessness, impatience, and haste” at least for the first ten books until after Cannae. Here natura indicates what is customary for people and can be defined as ‘human nature’ or even ‘human necessity’ since everyone must sleep sometime.
any labor (*primus sumpsisse laborem*, 1.242), an early indication of his Herculean character. However, as seen later in the poem, he will emulate the negative aspects of Hercules’ character while failing to live up to the Stoic ideal that Hercules represents.\(^6^7\) This is seen early in the poem in the crossing of the Pyrenees which Silius associates with Hercules’ rape of Pyrene and later in Hannibal’s crossing of the Alps. The most significant of the many boundaries he crosses in the poem, the Alps, like the sea for the Argonauts, represent the point of no return for Hannibal and the crossing is one of his greatest achievements.

**The Pyrenees**

As Hannibal begins his march toward Italy after the fall of Saguntum, his first obstacle is the Pyrenees, the crossing of which Silius uses to foreshadow Hannibal’s ultimate failure and to set the tone for his boundary crossings.\(^6^8\) As Hannibal approaches the Pyrenees he disturbs the peace of the Roman world (3.415-419):

\begin{verbatim}
At Pyrenaei frondosa cacumina montis
turbata Poenus terrarum pace petebat.
Pyrene celsa nimbosi uerticis arce
diuisos Celtis late prospectat Hiberos
atque aeterna tenet magnis diuortia terris.
\end{verbatim}

But with the world’s peace disturbed, the Carthaginian sought the leafy peaks of the Pyrenees. From the high throne of its cloudy peak Pyrene looks far and wide over the Iberians divided from the Celts and maintains an eternal division between these great lands.


\(^{68}\) On the passage as a whole see Augoustakis (2003), Ripoll (2006), and Ripoll (2009).
The collocation of *terra* and *pax* often occurs in constructions expressing the proliferation of peace.\(^69\) Here, however, peace is disturbed throughout the world (*turbata...terrarum pace*, 3.416) when Hannibal crosses the Pyrenees and “since the purpose of mountains is to divide, to keep one thing from another, to cross the mountains is in a double sense to transgress the will of *Nature*.\(^70\) Silius establishes Hannibal’s transgression of the Pyrenees as just as important if not more so than the crossing of the Ebro and his attack on Saguntum in ending the peace established by the First Punic War. Silius calls the Pyrenees an eternal division for the two lands on either side (*aeterna...diuortia*, Sil. 3.419), which emphasizes both the Pyrenees’ role in dividing the Hiberi from the Celti as a permanent boundary between Spain and Gaul. A *diuortium* is not only a barrier but also a ‘dividing line (in time)’ or a ‘turning point’ or ‘crisis’.\(^71\) The Pyrenees thus act in part as a turning point at the beginning of Hannibal’s campaign. Further reinforcing this reading is the catalogue of Hannibal’s forces that appears immediately prior to the Pyrenees passage in book 3 (3.222-414), a traditional indicator of the beginning of a campaign or war in epic poetry.\(^72\)

Silius connects Hannibal’s crossing of the Pyrenees with an *aetion* for how the Pyrenees got their name (3.420-426):

\[
\begin{align*}
nomen\ Bebrycia\ duxere\ a\ uirgine\ colles, \\
hospitis\ Alcidae\ crimen,\ qui,\ sorte\ laborum \\
Geryonae\ peteret\ cum\ longa\ tricorporis\ arua, \\
possessus\ Baccho\ saeua\ Bebrycis\ in\ aula \\
lugendam\ formae\ sine\ uirginitate\ reliquit \\
Pyrenen,\ letique\ deus,\ si\ credere\ fas\ est, \\
causa\ fuit\ leti\ miserae\ deus.
\end{align*}
\]

\(420\)

\(425\)


\(^{70}\) Murphy (2004, 153).

\(^{71}\) OLD s.v. 2c and 2d.

\(^{72}\) Cf. the catalogue of Argives in *Thebaid* 4.
The mountains got their name from the daughter of Bebryx and the crime of his guest Hercules who, when by chance during his labors he was seeking the great fields of triple-bodied Geryon, overcome by wine in the hall of cruel Bebryx he left behind lamentable Pyrene without the virginity of her body, and the god, if it is right to believe it, the god was the cause of the miserable girl’s death.

Silius’ aetion for the name of the mountain range details not a heroic achievement of Hercules’ but rather a brutal crime (crimen, 3.421). Hercules raped the maiden Pyrene who, after giving birth to a snake, flees into the woods and is torn apart by wild animals (Sil. 3.420-441). Pyrene is turbata, thrown into a confused and disturbed state, the same word that Silius uses to describe the state of peace in the world upon Hannibal’s ascent of the mountains (3.416). This even more intimately connects Pyrene’s rape with Hannibal’s crossing of the Pyrenees. Not only are peace and Pyrene both turbata, but just as Hercules sought Geryone (peteret, 3.422) so does Hannibal seek the peaks of the Pyrenees (petebat, 3.416), the same peaks that resounded with Hercules’ cries after finding Pyrene dead and torn to pieces. Hannibal’s ascent of the Pyrenees echoes and repeats the Pyrene story.  

Silius cleverly elides Hannibal’s journey over the mountains: he goes from seeking the mountain-tops (3.416) to already having crossed them (transcenderat, 3.443). What lies in between is the Pyrene story which communicates the significance of Hannibal’s crossing. Yet even when the pluperfect transcenderat tells us that Hannibal has already completed his journey, what he has crossed is not simply the mountains but the very forests where Pyrene mourned and was torn to pieces and the ill-fated halls of Bebryx where Hercules was seized with a drunken passion. Pyrene is the Pyrenees and, assimilated to the place itself (defletumque tenent montes per saecula nomen, 3.441), she is violated again by Hannibal who, ever striving to emulate and

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73 Augoustakis (2003).
surpass Hercules, is shown to be emulating “the wrong examples set by the demigod, the precise instances when Hercules himself violates his Stoic, heroic principles.”

The Alps

The Alps appear consistently throughout the *Punica* and, along with other mountain ranges such as the Pyrenees, are presented as significant geographical boundaries between Hannibal and Rome and between Rome and the rest of the world. In this way, mountains are a central component of Silius’ view of the 3rd century Roman republic and his conception of how the world has changed from the 3rd century up to the empire of his time. While boundaries such as mountain ranges remained important features of the interior of Roman territory, the empire had long since expanded beyond the confines of the Alps or Pyrenees. Thus Silius looks back to a time when the Alps had been a significant defense for Italy.

From the beginning of the *Punica*, the Alps are portrayed as an important obstacle that Hannibal must overcome. They appear in this way twice early in book 1 and are presented in conjunction with the Capitoline in Rome as peaks to conquer (*aut rapidis fertur per summas passibus Alpes*, Sil. 1.65; *Alpes Tarpeiaque saxa*, 1.117). In this way Silius frames Hannibal’s future campaign as a series of ascents, first over the Pyrenees and the Alps and then up the Capitoline. As Jiří Šubrt notes, the motif of crossing the Alps creates “the breaking point in the

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74 Augoustakis (2003, 253).

75 On the Alps in the *Punica* see Bassett (1966, 268), Feeney (1982, 82-83), Vessey (1982), Šubrt (1991), and Bona (1998, 102-111). See Hardie (1989) for the connections between Hannibal’s march, in particular the river-crossings and the ascent of the Alps, with Vergil’s *Aeneid*. Hardie (1989, 15) sees “Hannibal at the walls and Hannibal’s attempt to climb the Capitol” as the two unifying themes of the poem [emphasis original].

76 Feeney (1982, 82-83) notes “the Alps are not out of place with *superi* and *Tarpeia saxa*, for they are wholly natural barriers to the land of Italy.” Cf. Sil. 3.509-510. See also von Albrecht (1964, 24-46) on the *moenia Romae* motif in the *Punica*.

77 Partisans of Vitellius actually attacked the Capitoline in 69 CE from which a young Domitian barely managed to escape.
flow of the narrative from which everything develops…therefore the narrative comes back repetitively in many reminiscences to this fatal point.”

Silius also compares the falling walls of Saguntum to cliffs falling in the Alps, presenting the Alps as walls (Sil. 1.370-372) and establishing the Alps-as-moenia Romae motif repeated later in book 3 (3.509). Later in book 1, after Hannibal is wounded, the narrator declares that “if the spear had pierced deeper into him raging, the Alps would stand closed for mortals” (propius si pressa furenti / hasta foret, clausae starent mortalibus Alpes, Sil. 1.545-546). This could potentially be interpreted as presenting the crossing of the Alps as a positive achievement for mankind, but Silius’ condemnation of the crossing in book 17 suggests otherwise. Furthermore, the characterization of the Alps as the northern protective barrier for Italy and as the moenia Romae suggests that from the Romans’ perspective the Alps should remain closed, especially to invading armies.

Once they are through Gaul, the Carthaginians are faced with the Alps which cause them to forget their previous labors out of fear (3.477-486).

Sed iam praeteritos ultra meminisse labores conspectae propius dempsere pauentibus Alpes. cuncta gelu canaque aeternum grandine tecta atque aeui glaciem cohibent; riget ardua montis aetherii facies surgentique obuia Phoebo duratas nescit flammis mollire pruinias.

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80 Silius is also exaggerating Hannibal’s role as the Alps had previously been crossed by the Gauls that sacked Rome in 390 BCE and certainly by local Gauls.

81 Augoustakis and Littlewood (forthcoming) note the two aspects of Hannibal’s transgression, namely, “the violation of sacred space and challenging the cosmos” and the similarity between this passage and similar “passages of sublimity in Flavian epic, where horror seizes men, gods or shades who witness unnatural sights (Stat. Theb. 8.4-5, 107-110, 136-7) or shrink from penetrating new frontiers, with Valerius’ Argonauts in the early stages of their voyage, terrified alike by storm (1.625-26) and calm seas (2.41-42).”
quantum Tartareus regni pallentis hiatus
ad manes imos atque atrae stagna paludis
a supera tellure patet, tam longa per auras
erigitur tellus et caelum intercipit umbra.

But now the sight of the approaching Alps removed all memory of their previous labors from the fearful men. The whole mountain range is forever covered in ice and snow and contains all the ice of eternity. The high face of the lofty mountain is stiff and though it faces the rising sun it is unwilling to soften its hardened rime in the sun’s rays. As deep as the Tartarean chasm of the pale kingdom opens to the deepest shades and the pools of the black swamp from the upper earth, so high through the air does the earth rise and clip the sky with its shadow.

The Alps are dominated by harsh winter and ice that never thaws and their eternal (aeternum, 3.479) covering of ice and snow recalls Silius’ description of the Pyrenees as an eternal barrier between Spain and Gaul (3.419). They also rise as high into the sky as Tartarus is deep, which suggests that in crossing the Alps Hannibal is attempting the equivalent of descending into the Underworld. His undertaking is monumental: he is crossing a fundamental boundary of the world, a trial he must undergo in order to prove his worthiness to challenge Rome. Just as in the Pyrenees, Hercules has preceded Hannibal here too (3.494-499):

mixtus Athos Tauro Rhodopeque adiuncta Mimanti
Ossaque cum Pelio cunque Haemo cesserit Othrys.
primus inexpertas adiit Tirynthius arces.
scidentem nubes frangentemque ardua montis
spectarunt superi longisque ab origine saeclis
interemerata gradu magna ui saxa domantem.

Athos combined with Taurus, Rhodope joined to Mimas, Ossa with Pelion, and Othrys to Haemus all yield [to the Alps]. The Tirynthian was the first to enter the untouched heights. The gods watched him split the clouds and break the mountaintop and conquer by force the great stones unviolated by footsteps from the beginning of time.

Silius explicitly compares Hannibal to Hercules and presents him as literally following in Hercules’ footsteps. The Alps had been pure, undefiled, and unstained (interemerata) by anyone’s

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82 Cf. Liv. 21.36.5 ueterem niuem intactam.

83 According to Vergil (Aen. 6.577-579), Tartarus is twice as deep as Olympus is high, making the Alps twice as tall as Olympus if Silius has this passage in mind and Silius certainly knows his Vergil.
steps, but Hercules had mastered them by force (ui) recalling his drunken violation of Pyrene.\textsuperscript{84} Silius’ description of the mountains as undefiled, intemerata, looks forward to his condemnation of this violation in book 17 (temerata...secreta, 17.500-501) and serves to mark Hercules and Hannibal as violators of sacred natural boundaries. The variation in our judgment of their actions lies in the differences between them: Hercules is a god, Hannibal is not; Hannibal attacks Rome, Hercules helps it.\textsuperscript{85} But, as we will see in chapter 4, Hannibal must do this to provide for Rome the challenge that Jupiter requires. Yet, when Hannibal approaches the Alps, his soldiers hesitate to go further (3.500-505):

\begin{verbatim}
At miles dubio tardat uestigia gressu,
impia ceu sacros in fines arma per orbem
natura prohibente ferant diuisque repugnet
contra quae ductor – non Alpibus ille nec ullo
turbatus terrore loci, sed languida maestus
corda uirum fount hortando reuocatque uigorem:
\end{verbatim}

But the soldiers slow their steps, hesitant to advance lest they bring impious weapons across sacred boundaries throughout the world, though natura forbade it, and march in opposition to the gods, to which their general responds (he is not bothered by the Alps or any fear of the place) but he sternly rouses his men’s faint hearts and urging them on recalls their strength.

Silius contrasts the soldiers’ steps (uestigia) with Hercules’ steps (gradu) with which he previously mastered the Alps. Although Hercules, as a demigod, gets a pass for violating the previously undefiled Alps (Silius does not condemn his actions), the soldiers view the Alps as a sacred (sacros) boundary and the plural possibly suggests that it is one of many that they will cross as they bring war throughout the world (per orbem). This is similar to the Argonauts’ view of the ocean as sacred (sacrosque iterum seponite fluctus, V. Fl. 1.632) when set upon by the winds. They too believe that they have profaned the seas by sailing on them. Silius, however,

\textsuperscript{84} intemeratus OLD s.v. 1.

\textsuperscript{85} See the story of Hercules and Cacus in Aeneid 8.
adds *natura prohibente*, which could simply mean ‘the nature of the Alps as steep mountains stood in their way’ or an ‘impersonal *natura* (i.e. what is right or customary) is acting against them.’\(^{86}\) The active participle *prohibente* suggests a personified *natura* that is actively opposing the Carthaginian army. *Natura* here may be akin to natural law or a creative force; either way, the active participle indicates a personified *natura*.\(^{87}\) The entire passage *ceu...ferant...repugnet*, is an embedded focalization, but an ambiguous one.\(^{88}\) *Ceu*, ‘as if,’ could be expressing the perspective and thoughts of the poet, of the soldiers themselves, or both. I am inclined to believe that the soldiers themselves see it this way since they slow their advance voluntarily. This suggests a belief that since there is apparent resistance (*natura prohibente*) to their advance, the Alps must be a *sacer finis* from the soldiers’ point of view. This indicates a grander, cosmic *natura*, one operating in the sense of what is right or customary that is opposing them.

The Carthaginian troops also worry that in addition to crossing sacred boundaries while armed, they are fighting against the gods (*diuis repugnet*). Here Silius introduces theomachy, and the punishment they would incur, as a major concern for Hannibal’s soldiers, but not for Hannibal himself, who chides his soldiers for being afraid of the mountains (3.506-511):

‘non pudet obsequio superum fessosque secundis  
post belli decus atque acies dare terga niusosis  
montibus et segnes summittere rupibus arma?  
nunc, o nunc, socii, dominantis moenia Romae  
credite uos summumque Iouis conscendere culmen.  
hic labor Ausoniam et dabit hic in uincula Thybrim.’

\(^{86}\) Cf. Cic. *Arch. 21 Pontum...et ipsa natura et regione uallatum.*

\(^{87}\) On the many meanings of *natura* see Pellicer (1966) and in Lucretius see Merrill (1891). Cf. Cic. *ND 1.66* in which Cotta, in refuting Epicureanism as presented by Velleius, argues that whether true or false, at any rate the ideas of the natural philosophers (*physicorum oracula*) are more likely true than Epicurean ideas, particularly atomism whereby all things are formed by chance rather than by any compelling *natura* (*cogente natura*); cf. Cic. *ND 1.67 moderante natura.*

\(^{88}\) In an embedded focalization the narrator embeds the focalization of a character by “recounting what the character is seeing, feeling, or thinking without turning him/her into a secondary narrator-focalizer” through the use of direct speech (de Jong 2014, 50).
“Are you not ashamed to be tired of the allegiance of the gods and successes after the glory and battles of war? Are you not ashamed to turn your backs to snowy mountains and, sluggish, to lay down your arms to rocks? Now, o now, comrades, believe you are climbing the walls of despotic Rome and the high peak of Jupiter. This undertaking will put Ausonia and the Tiber in chains.”

Hannibal misunderstands his soldiers. While they are afraid of crossing sacros fines he thinks they are simply intimidated by the Alps since he himself has no fear of them. He does not understand that there are such things as sacred natural boundaries that should not be crossed. Instead, he views his soldiers as faltering in the face of a new obstacle. Hannibal shames (pudet) them into pressing on, arguing that they have been successful thus far and that they have the compliance or allegiance of the gods (obsequio superum), revealing his ignorance.\(^{89}\) Rather than worrying about theomachy in the way that his soldiers are concerned, Hannibal actually uses it as a selling point: he instructs his soldiers to think of the Alps as if they are the Capitoline itself (summum culmen Iouis). With Juno as his patron goddess that sent him on this campaign, Hannibal aligns Jupiter with Rome and urges his men to attack the god’s temple.\(^{90}\) Hannibal does not understand the gods or their intentions and, as Silius makes clear later in book 3 in the conversation between Jupiter and Venus, he does not have the gods on his side and has in fact been duped by his patroness Juno.\(^{91}\) He is little more than a pawn in Jupiter’s plan to challenge Rome.

Not only are the Alps a sacred boundary that was previously undefiled, but by urging his soldiers to think of them as the walls of Rome Hannibal makes the Alps a particularly Roman boundary, a barrier between Carthage and Rome with political significance for the latter. This

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\(^{89}\) Ignorance is one of the hallmarks of these scenes in which humans cross boundaries into unknown territory. Cf. the Argonauts in Argonautica 1, as discussed above.

\(^{90}\) Jupiter then cannot be one of the superi whose obsequium Hannibal claims to have.

\(^{91}\) See Vessey (1982).
descriptor is also found in Livy’s account but there are crucial differences between the two. Whereas Livy’s account has Hannibal presenting the Alps as both the walls of Italy and Rome (moeniaque eos tum transcendere non Italiae modo sed etiam urbis Romanae, Liv. 21.35.9), Silius removes any mention of the walls of Italy to focus solely on the city of Rome itself. This has the effect of making the capture of Rome the only goal that matters to Silius’ Hannibal.92

The moenia Romae that Hannibal claims to be mastering are the same moenia Romae that Vergil immortalized in the proem to the Aeneid and which stand as a symbol of the city and the republic (genus unde Latinum / Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae, Aen. 1.7). Thus, whereas Hannibal’s crossing of the Pyrenees disturbed the peace throughout the world, his crossing of the Alps represents an attack on the city of Rome itself and the beginning of the war. Ironically Hannibal will not conquer Rome and will not scale its walls or the Capitoline.93 Hannibal also casts crossing the Alps as the one labor that will deliver to him all of Italy and the Tiber and, hence, Rome. The image of the Tiber, enslaved and in chains, is important because it connects Hannibal with Scipio in his triumph in book 17 in that they both see themselves as conquering not only their enemies but also entire lands and geographical features like mountain ranges and rivers.

Hannibal’s claim to be mastering the Alps (dominantis, 3.509) echoes Hercules’ crossing of the mountain range (domantem, 3.499). Hannibal not only claims to rival Hercules but seeks to surpass his heroic model by forging his own passage through the Alps where no one has gone before and is, allegedly, the first to summit the mountains by his own path (3.512-517):

nec mora commotum promissis ditibus agmen

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92 Silius changes the time when Hannibal makes this speech to his soldiers. In Livy, Hannibal gives his speech once he reaches the summit of the Alps as a way of recasting what his army had already achieved. Silius, however, moves the speech to before the Carthaginian army has begun its ascent of the mountains.

93 Cf. Polynices and the Argives in Thebaid 4-6 where they sack Nemea but, ironically, will not sack Thebes.
Without delay he leads the army uphill, roused by his rich promises and directs his troops to leave behind the known footprints of great Hercules and to proceed in untrodden places and to advance by their own path. He, first, opens the inaccessible way and overcomes the heights and calls to his army from a high rock.

Without delay his soldiers resume their advance, although apparently not because of Hannibal’s chiding remarks or his rousing speech but instead because of the promised payment (promissis ditibus) that would be expected after sacking Rome. Just as Hannibal urges them to imagine that they are climbing the walls of Rome so does he create his own version of events as they cross— for as Hannibal advances Silius does not tell us that he is in fact marching where even Hercules never went, but Hannibal himself proclaims (edicit) that he is doing so. Likewise, he declares that he and his army are advancing into crudis locorum. While crudus most often means ‘rough’ or ‘savage’ it can also mean ‘young, fresh, and immature.’ In claiming that his army is leaving behind Hercules’ footsteps Hannibal presents their path forward as a trek into new, unexplored territory. Furthermore, my reading of proprio strengthens this interpretation. Delz’s apparatus criticus for line 515 reads “proprio sc. Hannibalis, non turmarum.” But why would Hannibal proclaim to be leaving his own path when, as seen in line 516, his army is clearly following his lead? Proprio then refers to Hercules’ path, which Hannibal and his army are leaving behind.

The next lines seem, and are often read, to suggest that Hannibal succeeds in surpassing his mythical rival (arduam primus / exsuperat). However, primus does not necessarily mean that he is the first to traverse the path he took, but simply that he is in the lead, the first of all his

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94 OLD s.v.
men.\textsuperscript{95} His claim to surpass Hercules is just that, an empty claim that is revealed to be the product of Hannibal’s own self-fashioning. This does not detract from his accomplishment as a leader and strategist. However, it is impossible to know whether or not Hannibal believes what he is telling his soldiers. If he does, he is almost certainly delusional. If he does not, it is possible that he is using the Hercules myth to motivate his soldiers to continue across the Alps. I am inclined to believe the former since Silius could have informed us of Hannibal’s mental state if it differed from what we infer from his actions, a technique not without precedent. Indeed in \textit{Aeneid} 1, Vergil shows Aeneas putting on a brave face for his men while himself being disheartened and discouraged.\textsuperscript{96} This is further reinforced by Hannibal’s repeated references to his conquest of the Alps throughout the poem as one of his greatest achievements.\textsuperscript{97}

\textbf{Semiferi in the Alps}

The final obstacle before reaching the summit of the Alps is a band of native inhabitants of the Alps that unexpectedly attack Hannibal and his army. With the Alps themselves the major obstacle, Hannibal does not expect people to attack him, especially considering the inhospitable nature of the mountains (3.540-546):

\begin{quote}
Iamque super clades atque importuna locorum
illuie rigidaeque comae squalore perenni
horrida semiferi promunt e rupibus ora,
atque effusa cauis exesi pumicis antris
Alpina inuadit manus adsuetoque uigore
per dumos notasque niues atque inuia pernix
clausum montiuagis infestat cursibus hostem.
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
540
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
545
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{OLD} s.v. 1.

\textsuperscript{96} Verg. \textit{Aen.} 1.208-209 \textit{talia uoce refert curisque ingentibus aeger / spem uultu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem.}


48
And now on top of the disasters and difficulties of the place, half-animal people, their hair stiff with dirt and constant filth, stick their horrible faces from out of the rocks, and the Alpine people attack, pouring out of the deep caves of hollow stone with the vigor that comes from familiarity through the thickets and known snow and pathless places, [and] persistently harass the enemy trapped in the mountain paths.

These new enemies that Hannibal encounters are not even human but *semiferi*, half-animal. The word *semiferus*, which does not appear often in extant Latin, describes nonhuman species or mythological monsters, the most common of which is the centaur. This is a marked departure from Livy’s account of the attack by the local inhabitants who ambush and then harass the Carthaginian army on the way up the Alps, not at the summit, and are described as rough, uncultured peoples (*homines intonsi et inculti*, Liv. 21.32.7) or simply as barbarians (*barbari*, 21.34.6). Silius shifts the historical account to present these attackers as nonhumans who inhabit not the grassy slopes of the Alps but rather the summit, the most inhospitable part of the mountains. This has the effect of making the *semiferi* locals a nonhuman or less-than-human part of the Alpine landscape, another obstacle to overcome like the snow and cliffs, rather than a proper enemy like the Saguntines Hannibal already defeated or the Romans he looks to conquer. In this way the *semiferi* are part of the Alps themselves, a monstrous people shaped by the inhospitable climate at the summit of the Alps.

**Descent from the Alps**

Hannibal and his army make their way to the far side of the Alps and proceed to descend into Italy with difficulty (3.631-636):

\[
\text{ductor Agenoreus tumulis delatus iniquis} \\
\text{lapsantem dubio deuexa per inuia nisu} \\
\text{firmabat gressum atque uementia saxa premebat.} \\
\text{non acies hostisue tenet, sed prona minaci}
\]

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praerupto turbant et cautibus obuia rupes.

The Carthaginian leader delayed by the uneven ground was strengthening his footing slipping down the pathless slope because of his doubtful footing and was leaning on dewy rocks. No army or enemy holds them back, but the steep threatening path and the rocks meeting with cliffs vex them. They stand confined and lament the delay and the difficulty of the path.

Now rather than the ascent, the descent proves a challenge for Hannibal and the lack of a clear path (*inuia*) makes progress difficult. There is no opposing army or band of wild men hindering the Carthaginians, but instead the enemy is once again the landscape itself: the rocks and boulders of the mountains. Again, ignorance is a problem for Hannibal: since the way is pathless (*inuia*) it is difficult to know how to proceed. And his men, who previously were hesitant to set foot on the mountains, now are eager to advance to easier ground. Hannibal’s men use fire and water to shatter the boulders in their path and finally arrive in Italy (3.644-646):

\[
\text{atque aperit fessis antiqui regna Latini.} \\
\text{his tandem ignotas transgressus casibus Alpes} \quad 645 \\
\text{Taurinis ductor statuit tentoria campis.}
\]

And the ancient kingdom of the Latins opens to the tired army. Finally having crossed the unknown Alps through these hardships, the general established a camp on the fields of the Taurini.

At the end of the Carthaginians’ ordeal, Silius reviews the main themes of the preceding few hundred lines in just a few words: *aperit, ignotas, transgressus.* Hannibal has opened Italy to the rest of the world—a positive achievement for him but a disaster for Rome, which is now

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99 The Carthaginian army stands like a lover shut out from his beloved’s house in a *paraklausithyron* and now laments the delay (*maerentque moras et dura uiarum*).

open to attack by outsiders coming from the north. However, Jupiter’s speech to Venus in book 3, which I discuss in detail in chapter 4, presents this as a positive development: by challenging Rome with Hannibal’s invasion Jupiter will insure Rome will be strong for years to come. Silius also emphasizes Hannibal’s ignorance (ignotas) of the Alps. He is an explorer making his way through unknown territory, potentially resulting in unknown consequences. The mystery surrounding the Alps and Hannibal’s ignorance about them reminds us that he does not know his own fate or that Juno has given him an incomplete picture of the consequences of his invasion of Italy or that Jupiter has assured Venus (and the reader) that he will ultimately be defeated. Hannibal has crossed (transgressus) the Alps, but not without difficulties (casibus). Just like the Argonauts in the previous section, Hannibal and his army are faced with a nonhuman enemy: the topography of the Alps. Despite his coming victories, the Alps will remain one of Hannibal’s greatest victories and a key motif throughout the poem because of what Hannibal achieved through conflict with nature, rather than the Romans. Any challenges and hardships that Hannibal undergoes and overcomes elevate him and illustrate his heroic, epic nature. By crossing the Alps and repeating a feat of Hercules, Silius grants the Carthaginian near-heroic status while also associating Hannibal with Hercules’ negative characteristics. Yet any elevation of Hannibal ultimately serves to portray him as a greater violator of nature than Hercules and showcases the resilience and strength of Rome in withstanding his invasion. Because Scipio ultimately defeats Hannibal at Zama, Silius’ portrayal of Hannibal as a heroic, formidable figure only further elevates Rome and the Romans who defeat him.

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101 In reality, Rome had already been attacked from the north previously, most notably by the Gauls who, led by Brennus, sacked the city in 390 BCE. For Romans opening parts of the world previously inaccessible cf. Cic. Arch. 21 Populus enim Romanus aperuit Lucullo imperante Pontum, et regis quondam opibus et ipsa natura et regione uallatum; Curt. 9.6.20 Orsus a Macedonia, imperium Graeciae teneo, Thraciam et Illyrios subegi, Triballis Maedisque imperito; Asiam, qua Hellesponto, qua Rubro mari subluitur, possideo. Iamque haud procul absum fine mundi, quem egressus alien naturam, alien orbem aperire mihi statui.
3. Between Argos and Thebes in *Thebaid* 1, 4, and 5

Much like Valerius and Silius, Statius establishes an inhospitable environment as a geographical obstacle to the Argives’ progress in the *Thebaid*, both as Polynices leaves Thebes and tries to return. I will discuss the obstacle that the space between Thebes and Argos presents for Polynices and the Argives, the role of their limited knowledge, and the theme of delay. In book 1 Polynices faces a storm in Nemea while he attempts to get to Argos and in books 4 and 5 the Argives are delayed in Nemea by a drought.\(^\text{102}\) During their delay in Nemea, the Argives meet Hypsipyle and hear her story, a distraction which inadvertently causes the death of her charge, Opheltes (or Archemorus).\(^\text{103}\) Statius explicitly thematizes their delay and emphasizes that it is desirable because it delays the criminal war between Eteocles and Polynices. Similar to the Argonauts and Hannibal, the Argives cross a geographic boundary, constructed in part by Bacchus, enter Nemea ignorant of their path forward, and attack the naturescape standing in their way. In addition, throughout the first half of the poem, Statius alludes to Valerius’ *Argonautica* and presents the Argives as being similar to the Argonauts.\(^\text{104}\) These allusions solidify the parallels among the passages I have examined and further suggest the common appeal of the themes of exploration and transgression to the contemporary audience.

Polynices exul

When the now-exiled Polynices leaves Thebes he wanders through the wilderness of Aonia outside the city (*Oedipodionides furtim deserta pererrat / Aoniae, Theb. 1.313-314*) and


\(^\text{103}\) On the false bilingual play on words connecting Archemorus’ name with the Latin word *mora*, see Soerink (2014, 730), McNelis (2007, 93 n.53), and Feeney (1991, 339). On Hypsipyle see Nugent (2016).

\(^\text{104}\) See Parkes (2014b) and Stover (2009).
his wandering prefigures the difficulty that he and the Argives will have in returning to Thebes. He decides to go to Argos but it is unclear how he finds his way and Statius’ multiple explanations suggest a combination of the Furies, luck, and fate (\textit{seu praevia ducit Erinys, / seu fors illa uiae siue hac innota uocabat / Atropos, Theb. 1.326-328}). If his apparent ignorance of the way was not already a significant difficulty, a storm of epic proportions breaks out, complete with raging winds, lighting, and rain. As noted above, Valerius’ \textit{Argonautica} has a significant influence on the \textit{Thebaid}, and this passage seems to be no exception.\footnote{Cf. \textit{Aeneid} 1; V. Fl. 1.}

The description of how “the broken doors of icy Aeolia resound,” (\textit{clausta rigentis / Aeoliae percussa sonant, Theb. 1.346-347}) recalls Jupiter’s declaration to open the doors of the sea (\textit{clastra maris, V. Fl. 1.557}), Boreas’ threats to destroy the Argonauts and flight to Aeolia, the mythological island home of the winds most often identified with Sicily (V. Fl. 1.574-607). \textit{Rigentis Aeoliae} literally refers to Thessaly, since icy places are in the north, but Statius is playing with the name Aeolia to also refer to the island that was the home of Aeolus and the winds, and as such refers to the role of Boreas in disrupting the Argonauts’ journey with a storm in \textit{Argonautica} 1, making Polynices an Argonaut of sorts.\footnote{See Parkes (2014b, 779-780).}

On his Argonautic journey, Polynices is faced not only with the storm, but its impact on the actual naturescape as well. Nemea and Arcadia are flooded and the Inachus and Erasimus Rivers burst their banks (\textit{Theb. 1.355-363}) making Polynices’ progress difficult as he attempts to advance through the wilderness (1.367-369):

\begin{verbatim}
non segnius amens
incertusque uiae per nigra silentia uastum
haurit iter: pulsat metus undique et undique frater.\footnote{Hall emends the manuscripts’ \textit{per nigra silentia}, which I print above, to \textit{per sentaque et aspera}.}
\end{verbatim}

\footnote{Hall emends the manuscripts’ \textit{per nigra silentia}, which I print above, to \textit{per sentaque et aspera}.}
Frantic and uncertain of his path through the black silences, he energetically exhausted the vast journey: fear and [the thought of his] his brother on all sides drive him.

Polynices’ journey is marked by the darkness and the length of the road, but perhaps most importantly by the fact that he is uncertain of his path (*incertus uiae*). As we will see below, lack of knowledge of the right path or a naturescape’s pathlessness (*inuia*) are hallmarks of humans’ encounters with unknown nature or wilderness in Flavian epic, encounters in which humans are at a disadvantage but press on nonetheless.

To return to the Argonautic motifs, in the next line Statius introduces an extended simile comparing Polynices to a sailor caught in a storm (*Theb. 1.370-375*):

```
ac uelut hiberno deprensus nauita ponto,
cui nec Temo piger nec amico sidere monstrat
Luna uias, medio caeli pelagique tumultu
stat rationis inops, iam iamque aut saxa malignis
expectat submersa uadis aut uertice acuto
spumantes scopulos erectae incurrere prorae
```

And just like a sailor caught in a winter storm, to whom neither the sluggish Wagon nor Moon show the way with friendly light, who stands thoughtless in the midst of the upheaval of sky, now and again he expects either rocks sunken in the treacherous depths or cliffs foaming with sharp peaks to run into his upright bow.

The imagery is striking: Polynices is as helpless on land as a sailor lost at sea without any light to show the way. Yet, as he will do again when returning through Nemea, Polynices forces his way through the landscape and, despite his fear, the lairs of wild animals (*opaca legens nemorum Cadmeius heros / adcelerat, uasto metuenda umbone ferarum / excutiens stabula, Theb. 1.376-378*). Like the Argonauts caught in Boreas’ storm in *Argonautica* 1, fear is Polynices’ driving motivation, forcing him to continue through the wilderness in search of human civilization. Using his shield he faces the landscape as if it were an enemy, breaking open the brush with even his chest (*prono uirgulta refringit / pectore, Theb. 1.378-379*). Given the other Argonautic
parallels, *uirgulta refringit* here might recall *rex tunc aditus et claustra refringit* (V. Fl. 1.595) which describes Aeolus freeing the winds, but the sense is reversed as Polynices finally overcomes the storm, or at least emerges from it, and in the very next line finally arrives in Argos (*Theb*. 1.380).

**Entering Nemea: Bacchus Delays the Argives**

In book 4 of the *Thebaid*, right after the catalogue of the Seven and their forces, they set out from Argos and Statius swiftly brings their advance to a halt in Nemea and explicitly thematizes their delay.\(^{108}\) The poet addresses Phoebus to ask about their delay at the beginning of the episode (4.646-651):

```
interea gelidam Nemeen et conscia laudis
Herculeae dumeta uaga legione tenebant
Inachidae. iam Sidonias auertere praedas
sternere ferre domos ardent instantque. quis iras
flexerit, unde morae, medius quis euntibus error,
Phoebe, doce: nunc rara manent exordia famae.
```

Meanwhile with their wandering legion the Inachidae were occupying icy Nemea and its thickets that knew the praise of Hercules. Now they burn with eagerness and threaten to steal the Sidonian spoils, to scatter them, and to carry off their homes. Phoebus Apollo, tell me, who could prevail on their anger, whence delay, what middle wandering could there be for them going [to Thebes]: now few traces of the story remain.

Here Statius introduces the theme of delay that will dominate books 4 through 6 and establishes the pattern of Argive behavior seen later in book 6 when they cut down the Nemean forest. He delays the war between Argos and Thebes within the narrative and also metapoetically delays the progress of his poem of *nefas*. The mention of Hercules’ achievements (*laudis Herculeae*) prompts the reader to expect an excursus on his deeds which is foiled and replaced with the death

of Opheltes, Hypsipyle’s inset narrative, and the funeral games.\textsuperscript{109} The Argives arrive in Nemea eager to destroy Thebes but the unintended delay in Nemea will turn their appetite for destruction against the naturescape of Nemea, specifically in the attack on the Langia River and the tree-cutting scene which I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapters. Their entry into Nemea is an \textit{error}, a word that describes both their wandering and the mistake inherent in entering Nemea. The word \textit{medius} serves to present the Nemea episode as a kind of midpoint of the text and their journey, although in reality they have just left Argos, and an interruption of their progress toward Thebes.\textsuperscript{110} Nemea is a turning point in the poem because, much like Hannibal crossing the Alps, after the Argives leave Nemea the war with Thebes, delayed so far, finally begins. One clear difference between the experiences of the Argonauts, Hannibal, and the Argives is that whereas the Argonauts and Hannibal intentionally travel into the unknown, the Argives do not. Their wandering and delay in Nemea is unintentional and contrary to their express purpose of destroying Thebes (\textit{nos ferro meritas excindere Thebas / mens tulit, 4.753-754}).\textsuperscript{111} In contrast to the coolness of Nemea (\textit{gelidam Nemeen}) the Argives burn with eagerness to pillage and plunder (\textit{ferre domos ardent}), anticipating the sack of Thebes and seemingly having forgotten that their goal is to install Polynices as the king, not to pillage the city.\textsuperscript{112} Bacchus wishes to stop the Argives from reaching Thebes and sacking his city and so planning to

\textsuperscript{109} Parkes (2012, 283). Brown (1994, 192) notes “In Callimachaean fashion, Statius replaces the story of Hercules and the Nemean lion with a tale which brings \textit{ingens gloria} to Nemea (IV 727), but from an unexpected source.”

\textsuperscript{110} Parkes (2012, 284).

\textsuperscript{111} With \textit{meritas} cf. Stat. \textit{Theb.} 1.2, \textit{sontes...Thebas}.

\textsuperscript{112} Cf. Verg. \textit{Aen.} 2.374-5 \textit{incensa ferunt.../Pergama for ferre meaning ‘to plunder.’ Despite Neil Coffee’s (2006) sound conclusions about Polynices and Eteocles, this is one instance that disconfirms his idea that “Polynices does not lust after the pleasures of violence” (448). Clearly, Polynices is implicated in the Argive army’s collective desire for destruction. On the contrast of cold and heat, see Vessey (1973, 165).
delay the Argives (*nectam fraude moras*, 4.677) he asks the local Nymphs to withhold their waters and cause a drought to delay the Argives (4.684-689).\(^{113}\)

incipit: ‘agrestes fluuiorum numina Nymphae et nostri pars magna gregis, perferte laborem quem damus. Argolicos paulum mihi sordibus amnes stagnaque et errantes obducite puluere riuos. praecipuam Nemeen, qua nostra in moenia bellis nunc iter, ex alto fugiat liquor.’\(^{114}\)

He begins: “Rustic Nymphs, divinities of rivers, and a great part of my flock, complete the task that I give you. For a little while, clog the Argive rivers with dirt for me and the lakes and with dust the meandering streams. Especially in Nemea, which is now a path for war against my city walls, let the water flee from the deep.”

The Olympian god pits the naturescape and its local divinities against the Argives and attempts to contrive a drought so terrible that the Argives will not be able to continue because of their extreme thirst. Nemea is the path (*iter*) that the Argives take to Thebes and Statius emphasizes Bacchus’ disruption of this path with repeated uses of the language of pathlessness (*inuia, auia*) in the subsequent passages.

**Pathless Nemea**

When they enter Nemea, the Argives are forced to wander in search of water and enter unknown territory where the rivers (the Inachus, Charadros, Erasinus, and Asterion) are now dry (4.714-720):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ille alta per auia notus} & \\
\text{audiri et longe pastorum rumpere somnos.} & \\
\text{una tamen tacitas sed iussu numinis undas} & \\
\text{haec quoque secreta nutrit Langia sub umbra.} & \\
\text{nondum illi raptus dederat} & \\
\text{lacrimalibe nomen} & \\
\text{Archemorus nec fama deae: tamen auia seruat} & \\
\text{et nemus et fluvium.} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{720}\)

\(^{113}\) Ganiban (2007, 96) argues that Bacchus recalls Vergil’s Juno and in doing this Statius “serves to expose Bacchus’ weakness and, in the process, that of Jupiter and the heavenly gods as well.” Bacchus is ineffectual at stopping the Argives, but this does not necessarily reflect negatively on Jupiter who ends their delay in book 7.

\(^{114}\) For the phrase *agrestes fluuiorum numina Nymphae* (4.684) cf. Verg. *Aen.* 3.34, *Nymphas...agrestis.*
[The Asterion] known for its sound throughout the pathless depths interrupts shepherds’ sleep from afar. Yet one, indeed she too by the god’s command, the Langia nurses silent waters under hidden shade. Not yet had dead Archemorus given the goddess a lamentable name, nor had fame done so: nevertheless she guards the pathless places and the grove and the river.

The Asterion courses through pathless (\textit{auia}, 4.714) wilderness and the Langia is hidden away (\textit{secreta...umbra}, 4.717; \textit{auia}, 4.719). Statius contrasts Bacchus’ view of Nemea as the path (\textit{iter}, 4.689) for the Argives to bring war to Thebes with the pathless unknown of Nemea. Later when the Argives meet Hypsipyle, Statius again emphasizes that the entire region lacks any discernible path (\textit{deuia}, 4.798). This establishes the entire landscape as a barrier to the Argives’ progress and a boundary between Argos and Thebes. With the word \textit{deuia} Statius employs the same language as Silius (\textit{deuexa per inuia}, Sil. 3.632; \textit{per inuia}, 4.3) when describing Hannibal descending from the Alps. The literal “lack of a path” through Nemea, or the Alps, marks it as a naturescape outside of the cultivated spaces of Thebes and Argos and recalls Polynices’ journey through the same landscape on his way to Argos.

Forced to wander through the wilderness in search of water the Argives find an enemy in the naturescape itself, much like the Argonauts and Hannibal (4.723-733):

\begin{verbatim}
  ergo nec ardentes clipeos uectare nec artos thoracum nexus, tantum sitis horrida torquet, sufficiunt: non ora modo angustasque perusti fauces, interior sed uis quotit aspera pulsu corda, gelant uenae et siccis cruor adhaeret uisceribus. tum sole putris tum puluere tellus exhalat calidam nubem. non spumeus imber
  manat equum: siccis inlidunt ora lupatis
  ora catenatas procul exertantia linguas, nec legem dominosue pati sed perfurit aruis flammatum pecus. huc illuc inpellit Adrastus exploratores si stagna Licymnia restent

  siquis Amymonae superet liquor:
\end{verbatim}

\footnote{Hall emends the manuscripts’ \textit{sed iussu} to \textit{iniussu} (716) and \textit{haec to sic} (717).}
Now they are not strong enough to carry their burning shields or the tight bonds of their breastplates, such a horrible thirst tortures them. Not only are their mouths and narrow throats burnt but even an inner force convulses their raging hearts irregularly and their veins freeze and their blood sticks painfully to their dried guts. Then the earth, crumbling from the sun and sand, exhales a hot dustcloud. No frothy spray flows from the horses’ mouths: their mouths champ on dry bits and thrust forth their bridled tongues, nor do they suffer their masters’ commands but the entire inflamed herd rages in the fields. Here and there Adrastus sends scouts to see if there are still pools in Licymnia or if any water of Amymona remains.

The Argives’ weapons are utterly useless against an environmental disaster and their dry bodies mirror the dry landscape.116 The earth breathes like a human body but, like the Argives, is completely dry. Their horses rage throughout the landscape, driven mad by their thirst. Only Adrastus seems to keep his head and sends out scouts (exploratores) to find water. Like the Argonauts and Hannibal, the Argives’ ignorance is emphasized (exploratores, errantes), but here there is no sense of bold exploration into the unknown.117 Instead, the Argives are humbled and beaten by the drought. The Argives disintegrate into a disorganized rabble and in their search for water they wander into the Nemean forest, which, if not for the drought, would be a fairly typical locus amoenus of shady trees, grassy meadows, cool breezes, and running water.118 The fact that Nemea is an unknown naturescape, hostile and unyielding, makes it a barrier or boundary area similar to the ocean or the Alps which are unknowns for Jason and Hannibal. Indeed, Statius compares Nemea to the deserts of Libya (4.737-738):

ceu flauam Libyen desertaque pulueris Afri
colustrent nullaque umbratam nube Syenen.

As if they wander golden Libya or the deserts of sandy Africa or Syene shaded by no cloud.

116 Parkes (2012, 304) notes that “gelant is a paradoxically cool word to apply to the effects of the sun. We might rather expect images of heat to be applied to the blood.”


Here Statius evokes not only the heat and dust of North Africa but also with *deserta* (4.737) repeats the motif of pathless wilderness with which he has characterized Nemea. As the land stops the Argive advance, Statius takes the opportunity to remind us that Bacchus is responsible for their wandering (4.739-741):  

```
tandem inter siluas – sic Euhius ipse pararat –
errantes subitam pulchro in maerore tuentur
Hypsipylen.
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Finally wandering through the forest (thus Bacchus himself planned it) they see Hypsipyle, unexpected in her becoming sadness.

In their wandering, luckily (or unluckily) they encounter Hypsipyle who acts as their guide. Adrastus’ address to Hypsipyle is telling. He considers her a goddess, specifically the goddess of the Nemean groves (*diua potens nemorum*, 4.746) and asks her for help in place of the winds or Jupiter (*tu nunc uentis pluuioque rogaris / pro Ioue*, 4.758-759). This exemplifies the disconnect between the divine and human spheres in the *Thebaid*. Unlike in the *Argonautica*, in which Jason prays to Neptune and the gods in general, Adrastus takes Hypsipyle as their goddess and protector, eschewing, in ignorance, the divine for the human. Jupiter takes a backseat and Adrastus presents him as akin to fortune or chance rather than an omnipotent deity when he states that they will honor Hypsipyle if Jupiter grants that they will return (*tantum reduces det flectere gressus / Iuppiter*, 4.761-762).

As Hypsipyle guides them through Nemea, Statius emphasizes once again the dark, pathless nature of the landscape and the Argives’ dependence on her (4.797-802):

```
illi per dumos et opaca uiurentibus umbris
deuia, pars cingunt, pars arta plebe secuntur
praecelerantque ducem: medium subit illa per agmen
non humili festina modo. iamque amne propinquqo
rauca sonat uallis saxosumque inpulit aures
```

119 Parkes (2012, 306) notes “The god can only delay, not destroy, the host which bears down upon his beloved Thebes.”
murmur.

They go through the thickets and the pathless forest dark with green shadows. Some surround their guide; others follow in a mass; still others race ahead. She walks in the middle of the army, moving quickly with dignity. And now the loud valley resounds from the sound of the nearby stream and the stony babbling strikes their ears.

The forest is full of thickets (dumos) and is completely lacking in any discernible paths (deuia). Hypsipyle becomes not only the guide but the military leader (ducem) of the Argives who swarm around her. Hypsipyle becomes their leader in the unknown and the Argives are totally dependent on her to proceed through Nemea and reach their goal in Thebes. Hypsipyle’s encounter with the Argives and their dependence on her is her undoing and determines the course of events in Nemea.

The Giant Snake

While Hypsipyle is distracted by the Argives, Opheltes (Archemorus) is accidentally killed by the sacred snake of Jupiter which represents another aspect of the Nemean naturescape that stands in the way of the Argives’ progress. The serpent is a denizen of the forest and is earth-born but it is not a member of an uncomplicated “nature” in which all aspects of the natural world are harmonious and suffer only from human encroachment. In book 5 the snake emerges, a sacred horror of the Achaean forest (nemoris sacer horror Achaei, Theb. 5.505) and earth-born (terrigena, Theb. 5.506). Its description as a horror marks it as a source of fear and religious

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120 Statius is playing with Callimachaeian poetics; see McNelis (2007, 76-96). Cf. Verg. Ecl. 9.20 uiridi...umbra.

121 Cf. Dido’s procession Verg. Aen. 1.497 incessit magna iuuenum stipante caterua.

122 On this snake and others in Statius, see Taisne (1972). For similar giant snakes in epic see Ap. Rhod. Argon. 4.127-161; Ov. Met. 3.26-94; V. Fl. 5.253-258; Sil. 6.181-284.

123 Cf. the giant snake killed by Cadmus at Ov. Met. 3.26-94. Statius’ terrigena exoritur serpens tractuque solute / immanem sese uhit ac post terga relinquit. / liuida fax oculis, tumidi stat in ore ueneni / spuma uirens, ter lingua uibrat, (Theb. 5.506-509), seems to echo Vergil’s description of the serpents that kill Laocoon and his sons: pars cetera pontum / pone legit sinatque immensa volumine terga. / fit sonitus spumante salo; iamque arua tenebant / ardentisque oculos suffiecti sanguine et igni / sibila lambebant linguis uibrantibus ora (Verg. Aen. 2.207-211).
awe for humans. Statius confirms this by later stating that the nearby farmers consider the snake to be sacred to Inachian Jupiter (\textit{Inachio sanctum dixere Tonanti / agricola, Theb. 5.511-512}) and that Jupiter cares for the forest and receives offerings at the forest altars (\textit{cui cura loci et siluestribus aris / pauper honos, Theb. 5.512-513}). However, the snake has a complicated relationship with the forest since it habitually wraps around the temple of Jupiter, rubbing the oaks of the miserable forest and wearing down the huge ash trees with its coils (\textit{miserae nunc roborae silvae / atterit et uastas tenuat complexibus ornos, Theb. 5.514-515}).\textsuperscript{124}

Statius contrasts the serpent’s usual behavior with its reaction to the lack of water in Nemea. The snake twists savagely (\textit{saeuior, Theb. 5.520}) through the dry Nemean landscape and rages (\textit{furit, Theb. 5.521}) because of its extreme thirst.\textsuperscript{125} As it rages through the forest, the snake unknowingly kills the baby Opheltes as he plays unattended in the grass (\textit{occidis extremae destrectus uerbere caudae / ignaro serpente, puer, Theb. 5.538-539}). In response, the Argive hero Capaneus, true to his nature as a theomach contemptuous of the gods, gleefully declares that he will kill it whether it is a wild inhabitant of the terrifying forest or a pleasure permitted to the gods, and that he hopes that it is a source of pleasure for the gods (\textit{seu tu pauidi ferus incola luci, / siue deis, utinamque deis, concessa uoluptas, Theb. 5.567-568}).\textsuperscript{126} As Statius makes clear, he is correct on both counts; that Jupiter nearly kills Capaneus is proof that the serpent was sacred to him (\textit{Theb. 5.584-587}). After the snake is mortally wounded it retreats to the shrine to die and

\textsuperscript{124} For \textit{atterit} as ‘to rub, wear’ see \textit{OLD} s.v. 1a, b. For \textit{tenuat} as ‘to wear down’ see \textit{OLD} s.v. 2. \textit{Vastus} can mean ‘laid low’ but here probably just serves to describe the size of the trees and hence the size and power of the serpent.

\textsuperscript{125} The snake experiences the same \textit{furor} as the the Argives raging in the Langia: \textit{agmina bello / decertare putes iustumque in gurgite Martem / perfurere aut captam toli uictoribus urbem, Theb. 4.821-823.}

\textsuperscript{126} On Capaneus the theomach, see Chaudhuri (2014, 256-297).
Jupiter almost kills Capaneus to avenge the killing of the snake, illustrating the extreme nature of this sacrilege.  

Unexpectedly, all of Nemea mourns the snake and Statius personifies the grieving landscape (5.579-582):

\[
\text{illum et cognatae stagna indignantia Lernae,} \\
\text{floribus et uernis adsuetae spargere Nymphae,} \\
\text{et Nemees reptatus ager lucosque per omnes} \\
\text{siluicolae fracta genuistis harundine Fauni.}
\]

Him you lamented, you scorned pools of kindred Lerna, and you, Nymphs, accustomed to scatter the land with spring flowers, and you, field of Nemea, through which he crawled, and you, forest-dwelling Fauns, who lamented him throughout the entire forest on your broken reed.

Nemea’s deities, together with the entire landscape, collectively mourn the death of the snake. This unified expression of grief provides an initial indication of the larger community in Nemea, on which the simile comparing Nemea to an *urbs capta* will later capitalize, as I discuss in chapter 2. Statius presents four different actors lamenting the serpent: the waters of Lerna, the Nymphs, the fields of Nemea, and the Fauns. Two are personified landscapes and two are groups of nature deities. Fauns and Nymphs are woodland deities and can be expected to lament its death but the inclusion of the personified Lerna and Nemea suggests that the wider landscape beyond the woods is mourning the snake.

The snake has united the entire forest and the wider naturescape of Nemea in lamentation, establishing it as a symbol of Nemea and in a sense the *genius loci*. In Roman

\[\text{illum et cognatae stagna indignantia Lernae,} \]
\[\text{floribus et uernis adsuetae spargere Nymphae,} \]
\[\text{et Nemees reptatus ager lucosque per omnes} \]
\[\text{siluicolae fracta genuistis harundine Fauni.} \]

It seems that Capaneus has not committed a great enough offense to warrant death, but only just. The distinction may be that here he has only killed an animal sacred to Jupiter whereas later in the poem he challenges Jupiter himself.

The Nymphs in particular and the Fauns’ broken reed indicate Nemea’s rustic and pastoral character. Cf. Verg. *Ecl. 1.1 Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi / siluestrem tenui Musam meditaris auena*; Verg. *Ecl. 5.20 Extinctum Nymphae crudeli funere Daphnin / flebant (uos coryli testes et flumina Nymphis)*. Although, as mentioned above, Nemea is not a simple paradise and the giant snake itself was in the habit of damaging the forest: *nunc ille dei circumdare templa / orbe uago labens, miseru nunc robora silvae / atterit et uastas tenuat complexibus ornos, Theb. 5.513-515.*
religious practice, any male or place could have a *genius* (women had a *iuno*) that was a kind of spirit or double of the person or place, similar to the Greek *daimon*. Places where Romans “exercised an activity had a *genius* which expressed the totality of its traits at the moment of construction.”\(^{129}\) Statius’ snake seems to have been based in part on a similarly sacred snake that appears in *Aeneid* 5 while Aeneas is pouring libations at his father’s grave. The snake emerges from the base of the shrine and wraps itself around the burial mound and altars (*adytis cum lubricus anguis ab imis / septem ingens gyros, septena uolumina traxit / amplexus placide tumulum lapsusque per aras*, Verg. *Aen.* 5.84-86). Uncertain whether to consider it the *genius loci* or the servant of his father’s spirit (*famulumne parentis*, 5.95), Aeneas shows it respect and takes its appearance as a good omen. Both Anchises’ snake and the Nemean snake have similar gold coloring and are denizens of a shrine. The Nemean snake is sacred to Jupiter and wraps around Jupiter’s shrine like Anchises’ snake (*nunc ille dei circumdare templa orbe uago labens*, *Theb.* 5.513-514). Having already been introduced as a sacred wonder of the Achaean forest (*nemoris sacer horror Achaei*, *Theb.* 5.505), the parallel with the snake in *Aeneid* 5 reinforces the sacred nature of the snake and its potential as a symbol of the temple of Jupiter and the forest of Nemea as a whole.\(^{130}\) The mourning of the Nemean deities and the landscape tells us to judge the Argives’ actions negatively by demonstrating the appropriate response to their loss and Statius makes the naturescape of Nemea a dangerous, but innocent victim of the war.

\(^{129}\) *OCD* s.v. See also *OLD* s.v. 3.

\(^{130}\) This interpretation is further reinforced by the similarities between these literary snakes and snakes seen in Campanian wall paintings accompanying depictions of *Lares* and *Penates*. This connection was first suggested to me by Chad Uhl. On snakes in Campanian wall painting see Boyce (1942) and on their connection with Vergil’s *Aeneid*, book 2 in particular, see Trinacty (2018).
4. Conclusion

As these examples illustrate, human/nature encounters and conflicts are integral parts of Flavian epic. Valerius simultaneously posits a primitivist vs. progressive dichotomy while questioning the terms of the debate. However, the broad conclusions of the text cannot be ignored: the Argonauts’ voyage opens the sea to exploration and is blessed by Jupiter who casts their journey as a necessary link in the chain of history. The Argonauts are civilizers, defeating the monstrous Amycus on the way to Colchis but also killing their hosts at Cyzicus and fighting a civil war when they get to Colchis. Despite the negative consequences, the opening of the sea by the Argonauts remains a pivotal element of the poem and of world history. Likewise, Silius presents elements of nature, especially mountain ranges, as obstacles to Hannibal’s campaign and continues the chain of history as Hannibal opens the geographic boundaries of the world. Hannibal’s crossing of the Alps, while in direct contravention of natural law and an assault on Rome itself, is also a heroic achievement, like the Argo’s voyage. Statius also confounds simple interpretations of the Nemea passage as his Argonautic heroes fight against nature to accomplish the criminal telos of the poem. The primary reason for the Nemea section is delay: Bacchus wishes to preserve Thebes, Amphiaraus wishes to delay the war indefinitely, and the poet himself can be seen as delaying the inevitable conclusion of his poem. That this delay is contrived through a conflict between the Argives and nature illustrates the agency of naturescapes to intervene in the narrative. Furthermore, the delay is not benign. As I explore in the next chapter, the nonhuman inhabitants of Nemea, and in particular the forest of Nemea, provide the Argives with an enemy during their delay, one which they eagerly destroy, illustrating their immorality.
CHAPTER 2
WHEN THE PINES BEGIN TO CRY: FORESTS AND DEFORESTATION

This chapter examines the forests in Flavian epic, often wild, deceptive, and numinous places, that become places of conflict between humans and nature or are the objects of human activity, such as tree-cutting.\footnote{On forests in the ancient world from an environmental perspective, see Hughes (1975), Thirgood (1981), Meiggs (1982), Hughes (1983), Harrison (1992), Grove and Rackham (2001), Hughes (2011), Thommen (2012), Harris (2013), Hughes (2014), and Walsh (2014). Meiggs (1982, 371) argues that there was extensive deforestation in the ancient world and that Mediterranean forests today present “a very sorry contrast with their past.” Hughes (2014, 87) is also consistently pessimistic about deforestation in the ancient world, concluding that “deforestation, overgrazing, and erosion produced the most visible, far-reaching, and relatively permanent changes in the Mediterranean landscape of all those caused by human activities in ancient times” and had significant social impacts. Harris (2013, 193) also argues that “much woodland was degraded or disappeared in the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean. But no extreme hypothesis about deforestation seems well-founded.” However, Grove and Rackham (2001), argue they have “thoroughly demolished the myth of the Ruined Landscape, at least as a general proposition...[since] Mediterranean vegetation should be understood on its own terms and using its own categories, rather than misinterpreted as degraded forms of a once-universal forest of tall, timber-quality trees. It makes no sense to reproach Greece for not being like northern Europe.” Thommen (2012, 41) also argues “the damage to forests and to pastureland neither led to any immediate supply crisis, nor involved complete deforestation” and that some types of trees rapidly regenerate. Walsh (2014) also takes a generally optimistic view of ancient degradation. This is all to say that the question of ancient deforestation is complex and the tree-cutting scenes of epic should in no way be taken as definite indications of larger ecological concerns on the part of the poets. For a more literary perspective on trees, see Hunt (2016) and n.132.} Continuing a long tradition in Greek and Latin epic, Valerius, Statius, and Silius all include tree-cutting scenes in their poems, which exemplify the human/nature interactions on which my analysis focuses and builds on the theme of transgression and exploration from the previous chapter. Flavian epic’s forests reflect the contemporary interest in nature and geography but create a tension between human knowledge and ignorance. Forests in each poem, like the larger geographical boundaries in the previous chapter, appeal to the Flavian audience’s interest in strange, distant, and unknown landscapes and the pervasive language of wilderness and pathlessness (inuius, auius) is especially telling. These forests are sometimes deceptively pleasant and other times provide obstacles to human movement and discovery. As such, they often become targets for human attacks leading to...
deforestation. The cutting of forests is not inherently negative or transgressive and in fact serves an important function, especially for building pyres to honor the dead in the *Thebaid* and *Punica* as well as for Valerius’ *Argo*. However, tree-cutting is emblematic of the opening up of dark, ancient, unknown forests to human activity and discovery. The forest wilderesses of Flavian epic often occupy middle spaces between human civilization or exist on the periphery of civilized, known space. For example, much of the area between Argos and Thebes in the *Thebaid* is presented as a wilderness and the dangerous forests of the *Argonautica* are far from Greece.

1. **Tree-cutting in the Epic Tradition**

   While my analysis does not exclusively focus on it, tree-cutting is a *topos* that is found throughout the epic tradition and as such it is necessary to comment on its development in anticipation of its use in Flavian epic. I will briefly survey the tree-cutting trope in epic as a preface to my discussion of such passages in Flavian epic. In *Iliad* 23, the Achaeans cut down trees on Mount Ida in order to provide fuel for the funeral pyre of Patroclus, a passage which seems to be the progenitor of similar scenes in later epic (Hom. *Il.* 23.110-126). Homer introduces many of the features generally seen in later instances of this epic trope: the use of axes (ὑλοτόμους πελέκεας 114; χαλκῷ, 118), a sense of eagerness (ἐπειγόμενοι, 119) and rapid action as in the remarkable line πολλὰ δ’ ἀναντα κάταντα πάραντά τε δόχμια τ’ ἔλθον· (116), the type of tree specified (δρῦς, 118), an emphasis on the height of the trees (ὑψικόμους, 118), the sound of the trees falling (μεγάλα κτυπέουσαι, 119), and finally the splitting and transportation of the lumber (120-125).

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Apollonius eschews a tree-cutting passage and even a description of the Argo, seemingly since past poets had already told of how Argus built the ship according to Athena’s instructions (Ap. Rhod. *Argon*. 1.18-19). In a fragment of Ennius’ *Annales*, tree-cutting is undertaken, again, to prepare funeral pyres (En. *Ann.* 175-179 Skutsch):

> incedunt arbusta per alta, securibus caedunt. percellunt magnas quercus, excidunt ilex, fraxinus frangitur atque abies consternitur alta, pinus proceras peruortunt; omne sonabat arbustum fremitu siluæ frondosai.

They advance through the tall grove and cut it down with axes. They strike great oaks, the holm-oak is cut down, the ash is broken and the tall fir is brought down and they overthrow the tall pines: the whole grove resounds with the groans of the leafy forest.

Ennius puts much greater emphasis on the variety of trees with a catalogue of the trees cut: oak, holm-oak, ash, fir, and pine. He also emphasizes the size of the trees (*alta, magnas, proceras*) and the sounds of the woodcutters ringing throughout the forest (*omne sonabat / arbustum fremitu*).

Vergil’s *Aeneid* features two such passages, both of which show a great degree of Ennius’ influence. In *Aeneid* 6, the Trojans prepare a pyre for Misenus (6.176-82):

> tum iussa Sibyllae, haud mora, festinant flentes aramque sepulcri congerere arboribus caeloque educere certant. itur in antiquam siluam, stabula alta ferarum; procumbunt piceae, sonat icta securibus ilex fraxineaeque trabes cuneis et fissile robur scinditur, aduoluunt ingentis montibus ornos.

Then without delay weeping they hurry to obey the Sibyl’s commands and strive to pile up the funeral pyre with trees and to build it to the sky. They go into the ancient forest, the lofty den of wild animals. The spruces fall, the holm-oak, struck by axes, resounds and beams of ash and oak, easily broken, are split with wedges, and they roll huge ash trees down the mountain.
The Trojans hurry (*festinant*) even though then are weeping and they compete (*certant*) to build the pyre. Vergil shifts between the active voice, the impersonal *itur*, and the passive voice. Like Ennius, Vergil gives a catalogue of the trees cut: spruce, holm-oak (*quercus ilex*), ash (*fraxinus excelsior*), oak, and manna ash (*fraxinus ornus*). He also emphasizes the extreme old age of the forest, and thereby its august character, by calling it *antiquam*.

In *Aeneid* 11, the Trojans and Latins cut trees, again to prepare funeral pyres, during a twelve-day truce (11.134-138):

\begin{verbatim}
per siluas Teucri mixtique impune Latini errauere iugis. ferro sonat alta bipenni
fraxinus, euertunt actas ad sidera pinus, robora nec cuneis et olentem scindere cedrum
nec plaustris cessant uectare gementibus ornos.
\end{verbatim}

Through the forests on the ridges the Trojans and Latins wandered peacefully together. The tall ash rings with the iron axe, they bring down the pines reaching for the stars, they do not delay to split the oaks or fragrant cedar with wedges or to carry off the mountain-ash in creaking wagons.

Much like for the burial of Misenus, the men wander in the forests, the trees ring with the sound of axes, their size is emphasized, and a catalogue of the types of trees is given. Both of these passages, even in their few lines, serve to give a sense of epic scale. The oldest and largest trees are cut for Misenus; he will have a huge pyre in honor of his ability with the trumpet and for daring to challenge Triton. In the second passage, there are so many dead Trojans and Latins that

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133 Sargeaunt (1920).

134 As I discuss below, this passage seems to look back to the simile in book 2 in which Vergil uses the same language to compare Troy to an ash tree cut down on a mountainside (*antiquam in montibus ornun*, *Aen*. 2.626). The fact that Aeneas enters an *antiquam siluam* suggests that this can be read metapoetically as Vergil revisiting the venerable tree-cutting tradition and specifically acts as an allusion to Ennius’ passage. One of the meanings of *siluam* is ‘the raw material of a literary work.’ As Hinds (1998, 11-14) argues, Aeneas entering the ancient forest can be read as a metaphor for Vergil intervening in the tree-cutting tradition and Vergil’s intervention can be read as a metaphor for the Trojan tree-cutting. As I show below, Statius’ consistent self-consciousness prompts us to read the Nemean forest that the Argives cut down as this kind of *siluam*. On *siluam* as literary material, see Wray (2007) and Walters (2013).

their groaning wagons never cease carrying fuel for the pyre, suggesting not only the massive scale of the war but also the cost of preparing proper funeral rites.

Ovid’s Erysichthon in the Metamorphoses is one of the few examples of truly sacrilegious human violence against forests resulting from tree-cutting. The tree-cutting passages up to this point have been fairly positive as the trees are mostly used for funerals. The story of Erysichthon changes this paradigm. As the story goes, Erysichthon scorned the gods, violating a grove of Ceres and cutting down an ancient tree (ille etiam Cereale nemus uiolasse securi / dicitur et lucos ferro temerasse uetustos, Ov. Met. 8.741-742). The grove is very clearly marked as sacred to a god with one ancient, giant oak in particular wreathed with fillets, flowers, and surrounded by tablets. This is no ordinary tree. It is “a grove unto itself” (una nemus, 8.744) and as tall compared to the other trees as those trees were to the grass beneath them (8.750), a truly incredible tree whose stature is exaggerated in order to increase the criminality of Erysichthon’s actions. Indeed Ovid states that its size did not prevent Erysichthon from cutting it down (8.751-752) and he explicitly communicates his contempt for the gods when addressing the tree (8.755-756):

‘non dilecta deae solum, sed et ipsa licebit sit dea, iam tanget frondente cacumine terram,’

“Not only if she is loved by the goddess, but it will be permitted even if she is the goddess herself, [and] soon she will touch the ground with her leafy top.”

Erysichthon ignores the cries of a Nymph from within the tree which he ultimately fells (persequitur scelus ille suum, 8.774). The other Nymphs grieve the apparent death of their fellow Nymph and the damage to the grove (attonitae dryades damno nemorumque suoque /...maerentes, 8.777-779) and ask Ceres to punish Erysichthon who is stricken with unending

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hunger. The Erysichthon episode is noteworthy for its clear deviation from earlier epic and for its influence on tree-cutting passages in later epic, especially Lucan and Statius.\textsuperscript{137}

In book 3 of Lucan’s \textit{Bellum Civile}, Caesar besieges Massilia and cuts down the surrounding forests to procure timber for the seigeworks (\textit{tunc omnia late / procumbunt nemora et spoliatur robore siluae}, 3.394-395).\textsuperscript{138} Last to fall is an ancient Celtic grove that had never been cut (\textit{longo numquam uiolatus ab aeuo}, 3.399) where the local Gauls perform human sacrifices but do not stay to worship (\textit{non illum cultu populi propiore frequentant}, 3.422). It is a place where there are no animals and is no breeze; it is dark with rough-cut images of the gods striking terror into those that see them. Legend (\textit{fama ferebat}, 3.417) has it that there are earthquakes, strange noises, mysterious fires, and even fallen trees that stand back up.\textsuperscript{139} This grove is a perfect example of a \textit{locus horridus}. Where a \textit{locus amoenus} is a pleasant, shady place of babbling brooks, a \textit{locus horridus} is a gloomy, aged, decaying place of deep shadows and stagnant water.\textsuperscript{140} However, as James McIntyre notes, whereas the \textit{locus amoenus} is an ancient \textit{topos}, the \textit{locus horridus} is modern, was not recognized in antiquity, and a common name has not even been settled upon: \textit{locus inamoenus} and \textit{locus foedus} are used interchangeably.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{137} For more on the influence of Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} on Statius in particular see Mozley (1933), Newlands (2004), and Keith (2016).

\textsuperscript{138} See Phillips (1968) for the tradition from which Lucan drew for this scene; also Dyson (1970) and Santini (1999) on the scene in general. Phillips (1968, 299) cites in particular Ovid’s Erysichthon: “The cutting of the Massiliote grove then appears to be a nonhistorical incident inserted first by Lucan into the account of the siege. The incident seems to have been suggested by Ovid’s story of Erysichthon, as not only context but even verbal borrowings indicate.” Augoustakis (2006, 235) notes the grove is the “anti-grove \textit{par excellence}, in which any form of life, for humans and animals alike, proves not viable.” Also, compare with the grove of the Sphinx in \textit{Thebaid} 2 below.

\textsuperscript{139} Cf. the portrayal of the Capitoline in \textit{Aeneid} 8.

\textsuperscript{140} See Garrison (1992) for the \textit{locus inamoenus}, a synonym for \textit{locus horridus}, and an antonymn for \textit{locus amoenus}, and its connotations; also Edwards (1987). Lucan arguably creates the grove-type \textit{locus inamoenus} or \textit{locus horridus} with the ekphrasis of the Celtic grove but he may also be looking back to the description of Lake Avernus in \textit{Aeneid} 6.

Nonetheless, the *locus horridus* becomes increasingly common in Latin literature after Lucan appearing throughout Seneca’s *Tragedies* and Flavian epic.

Caesar takes the lead in cutting down the grove since his soldiers fear to approach it and is the first to strike a tree. He sarcastically calls this a violation but the poet acknowledges it as one (3.433-437):

\[
\text{primus raptam librare bipennem} \\
\text{ausus et aeriam ferro proscindere quercum} \\
\text{effatur mergo uiolata in robora ferro:} \\
\text{‘iam ne quis uestrum dubitet subuertere siluam,} \\
\text{credite me fecisse nefas.’}
\]

He first dared to pick up and swing the axe and cut down with iron the towering oak and with the iron sunken in the violated oak he said, “Now let none of you hesitate to raze the forest, and believe that I have committed a sacrilege.”

Caesar is the first to act, desecrating the previously unviolated grove and flippantly, much like Erysichthon, he acknowledges the sacrilege he has committed. Certainly there is no immediate punishment for this *nefas* and the poet suggests that it will go unpunished (*quis enim laesos inpune putaret / esse deos, 3.447-448*). Caesar’s troops are less convinced of this than he is but fear Caesar more than they fear the gods (*sed expensa superorum et Caesaris ira, 3.439*). Lucan does not fail to include the traditional catalogue of trees (3.440-445):

\[
\text{procumbunt orni, nodosa inpellituir ilex,} \\
\text{siluaque Dodones et fluctibus aptior alnus} \\
\text{et non plebeios luctus testata cupressus} \\
\text{tum primum posuere comas et fronde carentes} \\
\text{admisere diem, propulsaque robore denso} \\
\text{sustinuit se silua cadens.}
\]

The manna-ash trees fall, the knotted holm-oak is torn down and the tree of Dodona and the alder more suitable for waves and the cypress bearing witness to the noble’s grief for

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142 Cf. the hesitation of Hannibal’s troops to cross the Alps in *Punica* 3 and his decision to lead the way.

143 Cf. Hannibal crossing the Alps, discussed in the previous chapter.

144 See Augoustakis (2006).
the first time let down their leaves and lacking branches let in the daylight, and when the battered forest fell it supported itself with its dense growth.

Lucan makes Caesar (the sole aggressor) and the trees the focus of the scene rather than the actions of the soldiers generally. Unlike the tree-cutting scenes from earlier epic (e.g. Vergil, Ennius, Homer), and indeed similar to Ovid’s Erysichthon story, these trees are not cut to prepare funeral pyres but rather to build siege engines.  

2. Roman Views of Forests and Tree-Cutting

Many of the forests, groves, and trees that I examine in this chapter are large and ancient. Describing a forest as old is not simply a comment on its age but rather marks it as numinous and deserving of respect, or at least caution. Two passages, one from Seneca and another from Pliny, will help to explicate this. In Epistles 41, Seneca tells Lucilius that god (deus) is everywhere and dwells within and that in every good man “a god lives though we know not what god” (quis deus incertum est, habitat deus, Sen. Ep. 41.2). This seems to be a direct borrowing from Aeneid 8 from Evander’s tour around the future site of Rome when he tells Aeneas about the presence of a god on the Capitoline (‘hoc nemus, hunc’ inquit ‘frondoso uertice collem / (quis deus incertum est) habitat deus’, Ver. Aen. 8.352). Seneca explains further by drawing an analogy between the human body and a grove (Sen. Ep. 41.3):

> Si tibi occurrerit uetustis arboribus et solitam altitudinem egressis frequens lucus et conspectum caeli ramorum aliorum alios protegentium summouens obtentu, illa proceritas siluae et secretum loci et admiratio umbrae in aperto tam densae atque continuae fidem tibi numinis faciet.

145 The destruction of the Celtic grove seems to make a rather pointed allusion to Vergil’s tree-cutting passage in Aeneid 6. In Vergil’s passage, the spruce trees fall, procumbunt piceae (Aen. 6.180). Lucan uses procumbunt not once but twice to describe both the felling of the forests around Massilia (procumbunt nemora, 3.395) and also the felling of the Celtic grove (procumbunt orni, 3.440). Lucan’s Bellum Ciuile has been read as a repudiation of all things Vergilian, the Aeneid in particular. This passage seems to be no different. Through the allusion to the Misenus passage, Lucan perverts the burial of Misenus by the pius Aeneas twisting it into Caesar’s violation of a sacred grove in order to make engines for war.
If you have ever encountered a grove full of ancient trees that have grown to their usual height and where the trees shut out the sky with a covering of intertwining branches, then that very height of the forest and the seclusion of the place and wonder at such dense and continuous shade in an open space will prove to you the presence of a deity.

Seneca here describes the sublime in general and the sublimity of grand forests in particular, making the human experience of awe and wonder synonymous with the presence of a *numen*, i.e. a deity or some divine power.¹⁴⁶ He emphasizes the age of the forest and the size of the trees, impressive features that are cause for awe and wonder and contribute to the overall impression of the forest. Pliny the Elder provides further evidence for this view of aged and impressively tall groves (*HN* 12.3):

> Haec fuere numinum templa, priscoque ritu simplicia rura etiam nunc deo praecellentem arborem dicant; nec magis auro fulgentia atque ebore simulacra quam lucos et in iis silentia ipsa adoramus.

[Trees] were once the temples of deities, and even now according to ancient rite simple rustics dedicate an exceptional tree to a god. To no greater degree do we revere images shining with gold and ivory than groves and the very silence in them.

Like Seneca, Pliny remarks on the phenomenon of human awe and wonder making places sacred or divine. He makes this even more explicit by calling trees *templum numinum*. Although this is an ancient, rustic custom he explains that it is still practiced and by contrasting trees with statues may suggest that reverence of the former is more authentic. The presence of a *numen*, however, does not mean that a forest or grove is inherently inviolable or even sacred, an important point when discussing tree-cutting. Richard Thomas has argued that Romans were culturally averse to felling trees, especially sacred forests. He argues that “tree spirits are obviously hard to detect, and any tree is therefore potentially numinous, any tree felling potentially hazardous. Such is the danger that Cato records a prayer to be recited before the thinning of a grove.”¹⁴⁷ However, there

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¹⁴⁷ Thomas (1988, 263).
is a tremendous distinction between tree-cutting seen in poetry, epic in particular, and the real practices of Romans and their views on trees. Ailsa Hunt has shown that scholars have been incorrectly given to assume that in actual practice when a tree was considered sacred it became the property of the god to whom it was sacred and that it therefore became inviolable.\textsuperscript{148} She argues that “poetic images of violated sacred trees and unviolated groves...[blind] scholars to the possibility of another type of interference with sacred trees, aimed not at their destruction but their benefit: namely arboriculture.”\textsuperscript{149} Thus we should be cautious about automatically assuming an act of tree-cutting is a sacrilege or violation. There emerges, then, a disconnect between poetic scenes and actual Roman views and practices. While I do not interpret these poetic passages to be evidence of a universal view of tree-cutting across the Roman world, they do suggest anxieties about tree-cutting and reflect on real-life Roman conflicts with nature.

3. Forests and Tree-cutting in the \textit{Argonautica}

Valerius presents multiple forests and tree-cutting scenes and creates tension between them by changing the forest landscapes as the Argonauts move further away from Greece. The tree-cutting undertaken to build the Argo shows its positive aspects: the construction of the Argo is celebrated by the local deities of the forest and the tree-cutting does not cause any widespread destruction. Trees become useful tools of a different kind when the Argonauts must build pyres for Cyzicus and the dead Dolionians they have mistakenly attacked and killed, and the trees are the means of their catharsis. However, Cyzicus’ transgression in the forest and the tree-cutting for his funeral show the potential dangers of such landscapes and their simultaneously cathartic uses. Valerius contrasts the construction of the Argo with the strange forest where Mopsus

\textsuperscript{148} Hunt (2016, 121).

\textsuperscript{149} Hunt (2016, 132-133).
performs his infernal expiatory ritual and a deceptively pleasant, pathless forest is the setting for the abduction of Hylas by Nymphs which permanently separates Hercules and Hylas from the Argonauts. The forests of Asia and Colchis also present landscapes that are strange and unknown to the Argonauts and challenge their expedition. These naturecapes build tension between the known and unknown, between familiar Greece and the strange world outside, a tension which makes nature itself the greatest obstacle for the Argo and her crew.

**Tree-Cutting for the Argo in Argonautica 1**

Faced with the journey to Colchis, Jason prays to Pallas and Juno who, hearing his prayer, set the voyage in motion beginning with the construction of the Argo. While Valerius engages with the long tradition of the Argo’s construction, my focus will be specifically on the tree-cutting and the forest from which the trees are taken. Pallas goes to Argus in Thespiae and instructs him to build the Argo (1.91-95):

\[
\text{accepere deae celerique per aethera lapsu} \\
\text{diuersas petiere uias. in moenia pernix} \\
\text{Thespiaca ad carum Tritonia deuolat Argum;} \\
\text{moliri hunc puppem iubet et demittere ferro} \\
\text{rohora, Peliacas et iam comes exit in umbras.}
\]

The goddesses hear and swiftly gliding through the air took different paths. Quick Tritonia flies down into the Thespian city to dear Argus. She bids him build the ship and cut down oaks with his axe, and now as his companion goes out into the shade of Mt. Pelion.

Pallas commands Argus to cut down trees and build a ship, accompanying him into the shadowy forests of Pelion.\(^{150}\) The verb *exit* means not only that she ‘goes’ with Argus but that she ‘goes out,’ presumably from the city of Thespiae, making a clear, symbolic distinction between the

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\(^{150}\) Zissos (2008, 133): “VF presents the building of the Argo as a cooperative venture on the divine level. Here Minerva supervises the initial construction; the prophetic plank from Jupiter’s oracular grove will be added by Juno” at 1.302-308. This is reminiscent of Hypsipyle leading the Argives into the Nemean forest to the Langia River: *illi per dumos et opaca uirentibus umbris / deuia*, Stat. *Theb*. 4.797-798. Statius may be playing with this passage by naming the first Argive soldier to see the Langia River Argus. Zissos (2008, 136): “Pelion is the invariable source of timber for Argo’s construction...It was densely forested...especially with oak and pine trees.”
spaces of the city and the forests on the mountainside. Although we are far from the genre of bucolic, the forest’s shade marks it as a *locus amoenus*, since shade is one of, if not the most important, hallmarks of the *locus amoenus*. Thus Pallas goes out into a pleasant, or at least non-threatening forest, rather than a *locus horridus* like Lucan’s Massilian grove. This conception of the forest of Pelion as a pleasant, welcoming place is further emphasized by the reactions of the local deities to the Argo’s voyage, as seen below. Meanwhile, Juno, playing the role of Fama, goes around spreading the news of the voyage (1.96-99):

\[
\text{at Iuno Argolicas pariter Macetumque per urbes spargit inexpertos temptare parentibus austros Aesoniden, iam stare ratem remisque superbam poscere quos reuehat rebusque in sidera tollat.}
\]

But Juno throughout the cities of Argos and the Macedonians scatters the news that the son of Aeson will test the south winds, untried by his parents’ generation, and that already a ship stands ready and proud in its oars asks for the men whom it will carry and raise to the stars through their deeds.

Before the Argonauts even get on the ocean, Juno presents their voyage as a challenge to the winds (*temptare...austros*), one which their fathers never undertook (*inexpertos...parentibus*). This foreshadows the collective lament just a few hundred lines later in book 1 when the Argonauts are faced with the storm caused by Boreas (*hoc erat inlicitas temerare rudentibus undas / quod nostri timuere patres*, 1.627-628). Next we hear that everyone experienced in war and known by fame and even those young men that are as yet untested are eager to join the voyage (1.100-101).\(^\text{151}\) Valerius contrasts these men with unwarlike farmers who have little interest in such a voyage (1.103-106):

\[
\text{at quibus aruorum studiumque insontis aratri, hos stimulant magnaque ratem per lustra uiasque uisi}\textsuperscript{152} laude canunt manifesto in lumine Fauni 105}
\]

\(^\text{151}\) Hershkowitz (1998b, 112) notes the Argonauts are attracted to the voyage “by the thought of fame (a motivation similar to Jason’s own), but also by the pull of the name of Jason, himself, emphasized by its enjambment” in 1.98.
siluarumque deae atque elatis cornibus amnes.

But those that are focused on the fields and the innocent plow, these men and the ship the Fauns, seen in the clear light, and the forest goddesses and rivers with their horns uplifted urge on through great wanderings and journeys and sing with praise.

Even these men busy tending to their fields and crops, though full of praise for the Argo as they apparently are (omnis auet, 1.100), are disinclined to go, preferring to put their energy into their fields.\textsuperscript{153} However, the Fauns, Nymphs, and rivers of Greece rouse (stimulant) even them with their praise of the expedition and the ship.\textsuperscript{154} This gives the impression that all Greece desires the voyage, even those previously content to till their fields.\textsuperscript{155}

Valerius assimilates the Fauns, Nymphs, and rivers to the Argonauts by presenting them as similarly desirous of the voyage. Not only do they urge on (stimulant) the farmers, they also sing the praises (laude canunt) of the Argonauts. Since Juno has crisscrossed Greece to spread the news of the Argo’s journey, it is already well known that they will test the winds (temptare...austros, 1.97). The forest inhabitants’ and personified rivers’ praise for the Argo and its builders shows that they approve of the voyage and do not see any issue with testing the power of the winds. In this way they are aligned with Jupiter’s prophecy later in book 1 and with the values of the Argonauts themselves. Whereas in the \textit{Thebaid}, the \textit{Punica}, and even elsewhere in the \textit{Argonautica}, humans are so often at odds with forests and their inhabitants, here the forest deities, who can be seen as speaking for the forest, are entirely supportive of the voyage.\textsuperscript{156}

\textsuperscript{152} uisi Hensius; iussi V; see Zissos (2008, 140).

\textsuperscript{153} Zissos (2008, 140): “It is better to understand that the unadventurous rural population (taking hos as antecedent of quibus), though neither suited nor inclined to join the expedition, is enthralled to hear of it."

\textsuperscript{154} Kleywegt (2005, 77): “The oral propaganda suits the Fauns, their name in antiquity being falsely derived from fari (Var. L. 7.36).”

\textsuperscript{155} Kleywegt (2005, 76): “The Latin poet...explicitly refers to countryfolk, thereby accentuating the interest and sympathy felt throughout Greece, not just in Iolcus.”
However, the building of the Argo still remains to be examined. As seen in Ovid, Lucan, and below in the *Thebaid*, tree-cutting can be destructive and sacrilegious: the comparison of the Argives’ tree-cutting in the Nemean forest to the sack of a city presents it as an act of wanton destruction and plunder. Tree-cutting, especially that done to build funeral pyres, often repeats the sounds and violence of the preceding battle. But, the tree-cutting undertaken to build the Argo is completely different and without the same negative connotations. Juno gazes admiringly upon the activity of the workmen (1.121-129):

feruere cuncta uirum coetu, simul undique cernit
delatum nemus et docta resonare bipenni
litora; iam pinus gracili dissoluere lamna
Thespiaden iungique latus lentoque sequaces
molliri uidet igne trabes, remisque paratis
Pallada uelifero quaerentem brachia malo.

She sees everything surging with a gathering of men, and at the same time from all sides the grove is carried off and the shores ring with the learned axe. Already she sees Thespian Argus splitting the pines with a slender blade and the side [of the ship] joined and the beams made pliant with gentle fire, and, the oars prepared, Pallas seeking a yard-arm for the sail-bearing mast.

Unlike Silius’ and Statius’ tree-cutting scenes that feature catalogues of the trees, here the tree-cutting is barely mentioned. The trees are barely cut down (*delatum nemus*) and already (*iam*) Argus is splitting them into planks and the ship quickly takes shape while the shores ring with

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156 Cf. the sacred snake of Jupiter as *genius loci* in *Thebaid* 5.


158 About *uirum coetu* (1.121) Zissos (2008, 150) argues “VF does not describe the Argonauts’ arrival in Thessaly; the earliest indication they have mustered is at 184 (*Minyae*). Thus *virum coetu* is more likely to designate local workmen assisting Argus with the vessel’s construction.”

159 Nowhere, not even here, does Valerius interact extensively with the epic tree-cutting tradition, as Spaltenstein (2004, 99) notes on the preparations for Cyzicus’ funeral at 3.311 *uos age funeræas ad litora uolutæ silusæ*: “Val. ne présente pas à proprement parler le motif célèbre de l’abattage de la forêt...mais il y fait évidemment référence avec les touches hyperboliques *uolutæ siluæ* 311 et *nudatis montibus* 332, et d’autant plus que ce motif homérique est associé aux funérailles.”
the sound of axes. The pine is the only type of tree that Valerius mentions, suggesting that Argus selects only the type of tree necessary for shipbuilding and uses it in a way that fulfills its purpose.

Valerius does not suggest that there is any collateral damage as a side-effect of the construction of the Argo. Indeed, as mentioned just above, the local Fauns and Nymphs celebrate the Argonauts’ voyage and the building of the Argo. This suggests an altogether different relationship between the Argonauts and the local silvan deities. The rustic deities’ praise for the Argonauts (laude canunt) and their urging on (stimulant) of the farmers to undertake the journey suggests a mutual human and divine project. The Argonauts receive Jupiter’s blessing (1.556-557) for the journey but he is aloof and separate from the action of the poem. However, the rivers, Fauns, and Nymphs actively spur the Argonauts to action. Faunus was traditionally a rustic or wild (agrestis), forest-dwelling god generally opposed to civilized society, or at least apart from it. Nymphs as well, so closely identified with trees, are wild deities. Yet together with the rivers of Greece they take an active role in the initiation of the Argonautic journey (and of Valerius’ Argonautica itself). This is evidence for the (occasional) harmony between humans and nature in the Argonautica or a kind of melding of the human/civilized and nonhuman/wild. But this is by no means universal. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Giant-like winds strongly oppose the Argonauts’ voyage with only the

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161 This brings to mind the catalogue of trees destroyed by the Argives in Thebaid 6 where Statius details the uses of different trees, including the pine (odoro uulnere pinus / scinditur, Theb. 6.104-105). Statius mentions the fir tree, abies, not the pine, as the tree used specifically for shipbuilding. Of course, the cutting of these trees by the Argives to use them specifically for funeral pyres precludes their usage in the ways that they are useful. Argus, however, uses the pine in the way that fulfills its purpose for humans.

162 Whereas the Argives terrify the local Fauns and Nymphs driving them out of the forest and even seemingly kill the Nymphs that refuse to let go of their trees.

163 OCD s.v.
intervention of Neptune himself saving the Argonauts from certain death. The winds are strongly identified with the ocean and while the winds certainly blow on land, they are often closely connected with the sea, being necessary for sea-travel, and the sea offers no shelter from them. Thus a clear dichotomy emerges between, on the one hand, the winds and seas and, on the other hand, the terrestrial humans and nonhuman deities (Fauns, Nymphs, rivers). The Argonauts, and the woodland deities encouraging them, present a united terrestrial challenge to the seas that had been off-limits for humans. The apparent alliance between human and nonhuman actors allows Argus to cut trees and use them to their full potential without the risk of committing an atrocity like Ovid’s Erysichthon or the Argives in section 6 below. As seen in the *Thebaid* and *Punica* forests, rivers, and mountains can be significant obstacles in the way of human expansion. However, rather than being obstacles, the woodland deities and rivers of Greece join the Argonauts in initiating their expedition and by openly praising the Argonauts they show that they approve of the building of the Argo and of the advancement, and simultaneous transgression, that it symbolizes.

**Mopsus’ Infernal Expiation**

In book 3, Valerius presents a very brief tree-cutting scene (only two verses) when the Argonauts prepare a pyre for the dead Dolonian king Cyzicus. But the following scene in which Mopsus performs expiatory rites in a strange, Stygian forest connects with the overall motif of forest landscapes. My focus here is not on the rites themselves, but rather their setting and what it tells us about Valerius’ view of nature and his audience’s interest in such wild landscapes. The setting for Mopsus’ rites elides the distance between the edges of the earth and the Argonauts’ current location on the island of Cyzicus thereby making it dark and strange.
Mopsus’ rites bring the Underworld and the edges of the earth to the Argonauts and Mopsus informs Jason of the need for expiatory rites. The source of his knowledge is one Celaeneus who judges the dead below the land of the Cimmerians which itself is beyond the edge of the ocean, “between the upper world and the underworld, on a downward path, and is an eery place.” The land of the Cimmerians is marked by a Stygian silence (Stygiae deuexa silentia noctis, 3.398) and is not visited by the Olympian gods (superis incognita tellus, 3.399), indicating its extreme distance from the known world. In the home of the Cimmerians the sun never shines and “the branches are silent and an unmoving Avernal forest bristles on the leafy ridges,” (stant tacitae frondes immotaque silua comanti / horret Auerna iugo, 3.402-403). Below this is a cavern and the ocean flows down into long darkness and silence suddenly broken by the voices of the dead (aruaque nigro / uasta metu et subitae post longa silentia uoces, 3.404-405). With this description Valerius paints a picture of the end of the earth where even the ocean spills down into nothingness leading to the Underworld.

Although Mopsus is describing the distant source of his knowledge, i.e. the mysterious Celaeneus, the similarities between the infernal edge of the earth with its silent forest and the nearby forest where he conducts the rites are all too apparent. These similarities bring the ends of the earth to the Argonauts on Cyzicus (V. Fl. 3.419-421, 425-429):

\[\text{cum uigil arcani speculatus tempora sacri}\]

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165 Manuwald (2015, 172): “incognitus does not imply that the heavenly gods do not know about this region, rather that they have no direct experience of it (OLD 3).”

166 Manuwald (2015, 173): “in Homer’s Odyssey the Cimmerii are located at the edge of the ocean (11.13-14), often seen as a boundary between heaven and earth.”
Then the vigilant son of Ampycus, watching for the proper time for sacred rites, seeks the River Aesepia and the forests opposite and at the same time descends to the ocean waves.

He marks with shore with his sword drawn and around he establishes humble altars and the names of unknown gods and makes it gloomy with the dark forest: and when he has imparted to the place fear and a divine power and sacred silence, he calls forth the rising sun from the burning depths of the sea.

Mopsus goes down to the sea in the middle of the night and the night echoes the darkness in the land of the Cimmerians. Mopsus’ journey down to the sea similarly echoes Valerius’ description of the edge of the world descending down into the Underworld from the land of the Cimmerians (umbrarumque meatus / subter, 3.403-404). Standing on the shore next to the forest, he shades the area with foliage and, as it grows darker matching the infernal darkness of the Underworld, he imparts (addidit) to the place fear, a numen, and a sacred silence. Although siluaque super contristat opaca is unclear, by maintaining Mopsus as the subject, it suggests that he is covering the altars with foliage from the forest. Mopsus fills the place with fear, numen, and silence and metum numenque loco sacramque quietem addidit shows Mopsus, and by extension the Argonauts, imbuing the place with meaning through their worship and even ‘creating’ a numen in it. This imbues the forest and the shore with a vague sense of divinity that, when combined with metus and sacra quies, is dark and foreboding, completely unlike the woodland deities of Mt. Pelion.

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167 Cf. Stat. Theb. 9.586-588 quercus erat, Triuiae quam desacrauerat ipsa / electam turba nemorum numenque colendo / fecerat. Like Mopsus, Parthenopaeus’ mother makes “a tree sacred by her worship.” This introduces a whole separate topic of what is ‘sacred’ and how it becomes so. As Ailsa Hunt (2016) shows a tremendous part of it seems to be a combination of belief and action, i.e. “I think this object is sacred and I treat it as such, thus it is so.”
Looking back, the landscape Mopsus creates on the shore next to the forest mirrors his
description of the land of the Cimmerians and the Underworld.\textsuperscript{168} This elides the distance
between the two making this place on Cyzicus similarly dark and infernal. Valerius emphasizes
the thematic proximity of the edge of the world and the boundary between the shore and forest
on Cyzicus where Mopsus performs the rites to highlight that the Argonauts have traveled away
from Greece and civilization. This is not the same type of forest that gave them the Argo, where
the deities celebrated their voyage, but rather a dark, foreboding place whose strangeness and
connection with the dead makes it the ideal place for Mopsus to perform his rites. The Argonauts
are in a strange place far from home, almost descending to the Underworld through the rites at
the forest. Ultimately, the forest’s dark, wild nature enables Mopsus to expiate the Argonauts’
crimes and allows them continue on their journey.

**Hylas’ Abduction in Argonautica 3**

Some of the forest landscapes of the *Argonautica* encountered after the Argonauts leave
Greece are dark and foreboding, while others are deceptively pleasant yet dangerous, figuratively
increasing the distance from Greece even further. Shortly after leaving Cyzicus, Hercules breaks
his oar in a rowing contest, a famous incident familiar from Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, and they
stop in Mysia so he can fashion a new one. In the forest wilderness of Mysia, Hylas is captured
by Nymphs permanently separating him and Hercules from the others.\textsuperscript{169} Although the Mysian
forest is based in part on Ovid’s conception of *loci amoeni*, idyllic settings in which violence

\textsuperscript{168} On the mirroring function of space and its nature as a subset of mise-en-abyme, see de Jong (2014, 14).

\textsuperscript{169} Heerink (2015a) traces the Hylas legend first through Hellenistic Greek and then Latin literature and its
intertextual echoes between authors. For Valerius’ *Argonautica*, he shows that the scene of Hylas’ capture elegizes
Vergil’s *Aeneid* while incorporating “the earlier bucolic and elegiac appropriations of the Hylas myth into his own
version of the story” (2015a, 157). In addition, “by transforming a potential *Aeneid* into a bucolic and elegiac world,
Valerius inverts Virgil’s poetical move to essential epic in *Aeneid* 7...Valerius’s *Argonautica* is an elegized *Aeneid*
(2015a, 157). See also Heerink (2015b). On Valerius’ debt to his predecessors and his innovations in this scene see
occurs, Valerius uses the language of wilderness (auia) to illustrate the wild, dangerous nature of Mysia as well as Hylas’ and Hercules’ ignorance of the area.\footnote{On Ovid’s landscapes see Hinds (2002, 131), Parry (1964, 280-282).} This ignorance results in Hylas’ kidnapping and Hercules’ failure to find him.

Juno contrives to separate Hercules from the expedition and convinces Dryope, one out of a group of hunting Nymphs (uenantes...nymphas, 3.522), to capture Hylas as he hunts in the forested Mysian hills (laeui iuga pinea montis, 3.521).\footnote{On huntress nymphs, cf. Venus’ description at Verg. Aen. 1.318-320. Manuwald (2015, 211): “Beyond an indication of direction, laeui might have a metaphorical meaning and foreshadow something unfavourable (OLD 3c, 4).”} As Hercules and Hylas wander through the hills, they disturb the Nymphs’ forest home (turbatum...nemus, 3.531) and Dryope in particular is overwhelmed by the noise of Hercules (Herculeo Dryope percussa fragore, 3.529), which presents Hercules as an unwelcome invader and makes him unknowingly responsible for Hylas’ kidnapping.\footnote{Manuwald (2015, 213): “thus he unknowingly contributes to the realization of Juno’s plans.”} Dryope fears Hercules and Juno arrives to reassure her, instructing Dryope to capture Hylas who “is wandering through your glades and your streams,” (saltusque tuos fontesque pererrat, 3.537). Pererrat indicates Hylas’ ignorance of the area which is contrasted with tuos indicating the Nymph’s knowledge of the area and that it belongs to her and the other Nymphs. Furthermore, Valerius explicitly creates a dichotomy between Greece and Asia in Juno’s speech (V. Fl. 3.542-544):

\begin{quote}
‘quae spes nymphis aufertur Achaeis, praereptum quanto proles Boebeia questu audiet et flau quam tristis nata Lycormae!’
\end{quote}

“Such hope is taken away from the Achaean Nymphs, with such great complaints the offspring of Lake Boebe and the sad daughter of golden Lycormas will hear that you have been taken!”
Juno delights in denying Hylas to the Nymphs of Greece and instead gives him to a Nymph of Asia, drawing a distinction between his home country and their present location, further distancing the Argonauts from Greece. The Nymphs and forest landscape are reminiscent of deity-inhabited Mt. Pelion where the trees were cut for the Argo’s construction and indeed Lake Boebe is located in Thessaly. On Mt. Pelion, the local deities had welcomed and praised the Argonauts but here they run in fear from Hercules and Hylas. The welcoming, familiar landscape of Pelion has changed into the deceptive forest of Mysia.

Valerius plays with the characterizations of hunter and hunted in this passage to heighten the sense of danger as well as Hylas’ and Hercules’ ignorance. Hylas chases a deer that Juno sends running through the leafy wilderness (frondosa per auia, 3.545), separating himself from Hercules. The forest is auia from Hylas’ perspective: he is ignorant of where he is and where he is going but his eagerness and Hercules’ encouragement drive him to give chase (Hylas praedaeque ferox ardore propinquae / insequitur, 3.549-550). Valerius reveals the dangers inherent in rushing into an unknown landscape, even one that is deceptively pleasant. The deer escapes and Hylas finds himself at a stream and eagerly (auidus, 3.557) sinks into the water. Before he knows what is happening (nil umbra comaeque / turbaitque sonus surgentis ad oscula nymphae, 3.560-561), the Nymph grabs him and drags him under. Hylas, the hunter seeking the deer, becomes the hunted one trapped in the wilderness by the huntress Nymph (uenantes...nymphas, 3.522).

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174 Cf. Verg. Aen. 1.184-194 and 7.479-510. As Heerink (2015a, 123) notes, “by elegizing Hylas’ hunt and turning Hercules in the Hylas episode into an elegiac lover, Valerius inverts Virgil’s transformation of Latium into an epic world of war.” Manuwald (2015, 210): “The appearance of the stag is a consequence of VF’s remodelling the Hylas episode by the introduction of divine motivation...This modification creates a parallel to Czyzicus’ inadvertently hunting an animal with divine connections.” For Czyzicus’ killing of a lion sacred to Cybele, see V. Fl. 3.19-31.
After discovering Hylas’ absence, Hercules’ speech and actions further emphasize the wild unknown nature of the landscape. Hercules worries about Hylas as night falls (\textit{densam interea descendere noctem / iam maiore metu, 3.575-576}) and is moved at the thought of his companion’s wandering (\textit{comitis sic adficit error / Alciden, 3.579-580}). Hercules charges back into the hills with a similar passion that drove Hylas (\textit{ardens, 3.583}) and the landscape reacts to his approach (3.584-586):\textsuperscript{175}

\begin{quote}
\textit{pauet omnis conscia late silua, pauent montes, luctu succensus acerbo quid struat Alcides tantaque quid apparat ira.}
\end{quote}

Far and wide the whole forest is afraid, the mountains are terrified, enflamed with keen grief at what Alcides might do and how great his anger seemed.

Here the landscape is personified and shown to be terrified because of Hercules’ approach.\textsuperscript{176}

The landscape is the focalizer of the scene since the forest and hills are the subjects of both verbs (\textit{pauet, pauent}). The adjective \textit{conscia} gives the impression that the Nymphs acknowledge their own guilt in Hylas’ abduction.\textsuperscript{177} \textit{Conscia} can simply mean ‘knowing’ or imply ‘guilty,’ suggesting a range of interpretations: the forest, and by extension its inhabitants, may simply have knowledge of what occurred or it may actually feel guilt. Thus, we get the impression that

\textsuperscript{175} Hershkowitz (1998b, 153-154) argues Hercules’ portrayal is not that of a lover but rather of a parent and that Hercules most closely resembles Aeneas after the death of Pallas.

\textsuperscript{176} Spaltenstein (2004, 169) notes “Wa[gener] suggère d'abord que la forêt est \textit{conscia} parce que’elle a déjà éprouvé la violence d'Hercule...mais la forêt se sent ‘complice’ de la nymphe...et donc coupable. La touche d'animisme \textit{pauet} est traditionnelle.” This kind of personification of inanimate objects is typically known as ‘pathetic fallacy’ and occasionally as ‘pastoral echo’ in bucolic poetry (see Heerink 2015a, 124n47). However, at least as applied to ancient literary landscapes, I reject this label outright for many if not all landscapes in ancient literature, especially poetry, as it falsely implies that all instances of personified landscapes are purely fantastical, imaginary, and lacking any basis in ancient religious belief. As seen in this passage and in many of the others I discuss in this chapter, the naturescapes of the ancient world abounded in Nymphs, deities, and spirits. In epic, and other genres, these deities exist in the narrative. Whether real-life Romans believed they existed is another matter but they certainly acted like they did. Thus on both levels, as I see it, these personifications can be seen as reflecting the emotions of the local nature deities present in trees and streams. ‘Pathetic fallacy’ is, simply put, an elision of the complexity of ancient religious belief and its representation in literature. As Feeney (1991, 53) argues, early commentators’ “assumption that the gods contribute to the plausibility of the epic action is a useful check on the very common modern assumption that the gods generally undermine the plausibility of the human action.”

\textsuperscript{177} Cf. \textit{Theb.} 3.175 \textit{conscius actis}. 

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the forest itself is reacting with fear because of a guilty conscience. Ultimately, the forest feels guilt but *conscia* also suggests the guilt of the Nymphs and may also reflect Hercules’ judgment of the place that took away his friend. Not only do we have Hercules’ reaction and emotions but we are also presented with the emotions of the landscape and Nymphs. Both Hercules and the Nymphs have been changed by their encounter: Hercules has lost, and the Nymphs have gained, reflecting the unequal give-and-take inherent in such interactions and the danger of unknown places.

The dichotomy between known and unknown continues as Hercules searches for Hylas. He charges back into the hills aimlessly (*ordine nullo*, 3.593) until he runs once more to the places of the forest that he knows (*notas nemorum procurrit ad umbras*, 3.595) continuing to call into the wilderness for Hylas (*rursus Hylan et rursus Hylan per longa reclamat / auia*, 3.596-597). The enjambment of *auia* highlights its importance and Valerius contrasts the pathless wilderness into which Hercules shouts with the familiar part of the forest where he is. When Hercules fails to find Hylas, Valerius emphasizes once again the conflict between Hercules and the landscape. As if Hercules had been at war with the landscape of Mysia, peace returns to the forests when Jupiter causes Hercules to sleep (*fessis pax reddita siluis*, 4.20) and once again the rivers and breeze can be heard in the hills (*fluminaque et uacuis auditae montibus aurae*, 4.21). Not only has Hercules stopped raging through the forest but now, asleep, he is no longer weeping and disturbing the quiet of the forest. The conflict between him and the landscape that had begun when he disturbed the forest (*turbatum...nemus*, 3.531) is now at an end with the hero defeated.

At the end of the episode of Hylas’ abduction Hercules’ departure from the forest for Troy constructs a symbolic distinction between wilderness and city. After Hylas appears in his

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dream to comfort him, Hercules decides to go on alone, leaving Hylas to stay in the hills and deserted wilderness (hos montes desrtaque lustra tenebis, 4.52). Whereas the forest is pathless (auia) throughout, Hercules now retraces his steps (relegitque uias) and leaves the wilderness (et uallibus exit, 4.54). He sees the Argo sailing away at a distance and immediately heads for Troy (iamque iter ad Teucros atque hospitia moenia Troiae / flexerat, 4.58-59). Valerius contrasts the auia and deserta places of the wilderness with the path Hercules took into the forest (uiia) and the road he now takes to Troy (iter). The path out and the road to Troy are known while the wilderness was unknown and therefore dangerous, as Hylas discovered. Troy’s welcoming walls are nearby and known to Hercules, but the Argonauts must continue on further into the unknown without their greatest hero.

4. Forests and Tree-cutting in the Punica

Trees and forests in the Punica are highly context-dependent, sometimes portrayed as obstacles or enemies and other times as tools, such as fuel for fires. In the Alps, Hannibal uses the dense mountain forest as fuel to break a rock in his path. At the battle of Trasimene in Punica 5, two ancient trees used as a refuge by Roman-allied soldiers deceive and betray them causing their deaths. These trees are part of a pattern seen with the water-battles examined in the next chapter (Ticinus, Trebia, Trasimene) in which the Italian landscape allies with the Carthaginians and turns against the Romans. In addition, Silius uses the tree-cutting scene in Punica 10 to highlight the incongruity between the Carthaginians’ mental state and their view of the losses they have suffered at Cannae. Although they should be celebrating a victory while honoring the dead, the funeral pyres cause each Carthaginian soldier to instead think about the prospect of dying on foreign soil.
The Alps

Having finally crossed the summit of the Alps, Hannibal and his army find their path blocked by a cliff or large rock (\textit{obuia rupes}, 3.635). They work through the night to build a fire to dislodge the rock (3.638-644):

\begin{quote}
\begin{align*}
\text{n} & \text{octem operi iungunt et robora ferre coactis} \\
\text{ap} & \text{properant umeris ac raptas collibus ornos.} \\
\text{i} & \text{amque ubi nudarunt silua densissima montis,} \\
\text{ag} & \text{gessere trabes, rapidisque accensus in orbem} \\
\text{exco} & \text{quitur flammis scopulus. mox proruta ferro} \\
\text{dat} & \text{gemitum putris resoluto pondere moles} \\
\text{at} & \text{que aperit fessis antiqui regna Latini.}
\end{align*}
\end{quote}

They work through the night and hurry to carry on their gathered shoulders oaks and ash-trees, taken from the mountains. And now when they have stripped the dense forests from the mountains they pile up the logs and the rock, set on fire on all sides, burns with swift flames. Soon, with the impediment loosened, the crumbling mass, broken with iron, gives a groan and opens the kingdom of ancient Latinus to the tired soldiers.

Although brief, this passage bears several similarities to other tree-cutting passages. The various types of trees (\textit{robora, ornos}), the language of stripping or clear-cutting (\textit{nudarunt}), and the burning of the piled-up trees (\textit{flammis}) are all features of other passages and the speed of the cutting is emphasized (\textit{approperant}). The burning of the trees are the means by which Hannibal finally breaks through the last obstacle the Alps has presented to him and the means by which Italy is laid open. Much like woodland deities praising Argus and the Argonauts, nature essentially works with Hannibal to enable his entrance into Italy. The cooperation between nature and the Carthaginians emerges as a theme that extends from here throughout the Carthaginian victories at Ticinus, Trebia, and Trasimene.

Treachorous Trees at Trasimene

Like the forest where Hylas is kidnapped, trees and forests in the \textit{Punica} can be dangerously deceptive and even actively help the Carthaginians. At the battle of Trasimene in
book 5, Roman-allied soldiers from Sicily flee from the battle and seek shelter in two massive oak trees near the battlefield, which the Carthaginians then cut down to kill them. As the narrator notes, fear is a bad advisor in dire straits (non aequus in artis / nimirum rebus suasor metus, 5.477-478) and he gives the Sicilian soldiers’ decision to climb the trees as an example of this, critizing their misjudgment in assuming that the trees would be a safe place to which to flee. As often seen in literary descriptions of important and impressive trees, one is old (annosa, 5.480), raises its head into the clouds (nubibus insertans altis caput, 5.483), and looks like an entire grove (instar...nemoris, 5.483-484). The other is equal in size, ancient (longum...per aevum, 5.485), and casts a shadow on the nearby mountaintop (umbrabatque coma summi fastigia montis, 5.488). In a mad dash of fear the Sicilian soldiers flee to the trees (5.492-509):

certatim sese tuit adscendensque uicissim
pressit nutantes incerto pondere ramos.
mox alius super atque alius consistere tuto
dum certant, pars excussi (nam fragmine putri
ramorum et senio male fida fellerat arbor),
pars trepdi celso inter tela cacumine pendent.
turbatos una properans consumere peste
corripit aeratam iam dudum in bella bipennem
deposito clipeo mutatus tela Sychaeus.
incumbunt sociae dextrae, magnoque fragore
pulsa gemt crebris succumbens icibus arbos.
fluctuat infelix concusso stipite turba,
ceu, Zephyrus quatit antiquos ubi flamee lucos,
fronde super tremuli uix tota cacuminis haerens
iactatur nido pariter nutante uolucris.
procubuit tandem multa deuicta securi
suffugium infelix miseris et inhospita quercus
elisitque uirum spatiosa membra ruina.

179 This is Silius’ invention or based on a source that is no longer extant. Cf. Livy’s account of the battle at 22.4-7 in which he only mentions Roman soldiers fleeing into the lake in an attempt to escape by swimming. See Niemann (1975, 144-145).

180 Cf. Ov. Met. 8.744; Verg. G. 2.208-211; Stat. Theb. 5.18; Sil. 4.678, 5.470, 5.504.

They go earnestly and, climbing in turn, weigh down the nodding branches with their uneven weight. Then as one after another fights to reach safety, some fall, (for the tree deceived them with its rotten branches and its untrustworthy old age), and others hang fearfully from the high branches in a hail of missiles. Hurrying to destroy the panicked men with a single destruction, Sychaeus, changing weapons, dropped his shield and at once seized a bronze battle-axe. His comrades attack and the tree groans and, struck by numerous blows, leans with a great crack. The unlucky band of soldiers is distressed when the peak trembles, just as, when Zephyr shakes ancient groves with a gust, a bird scarcely holding onto the branches of the swaying tree-top is thrown from its wavering nest. Finally, defeated by many axes, the oak, an unhospitable and unlucky refuge for the miserable men, fell and its wide ruin crushed the bodies of the men.

Certatim (492) communicates the panic and competitive mindset of the soldiers as they try to escape, repeated again by certant (495), while the tree branches bend under their weight (nutantes, 493). Up to this point the focus has been on the soldiers, who have been the subject, but Silius switches to the tree and makes it the cause of the soldiers’ deaths because it deceives them with its rotten branches. Whereas a tree’s old age is often cause for respect, here it is a liability, one which the Sicilians did not anticipate. The tree’s active role in deceiving (fefellerat) the Sicilians is a clear instance of nature being partisan. As I will show in the next chapter when Italian rivers side with Hannibal, the tree’s apparent faithlessness and deception (male fida fefellerat) puts it in league with the Carthaginians who are infamous for their perfidia, one of the main themes of the poem (sacri cum perfida pacti / gens Cadmea super regno certamina mouit, Sil. 1.5-6).

Like Hannibal’s descent from the Alps, the tree becomes a tool of the Carthaginian warrior Sychaeus. He exchanges his spear for an axe as he transitions from attacking the enemy soldiers to attacking the tree. Axes are, naturally, common elements of tree-cutting passages and Silius includes many other common features: a group of men (sociae dextrae), the noise of the chopping (magno fragore), the swaying motion of the tree as its trunk weakens (concusso stipite), and finally the fall (procubuit tandem...deuicta). Typically the men compete to cut down
trees but here Silius transfers this sense of competition to the Sicilian soldiers as they attempt to flee to the tree (certatim, 492). Silius also makes the tree the cause of the soldiers’ deaths and the tool of Sychaeus as it crushes them when it falls (inhospita quercus / elisitque uirum spatiosa membra ruina, 508-509).  

Silius follows the cutting of the first tree with the destruction of the second by fire (5.510-516):

Inde aliae cladum facies. contermina taedis collucet rapidoque inuoluitur aesculus igni. iamque inter frondes arenti robre gliscens uerticibus saeuis torquet Vulcanus anhelo cum feruore globos flammarum et culmina torret. nec tela interea cessant. semusta gementum atque amplexa cadunt ardentes corpora ramos.  

Then there are other forms of destruction. The neighboring tree is lit up with torches and the oak is engulfed by the quick flames. And then Vulcan shining among the branches with his parching heat twists vaporous masses of hot flame from its cruel tongues and burns the tree-top. Meanwhile, the missiles do not stop. The half-burnt bodies of the groaning men fall as they embrace the burning branches.

Unlike the first oak, the second is overcome by fire, apparently the Carthaginians’ second choice for bringing down the trees, although Silius does not make the source of the fire explicit. The ancient tree goes up quickly and the Sicilian soldiers’ deaths are gruesome: they fall half-burnt from the tree. Unlike the first oak, the fire does not make the second oak fall but burns it

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182 This passage has much in common with Vergil’s simile comparing Troy to a falling ash tree in Aeneid 2 (2.624-631; also G. 2.303-311), suggesting at minimum an intertextual relationship if not an allusive one. The linguistic parallels are manifold with the concluding ruina especially noteworthy (Verg. Aen. 2.631 congemuit traxitque iugis auulsa ruinam; Sil. 5.509 elisit uirum spatiosa membra ruina). If Silius has this Vergilian passage in mind he may be suggesting the scale of the destruction caused by the falling trees as akin to the destruction of a city, like in the Thebaid below, but the connections are more tenuous. We should not view this as the same effect achieved by Statius, but rather a more figurative comparison of the falling trees and the fall of Troy. Furthermore, Silius makes the focus of his tree-cutting passage the trees alone as the inset simile he uses to describe Sychaeus and the Carthaginians cutting down the trees is in fact another simile describing trees being shaken by the wind, which is reminiscent of the wind similes that Statius uses to describe the deforestation of Nemea. Cf. Stat. Theb. 6.107-110 where Statius suggests the Argives are more violent than the wind, non sic euersa feruntur / Ismara cum effracto Boreas caput extulit antro, / non grassante Noto citius nocitura peregit / flamma nemus.

183 The “many forms of death” motif (aliae cladum facies, 5.510) is fairly common. Silius continues the idea from earlier (5.458, uaria...pugna).
completely. Instead of the tree, it is the soldiers who fall screaming from the branches. It is unclear whether, unable to hold on because of the fire, they grasp at branches as they fall or the branches which they are holding break off because of the fire. Ultimately, both trees are characterized as being treacherous and untrustworthy, much like the Carthaginians, putting the Sicilian soldiers in an “out of the frying pan and into the fire” situation as they flee from one source of danger to another, communicating the potential deception and inherent danger in wild naturescapes.

**Funerals after Cannae**

In book 10, tree-cutting features prominently in the preparations for the funerals of the Carthaginian soldiers and of the consul Paulus killed at the battle of Cannae.\textsuperscript{184} As Hannibal listens to Cinna’s story of Cloelia in the aftermath of the battle, the Carthaginians send up a sudden shout announcing that the body of the consul Paulus has been found, interrupting the story and taking the narrative in a new direction (**Talia dum pandit, uicinus parte sinistra / per subitum erumpit clamor**, 10.503-504).\textsuperscript{185} For Silius, the great tragedy here is the death of Paulus and he draws attention to the contrast between his former glory (**heu quis erat**, 10.507) and his current state in death (**tum toto corpore ulunus**, 10.512). While the funeral scenes are reminiscent of scenes in the *Aeneid* such as the burial of Misenus by the Trojans in book 6 and the mutual funerals of the Trojans and Latins in book 11, Hannibal does not grieve for his soldiers but celebrates the death of his enemy while commanding he be given a funeral with honor.\textsuperscript{186} While Hannibal wishes that he would one day die in battle like Paulus (**cum fata uocabunt, / tale precor**)

\textsuperscript{184} On Paulus’ death and funeral, see Augoustakis (2017, 305-309).

\textsuperscript{185} Littlewood (2017, 201). Cf. Verg. *Aen*. 2.58 *magnus clamore*, the shout sent up when Sinon is found which signals a similar shift. Cf. Silius’ description of Paulus with that of Hector when he appears to Aeneas (Verg. *Aen*. 2.270-279).

nobis salua Carthagine letum, 10.522-523), his own dead soldiers are almost an afterthought in comparison to Paulus, and he only turns to them after finishing his speech for Paulus (haec ait et socium mandari corpora terrae, 10.524).

The preparations for the funerals of the Carthaginian dead provide an opportunity for tree-cutting. After Hannibal gives his speech praising the dead consul Paulus, he commands that the dead be given a funeral (10.526-536):

> armorumque iubet consurgere aceruos,
> arsuros, Gradiae, tibi. tum munera iussa,
> defessi quamquam, accelerant sparsaque propinquos
> agmine prostrunt lucos. sonat acta187 bipenni
> frondosis silua alta iugis. hinc ornus et altae
> populus alba comae ualidis accisa lacertis
> scinditur, hinc ilex proauorum consita saeclo
> deuoluunt quercus et amantem litora pinum
> ac, ferale decus, maestas ad busta cupressos.
> funereas tum deinde pyras certamine texunt,
> officium infelix et munus inane peremptis
>
> And he commands them to build up pyres to be burned to you, Gradivus. Then, the duties commanded, although they are tired, they hurry and in a scattered band cut down the nearby groves. The high forest on the leafy hills resounds, driven by the axe. On one side, the ash-tree and tall poplar with white leaves are cut by strong arms, on another, the holm-oak, planted in ancient times, and the oak and the pine that loves the shores and the cypresses, sad in its deathly glory, roll down to the fires. Then in rivalry they weave funeral biers, an unfortunate duty and a service useless to the dead.

As in the Alps, Hannibal’s soldiers hurry to cut down the trees as ordered (accelerant) despite their exhaustion (defessi quamquam). Just as the shores ring with the sound of the axe in previous tree-cutting passages (e.g. docta resonare bipenni / litora, V. Fl. 1.122-3; sonat icta securibus, Verg. Aen. 6.180), here the whole forest resounds when struck by the axe (sonat acta bipenni /...silua, 10.529-530).

Silius gives a catalogue of the trees cut down, a common feature of this topos. The Carthaginians cut down ash trees (ornus), white poplars (populus alba), holm-oaks (ilex), oaks

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187 Delz (via Gronovius) reads icta (cf. Verg. Aen. 6.180 sonat icta securibus) but w has acta.
(quercus), pines (pinum), and finally cypresses (cupressos). The white poplar is a Silian addition that is different from Vergil’s trees as is the cypress, an especially appropriate addition given its funereal associations. Although not as extensive as Statius’ catalogue in Thebaid 6, Silius gives a sense of the great variety of trees in the forest near Cannae and, like Statius, includes the typical uses of the trees. There are some interesting differences between the uses presented by Statius, Silius, and Valerius. The pine is the tree of choice for Argus when building the Argo (V. Fl. 1.123), an association that Silius also invokes here by stating that it “loves the shores” (amantem litora pinum, 10.533). For Statius, however, the pine is more noteworthy for its fragrant odor (odoro vulnere pinus, Theb. 6.104). Whereas Statius emphasizes the evergreen nature of cypresses (brumaeque illaesia cupressus, 6.99), Silius stresses the well-known associations between cypresses and death. One clear aspect that they have in common is their mutual emphasis on the old age of the forests. Statius’ Nemean forest stands sacred in the divinity of old age (stat sacra senectae / numine, 6.93-94) and had seen generations of Nymphs and Fauns come and go (6.95-96). Similarly, Silius’ forest has holm-oaks that were planted by distant ancestors (ilex proauorum consita saeclo, 10.532), also emphasizing its extreme old age.188

Let us further examine the passage’s intertextuality with previous iterations of the topos.189 As Vergil does in Aeneid 6, Silius reverses the order of tree-processing with the trees being split (scinditur, 10.532) before they are rolled (deuoluunt, 10.533). Silius also varies the

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188 This can also refer metapoetically to the long life of the tree-cutting topos in epic. See Littlewood (2017, 208), Hinds (1998, 10-14). In addition to being reminiscent of the Argonautica, this passage also has intertexts with two tree-cutting scenes in the Aeneid. The first is the funeral of Misenus in Aeneid 6, mentioned in section 1. In both the poets emphasize the sound of the axes cutting the trees and use the same language. Silius’ sonat acta bipenni has an intertext with Vergil’s sonat icta securibus ilex (Aen. 6.180). The same language appears in the second passage to which Silius alludes. In Aeneid 11, both the Latins and Trojans prepare funeral pyres during a temporary truce. Here as well the sounds of trees struck by axes ring (ferro sonat alta bipenni / fraxinus, Aen. 11.135-136; see Horsfall (2003, 122-126). As seen in section 1, the emphasis on the sound of the tree-cutting goes back to Ennius and even Homer. In addition, not only does language connect these passages but the tree-cutting for all three is undertaken in order to provide fuel for funeral pyres, unlike the tree-cutting in the Alps.

189 Wilson (2004, 248) calls the Punica “the most intertextual of poems.”
structure of his passage with two verbs (accelerant, prosternunt) initially describing the Carthaginians as they begin to cut the trees, then two verbs (sonat, scinditur) with the trees as their subject, before finally returning to the Carthaginians (deuoluunt, texunt). Silius emphasizes their speed (accelerant) as does Vergil (festinant). Silius’ rhythm is effective in emphasizing their speed since the line defessi quamquam accelerant sparsoque propinquos (10.528) begins with two heavy spondees before switching to a dactyl in the principle caesura between quamquam and accelerant. This nicely contrasts the Carthaginians’ exhaustion with their rapid action. This is another of Silius’ innovations since he intimately connects the Carthaginians’ mental state after the battle with the tree-cutting. Indeed it is the funeral preparations themselves that make the Carthaginians reflect on their own fates, illustrating the importance of the tree-cutting.190

Although funerals are necessary and important, Silius undermines their beneficial aspects by stating that they are an unfortunate duty and a useless service to the dead (officium infelix et munus inane peremptis, Sil. 10.536). This characterization serves to eliminate any sense in which they have a positive function and questions the entire enterprise that led to it. As Joy Littlewood notes, Silius “encourages no sympathy for his Carthaginian troops...[who lack any] sign of grief or lamentation for their fallen comrades.”191 Indeed, this is the very reaction that the Carthaginian soldiers have when they light the fires (10.540-546):

post, ubi fulserunt primis Phaethontia frena
ignibus atque sui terris rediere colores,
suppenunt flammam et manantia corpora tabo
hostili tellure cremant. subit horrida mentem
formido incerti casus, tacitusque pererrat

190 Although the exchange between Silius and Statius is a fraught issue and it is impossible to prove the directionality of influence for any given passage, the two poets certainly influenced and were, in a sense, in competition with one another.

intima corda pauor, si fors ita Martis iniqui 
mox ferat, hac ipsis inimica sede iacendum.

After, when Phaethon’s reins shone with their first fires and the earth’s colors returned, 
they set the flames underneath and burned on enemy soil the bodies pouring forth gore. A 
horrifying fear of their uncertain fate occurs to their minds and a silent terror wanders 
through their innermost hearts, if soon the fortunes of war might be against them that they 
would die in a hostile place.

They have burned the bodies, still oozing gore, in a hostile land (hostili tellure). This precipitates 
the immediate realization (subit...mentem) that their own fates are uncertain (incerti casus) and 
that they too may end up buried in enemy territory (inimica sede).\footnote{Spaltenstein (1990, 94-95): ‘Hostili tellure’, repris par ‘inimica sede’ 546, souligne ce paradoxe 
traditionnellement pathétique (n.2, 185). Sil. en tire cette méditation mélancolique, qui fait penser à Val.Fl.5,12 ‘dies 
simul et suas admonet omnes’, et qui paraît développer Verg.Aen.11.199 ‘tum litore toto/ ardentis spectant socios 
semustaque servant/ busta neque avelli possunt’, dans la scène dont il s’inspire pour ces vers (cf. aussi n.10,572).’} The Carthaginian soldiers 
come to the realization that they are in the wrong place, that fighting at home in one’s own 
country is preferable and they seem to regret their endless march through Spain, Gaul, and across 
the Alps into foreign territory.

This lack of feeling is another of Silius’ innovations and contributions to this epic topos 
since the Carthaginians should be grieving. In Aeneid 6, Vergil emphasizes the Trojan’s grief as 
they set about preparing Misenus’ funeral (ergo omnes magno circum clamore fremebant, / 
praecipue pius Aeneas, 6.175-176; Misenum in litore Teucris / flebant, 6.212-213). Where the 
Trojans cry out (magno clamore) in grief the only clamor the Carthaginians raise is when 
the body of Paulus is found (10.504). Unlike the Trojans, there is no unity among the Carthaginians, 
no concern for their fellow soldiers. Their task of preparing the funeral pyres is an officium 
infelix and munus inane peremptis. This is true enough from a philosophical point of view; the
dead have no need of pyres, a common observation in epic.\textsuperscript{193} But this description of funerals as useless combined with the Carthaginians’ lack of emotion suggests something more: Silius shows a breakdown, or an inherent lack, of respect, decency, and grief on the part of the Carthaginians.\textsuperscript{194} While the victorious Carthaginian survivors can only think about themselves and their own deaths, similar scenes in other epics show the survivors being reminded of their own mortality while simultaneously consumed by grief. For example, during the funeral for Idmon and Tiphys, the surviving Argonauts are reminded of their own mortality (\textit{dies simul et suus admonet omnes}, V. Fl. 5.12). However, the Argonauts are also wracked by grief for Idmon and Tiphys (\textit{inter lacrimas}, 5.13; \textit{fundunt maestas...uoces}, 5.16; \textit{pectore ductor ab imo / talia uoce gemit}, 5.36-37). The Trojans, including Aeneas, similarly grieve for Pallas and their other dead comrades (\textit{substitit Aeneas gemituque haec addidit alto: / ‘nos alias hinc ad lacrimas eadem horrida belli / fata uocant}, 11.92-97). Although the Argonauts are reminded of their own mortality, this does not make them forget or replace their grief for their comrades. In contrast, the Carthaginians think solely of themselves and show no emotion whatsoever for their dead comrades. Indeed, Hannibal exclusively praises the dead consul Paulus with no words for his own dead soldiers and, instead of lighting their pyres, he is more concerned with setting fire to the pile of Roman weapons and armor as an offering to the god of war (10.551-554):

\begin{quote}
ˈprimitias pugnae et laeti libamina belli
Hannibal Ausonio cremat haec de nomine uictor,
et tibi, Mars genitor, uotorum haud surde meorum,
arma electa dicit stipantum turba uirorum.ˈ
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{194} Littlewood (2017, 210) notes “the grim reality of the Carthaginians’ mass cremation appears to have obliterated any feelings of shared grief for the comrades they have lost or triumphalism for the victory at Cannae.”
These first fruits of battle and offerings of a successful war Hannibal, the victor over the people of Ausonia, burns and for you, Father Mars, by no means deaf to my prayers, the crowd of massed soldiers dedicates chosen arms.

This comes just moments after Silius tells us that Hannibal’s troops are afraid and thinking about their own fates (10.543-546). This implicitly compares the soldiers’ fear (horrida formido) with Hannibal’s happiness and good fortune (laeti libamina belli) and reveals a disconnect between the general and his men. As described in the previous chapter, this disconnect is a consistent feature of Hannibal’s relationship with his men: while the Carthaginian soldiers fear committing a transgression by crossing the Alps, Hannibal has no such fear. This gets to the very heart of Hannibal’s character as a transgressor, a habitual line-stepper, who has no concern for the values and norms of humans (e.g. the treaty with Rome) or gods (e.g. crossing the Alps). Hannibal’s happiness and celebratory mood, although acceptable after a victory, feel inappropriate as they are in no way tempered by concern for his dead soldiers. While the surviving Carthaginians also do not grieve, in contrast, they fail to acknowledge the victory at all and fear what the future holds for them. Both of these responses illustrate a corruption of the behavior expected in funeral-preparation scenes.

Silius uses the Carthaginian’s tree-cutting, the manner in which they build the pyres, and the way they view their duty to comment on this crucial turning point in the narrative. Hannibal and his men have just won their greatest victory, utterly annihilating the Roman army. They should be celebrating their victory but instead the Carthaginian soldiers can think only of the

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195 Augoustakis (2017, 307): “It seems that the poet would like to minimise here the Carthaginian victory: the bloodbath at Cannae is also the beginning of Carthage’s decline and defeat.”

196 Their lack of grief contrasts with the excessive rage of the Thebans and Argives when they cut down trees in the Thebaid and the celebratory construction of the Argo.
possibility of their own deaths on foreign soil. Hannibal’s and the surviving soldiers’ lack of
grief for the dead reveals their _perfidia_ even when it comes to their own comrades.

5. _tum ferro retegunt siluas_: Tree-cutting in _Thebaid_ 3 and 4

Statius’ tree-cutting scenes are also related to the construction of funeral pyres and take
place in the space between Argos and Thebes, which stands in clear contrast to the two cities
themselves as a wild and uncultivated place of _horror_. The first tree-cutting scene in the _Thebaid_
comes in book 3 when the grieving Thebans prepare funeral pyres for the fifty soldiers killed by
Tydeus in a failed ambush. The forest is wild, dark, and tainted by the earlier presence of the
Sphinx and the proper honor and lamentation for the fifty Theban soldiers is marred by the
Thebans _furor_ as the Thebans angrily attack the forest because they blame it for their soldiers’
deaths. In book 4, an ancient forest is the setting where Teiresias and his daughter Manto
summon spirits of the dead and collapse the boundaries between the worlds of the living and the
dead. Finally, in book 6 the Argives cut down trees to build pyres for the baby Opheltes
(Archemorus) and the giant snake, an act that Statius compares to the sack of a city. Statius
presents the space between Argos and Thebes as an uncultivated and largely uninhabited
wilderness in which the Argives and Thebans contend with the landscape and its features,
especially forests, become targets for human violence. These forests in particular should be read
together because of their shared characteristics: they are ancient, numinous, dark, attacked by
Argives and Thebans alike, and used as fuel for pyres. These passages exemplify Statius’
fascination and discomfort with the strange and the unknown, which his audience shared.

While some have argued that the destruction of forests in the _Thebaid_, particularly in
Nemea, represents the end of an idealized pastoral order, I argue that, although they have some
features of _loci amoeni_, Statius’ forests are neither simple _loci amoeni_ nor mere passive victims
of human violence.\textsuperscript{197} Instead, forests in the \textit{Thebaid} are strange, dangerous, and deceptive places that Statius connects with death and uses to elicit horror. In addition, both the Argives and Thebans perpetrate violent acts against forests and groves through which they vent their frustration and anger while revealing their \textit{furor}, a major theme of the poem.\textsuperscript{198} Statius uses this violence to illustrate the destructive impulses on both sides of the war and the role that forest landscapes play in the poem to reflect the characters’ immorality.

\textbf{The Ambush and its Aftermath in \textit{Thebaid} 2 and 3}

The wilderness between Argos and Thebes, established as difficult, uncultivated terrain through Polynices’ flight from Thebes in book 1, becomes the first site of conflict between the Seven and the Thebans in book 2 when Eteocles send a company of soldiers to ambush Tydeus on his way back to Argos. Tydeus proceeds to slaughter the Thebans soldiers and when the Thebans learn of their deaths they blame the nearby forest and in a rage cut it down to make funeral pyres in book 3. The destruction of the nearby forest by the Thebans illustrates the \textit{furor} that is central to the poem and its role in spurring human violence towards the natural world in the \textit{Thebaid}.\textsuperscript{199} The Thebans, like the Argives in Nemea as I will show below, use violence against nature to vent their anger, frustration, and grief in a wilderness that is dangerous and deceptive, illustrating the dangers of the unknown. Statius establishes the scene of the Thebans’ ambush of Tydeus in the wilderness between Thebes and Argos (2.496-505):\textsuperscript{200}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{198} See Fantham (1997).
\item \textsuperscript{199} Venini (1964, 211-213) argues for the importance of \textit{furor} in Statius as a central theme and a psychological factor driving human action and even has the power to change the nature of characters in the \textit{Thebaid}. On \textit{furor} in the \textit{Thebaid}, see also Fantham (1997) and Dominik (2015).
\end{itemize}
fert uia per dumos propior qua calle latenti
praecelerant densaeque legunt compendia siluae.
lecta dolis sedes: gemini procul urbe malignis
faucibus urgentur colles quas umbra superni
montis et incurris claudunt iuga frondea siluis.
insidias natura loco caecamque nocendi
struxit opem: medias arte secat aspera rupes
semita quam subter campi deuexaque latis
arua iacent spatiis. contra inportuna crepido,
Oedipodianiae domus alitis.

There is a shortcut through the thickets, a hidden path by which they hurry and shorten
the distance through the dense forest. A place is chosen for the ambush: far from the city
twin hills are hemmed in by narrow straits and the shade of the high mountain and ridges
leafy with crooked trees enclose them. *Natura* made it a place for an ambush and a dark
aid for attack: a rough path narrowly splits the middle of the rocks and below lie fields
and plains sloping in a wide area. Opposite is the monstrous ledge, the home of the bird
of Oedipus.

It is abundantly clear that the Thebans are more familiar with the landscape than Tydeus: they
know a shortcut through the forest which they use to get ahead of him and cut him off. Statius
makes the distance from the city explicit (*procul urbe*), emphasizing their distance from
civilization and entrance into an uncultivated wilderness of dense forests (*densae...siluae, iuga
frondea siluis*). This makes it doubly dangerous when combined with its natural design for
ambushes (*insidias natura loco caecamque nocendi / struxit opem*), which Statius presents as the
product of a personified, active *natura* that crafted the forest specifically for this purpose.\(^{201}\) The

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\(^{200}\) Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 8.594-596 *ollí per dumos, qua proxima meta uiarum, / armati tendunt; it clamor, et agmine facto / quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum*; also Verg. *Aen.* 9.381-383 *silua fuit late dumis atque ilice nigra / horrida, quam densi completer undique sentes; / rara per occultos lucebat semita callis.*

\(^{201}\) Gervais (2013, 288) argues for the variant *nocendi* rather than *latendi* arguing that in addition to being foreign to Statius’ style *latendi* makes the phrase mean “the secret means of hiding” rather than “secret means of causing harm.” *Nocendi* also works better with the sense of *insidias struere*, which, as Gervais (2017, 246) points out, is “a common idiom” meaning ‘to devise treachery.’ *Natura loco...struxit* is “a variation on *natura loci*, used passim in
prose writers for topographical descriptions” (Gervais 2017, 246); cf. Livy 9.2.7, 32.4.3, 37.28.7. Although *natura loci* is commonly used in topographical descriptions, here the active verb marks *natura* as an active subject and
agent that caused this characteristic of the landscape and not simply as a synonym for ‘character.’ This passage shows *natura* perversely helping the Thebans to ambush Tydeus although he manages to turn the tables and
slaughter them.

Cf. Livy 1.48.2, 1.49.2 and Stat. *Theb.* 7.447 *ipsa loco mirum natura faebeat*, where Statius notes that the Argives
chose the location of their camp outside Thebes because it was easily defensible and that *natura* itself favored the
Thebans take up positions on the two mountains overlooking the path that Tydeus will take, one of which has a cliff where the famous Sphinx of Oedipus had its lair. Statius’ description of the mountain pass as a place made for ambushing passersby transitions naturally into the story of the Sphinx, who habitually ambushed travelers. In this way, the Thebans are assimilated to the Sphinx thereby setting up Tydeus to enter a dangerous, unknown landscape of dense forests and to be ambushed by monstrous, Sphinx-like Thebans. The Thebans attempt to use the landscape to ambush Tydeus and make the landscape itself collusive in the crime.

Not only is the place dangerous and a natural location for an ambush but the foul deeds of the Sphinx have corrupted the landscape and the nearby forest (*Theb. 2.519-523*):

\[
\text{monstrat silua nefas: horrent uicina iuuenci} \\
\text{gramina damnatisque auidum pecus abstinet herbis.} \\
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202 Gervais discusses extensively the confusing topography of the place. Statius models the ambush site on *Aeneid* 11.522 and Vergil’s passage is modeled on Livy’s description of the Caudine Forks (9.2.7). Gervais (2017, 244-245) argues “all three descriptions refer to a landscape type: wooded hills lie at each end of a long valley, the sides of which are flanked by higher mountains; a path enters the valley via one hill and exits via the other. The victims of the ambush walk along the path; the ambushers hide in the heights above. Or so it seems...Despite the topographical obscurity, the structure of St.’s ekphrasis is clear. The place the ambushers will occupy is introduced by 498 *lecta dolis sedes*, then described by 498f. *gemini ... colles*. The path Tydeus will take is introduced by 501f. *insidias ... opem*, then described by 502f. *medias ... semita*. Each description is followed by a vertical movement: upwards with 499f. *quos ... siluis* and downwards with 503f. *quam spatiis*. Each describes the same thing: a path running across a hill. The second description clarifies the first, and inverts its syntax: *colles faucibus urgentur* becomes *semita rupes sectat.*”

203 *Natura* or *natura loci* becomes the key agent for the conflict taking place here. The place’s character caused the Sphinx to use it, which brought Oedipus into conflict with her, and now causes the ambush of Tydeus.

204 Newlands (2004, 137) argues that Statius’ “landscapes are more often victims of violence than collusive with it.” This is in reference mostly to Nemea which is not nearly as simple as Newlands presents it and ignores the former haunt of the Sphinx which presents something of a conundrum in that it is a cursed place characterized by *nefas* that the Thebans attempt to use in their ambush of Tydeus but which is turned against them. Furthermore, Statius specifies that *natura* created the place to be used for ambuscades, making it clearly collusive in its history of violence.
non Dryadum placet umbra choris non commoda sacris
Faunorum diraeque etiam fugere uolucre
prodigiale nemus.

The forest bears witness to her crimes: cows fear the nearby fields and greedy herds shun
the damned grass. Its shade is neither pleasing nor agreeable to the sacred choruses of
Dryads or Fauns and even dread birds flee the monstrous grove.

The forest has been tainted by the Sphinx in some intangible way that seems instinctually
intelligible to animals and deities, causing them to avoid it. However, the meaning of *monstrat*
silua nefas is puzzling. The forest was not the site of the Sphinx’s lair and as such would not
have the bones and blood of her victims still present so it cannot mean that the forest ‘shows the
crimes’ in that it provides visible evidence. Rather here *monstrat* means ‘to give an indication of’
or ‘to reveal,’ suggesting that it is the fact that animals and rustic deities avoid the place that
reveals the Sphinx’s corruption of the landscape and the verb *monstrat* presents the forest as an
agent actively giving a warning for people to stay away.\(^{205}\) This warning takes the form of the
horror and dread that fills the animals, two key emotional reactions to *loci horridi*. Statius first
tells us that the nearby fields make the cattle shudder and tremble with fear (*horrent*).\(^{206}\) Not only
do the cattle avoid the pasture nearby, but the grass is described as condemned or doomed,
*damnatis*, which might reflect either an inherent taint or the effect it would have on any animal
that ate it. Thus the Sphinx has not only tainted the forest but her pollution further extends to the
nearby pastures suggesting a broader, interconnected landscape.\(^{207}\)

\(^{205}\) *OLD* s.v. 4.

\(^{206}\) *OLD* s.v. 5a.

\(^{207}\) Here, the forest is clearly connected to the surrounding landscape creating the sense of a phenomenon larger than
a single isolated grove. Cf. the necromancy scene at the end of book 4 and the entire Nemea episode books 4-6
especially the mourning of the Nemean landscape for the dead snake, 5.579-82.
While cattle avoid the nearby pastures, Dryads and Fauns, typical inhabitants of *loci amoeni*, avoid the forest itself. Statius further calls the forest *prodigiale* suggesting that the landscape has been indelibly marked by the presence of the Sphinx and by Oedipus’ killing of the Sphinx. The forest is even avoided by ominous birds which, unlike the cattle and woodland deities, are polluted, corrupt animals which Statius calls *dirae*, an adjective suggestive not only of birds of ill-omen but perhaps also carrion birds or birds that are inherently horrible or terrifying in some way. Thus he subverts expectations by writing that even birds that might be expected to frequent such a place avoid it. Yet, even after this description of the forest, in book 3 when the Thebans cut it down, Statius calls the hill where the forest is located “aged” (*annosum, Theb. 3.175*), making it a sublime, numinous place by virtue of its age, a common descriptor of forests.

All of these aspects of the Sphinx’s forest combine to present it as a *locus horridus*. But, if the Sphinx’s forest is such a terrible place, what is the problem with cutting it down? Does Statius make it a sympathetic target of Theban violence? A comparison with the grove in book 3 of Lucan’s *Bellum Ciuile*, mentioned in section 1 of this chapter, will be helpful to communicate the character of the Sphinx’s grove and the problem with cutting it down. Statius’ grove shares

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208 Gervais (2017, 252) notes that the absence of animals and woodland divinities is not a standard feature of *loca horrida* and compares the forest of the Sphinx to Lucan’s grove near Massilia 3.402-425. Cf. Verg. *Geor.* 1.11 *fert simul Faunique pedem Dryades puellae*.

209 Gervais (2017, 252): “Do the woods thus remember a double *nefas* (519): not only the Sphinx’s monstrous acts, but also her death (compare 519 *monstrat silua nefas* with Caesar’s words at *BC* 3.436f.: ‘iam ne quis uestrum dubitet subuertere siluam, / credite me fecisse nefas’)?...In the perverse universe where a monster-slayer may himself be a monster (517n.), perhaps the slaying of the Sphinx may be an evil act[.]” See Micozzi (2015, 327) for the idea that places are linked with crimes committed there.

210 Gervais (2017, 253): “We may understand therefore that the corpses of the Sphinx and her victims are left untouched by carrion birds, so evil is the place.”

211 This is a motif that Statius repeats later in the description of the Nemean forest: *stat sacra senectae / numine, Theb. 6.93.*
some features with Lucan’s (Luc. 3.399-425). In particular, animals, birds, and deities avoid it and it is a source of fear and horror for those who see it. Although Statius does not go into great detail, these facts alone suggest that it is a numinous place that is best left alone. All of these features combine to make the ambush site, the Sphinx’s lair, and the surrounding landscape a dangerous, uncultivated, and unknown place that Tydeus enters in ignorance but ultimately manages to escape through his individual effort.

The fifty Theban soldiers use this *locus horridus* to ambush Tydeus, confident that the landscape will help them. However, as often happens in these dangerous landscapes, they are deceived, feeling safe when they are not. The Thebans, unlike the animals, do not feel *horror* and so do not avoid the former haunt of the Sphinx. Their focus on ambushing Tydeus seems to override any fear of the place and, taking on the characteristics of the Sphinx, they lie in wait to ambush the lone traveler Tydeus, using the same landscape features that she did. Yet the hunters become the hunted when Tydeus proves to be more than a match for them, killing everyone but Maeon who returns to announce the defeat to Eteocles and then commits suicide.

The Thebans pour from the city to find their dead. The landscape that seemed to offer safety and a hiding place for the Theban ambushers becomes the target of the Theban civilians’ violence in response to the defeat (3.114-117):

\[
\text{at nuptae exanimes puerique aegrique parentes}
\]

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212 On Lucan’s influence on Statius in general see Micozzi (1999).

213 Much like the Sicilian soldiers seeking refuge in the trees at Trasimene in *Punica* 5.

214 As Parkes (2010, 19) has observed, the monomachy between Tydeus and the Theban ambushers reenacts the similar monomachy between Cadmus and the Spartoi. This creates a point of intratext between the forest of the Sphinx and Teiresias’ necromancy which takes place on the ground from which the Spartoi emerged. She goes on to argue that here “again one man faces a hostile group and, after initially hurling a rock into their midst (*Thb*. 2.559-66), he effects their near-total massacre… and lives against all odds.”

215 Statius’ choice of *inuia* to describe the landscape outside the city marks it as an uncultivated wilderness. This is echoed later in the description of the Nemean forest as *deuia* (*per dumos et opaca uirentibus umbris / deuia*, 4.797-798).
moenibus effusi per plana per inuia passim
quisque suas auidi ad lacrimas miserabile currunt
certamen

But the terrified wives and children and heart-sick parents poured from the city walls everywhere into the flat wilderness, each running a miserable race eager to find their own sorrow.

The wives, children, and parents of the dead, consumed by grief, repeat the journeys of Tydeus and the fifty soldiers through the same pathless wilderness (per inuia) outside the city of Thebes. However, inuia suggests that they are not privy to the knowledge of the shortcut through the wilderness (fert uia per dumos proprior, 2.496) that the soldiers took the day before. When they find the battlefield, the narration initially focuses on the landscape rather than dead Thebans. We first hear of the “infamous cliffs and the evil forest,” (infames scopulos siluamque nefandam, Theb. 3.121). This description of the landscape evokes both the present calamity that has befallen Thebes and the well-known association of the area with the Sphinx. Infames and nefandam could easily refer to both the Sphinx’s tainted influence on the place as well as the death of the fifty. The setting is thus crucial to the outcome and the impact of the failed ambush.

However, at the sight of the bloody corpses of dead (aspectuque…cruento, 3.124) the Thebans forget their mourning and become incensed (accensa, Theb. 3.124) and rage as a crowd (turba furit, Theb. 3.125). Here Statius invokes one of the central themes of the poem as the

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216 Enjambment makes this striking statement stand out all the more. This description of the Thebans suggests an allusion to Aeneid 12 and Aeneas’ killing of Turnus. Just as Aeneas was incensed with fury at the sight of Pallas’ belt (furiis accensus, Aen. 12.946) so are the Thebans incensed and rage at the sight of the dead (aspectuque accensa cruento / turba furit, Theb. 3.124-5). Further solidifying this allusion is the fact that, ironically, the rage of the Thebans reflects the emotions Tydeus embodied during the battle with the ambushers. In the battle, he is furious (infensus, Theb. 2.660) and boasts of the slaughter and frenzy of battle (hic aliae caedes, alius furor, Theb. 2.667) for which the Thebans were not prepared, and he tells the Thebans to “Go to hell” (ite sub umbras, Theb. 2.667). Given the close connection between the battle and the Thebans’ reaction to its aftermath, Tydeus’ statement makes yet another allusion to the end of the Aeneid and the flight of Turnus’ spirit to the Underworld (fugit indignata sub umbras, Aen. 12.952). These allusions invite comparisons between Tydeus and Aeneas and the Thebans and Aeneas at his most conflicted. As Gervais (2015, 70) has written, in the Thebaid, Tydeus embodies a “confused intertextual identity” that exhibits “tension between heroic and monstrous behavior” as he exhibits behavior that alludes to Aeneas, Turnus, and even Mezentius.
Thebans take on the characteristics of Eteocles, Polynices, and the Furies themselves. Thebans then turn their *furor* against the strange landscape and the damned forest which they blame for the deaths of the Theban soldiers (*Theb. 3.174-176*):

\[
\text{tum ferro retegunt siluas collisque propinqui}
\]
\[
\text{annosum truncant apicem, qui conscient actis}
\]
\[
\text{noctis et inspexit gemitus}
\]

Then with axes they strip the forests and mutilate the aged peak of the nearby hill which as an accomplice of the night’s deeds looked down on the groans.

As the Thebans cut down the forest in order to build pyres for the dead they focus their hatred on the landscape. While tree-cutting is not inherently bad and the Thebans’ use of the trees is legitimate, as funeral are an incredibly important and meaningful custom, their rage (*furor*) directed towards the landscape marks their behavior as excessively violent and exemplifies the *furor* that infects many of the poems’ human actors. The transferred epithet *annosum*, which must describe the forests not the hill itself is one of the key descriptors that imply that forests are potentially numinous and deserving of respect. We know that the Sphinx’s forest is a dark, vile place devoid of deities and animal life, but, like Lucan’s grove, its age suggests that it should be handled with caution and respect.

However, the Thebans strip the forests (*retegunt, Theb. 3.174*) and mutilate the peak of the nearby hill (*truncant, Theb. 3.175*). The verb *trunco* means ‘to strip of foliage’ but it can also mean ‘to mutilate’ or ‘to amputate,’ suggesting that the Thebans have mutilated a body rather than merely cut down trees on a hill. It also recalls an earlier scene in which the grieving

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217 The role of *furor* reaches its climax in book 11 during the duel between Eteocles and Polynices when the Furies look on in amazement and lament the fact that the *furores* of humans could be more powerful than theirs (*tantum mirantur et astant / laudantes, hominumque dolent plus posse furores*, 11.537-538). As Ash (2015, 216) notes “Statius’ Furies, Tisiphone and Megaera, have finally been outdone by human *furor* and they too are reduced to a state of awe by what they see.”

218 Although it is slightly unclear, the passage suggests that they cut down two forests, one on either hill at the end of the pass between the larger mountains; see Gervais’ description of the topography in n.201 above.
Thebans attempt to reattach the limbs and heads of the dead ambushers to their mutilated bodies (pars molliter aptant / bracchia trunca loco et ceruicibus ora reponunt, Theb. 3.131-132). The bracchia trunca are re-echoed in truncant as the Thebans mutilate the forests surrounding the lair of the Sphinx. Both truncant and retegunt connote bodily mutilation and also serve to characterize the trees as people we should pity.\textsuperscript{219} The Thebans have mutilated the forest and the larger landscape out of a desire for revenge, an interpretation that is strengthened by the fact that the Thebans consider the landscape itself guilty, viewing the forest as an accomplice to the slaughter of the fifty and conscius communicates both shared knowledge and shared guilt (conscius actis / noctis et inspexit gemitus, Theb. 3.175-176). Statius also presents the hill as the focalizer that looked down on the slaughter of the ambushers representing the Thebans’ belief that the landscape is guilty and complicit in the deaths of the ambushers.\textsuperscript{220} The Thebans’ imputation of guilt to the landscape, an idea which grants the landscape a certain agency, suggests that they are using the forest as a kind of scapegoat for their ineffectual and impotent anger, much as the Argives do in Nemea, as I discuss below.

Yet there is a clear disconnect between the Thebans’ furious destruction of the forest and Aletes’ condemnation of Eteocles in his speech. Aletes addresses the Thebans gathered at the funeral pyres and states that the disaster they have just suffered is equaled only by the death of Niobe’s children, laying the blame squarely at the feet of Eteocles. Aletes especially criticizes the guilt of their king (regis iniqui / ob noxam, Theb. 3.206-207) and his crime of not ceding the throne and instead going to war with his brother. Yet the grieving Thebans rage with the same furor as Eteocles and Polynices, thereby showing that they are not immune to the nefas of their

\textsuperscript{219} Nisbet (1987, 243) notes the similarities between trees and people: “trees are like people. They have a head (vertex), a trunk (truncus), arms (bracchia).”

\textsuperscript{220} Snijder (1968, 105) notes “the attribution of human perception to the inanimate ‘mons’.” This is the so-called pathetic fallacy or personification of nature (see de Jong 2012b, 16-17) and see n.170.
world and their king. For the Thebans, the war is a *nefas*, but Eteocles is bent on pursuing it. Faced with the death of so many men, the Thebans take out their anger on the closest object they can find, simultaneously providing fuel for the pyres of the dead, re-enacting the devastation and mutilation of the battle, and raging with the same *furor* as their king.\(^{221}\)

**Necromancy at the Forest of Diana**

Statius extends and builds the tension between city and wilderness in book 4 where Teiresias’ necromancy is set on the border between the forest of Diana and the field that spawned the Spartoi (4.419-442). The forest and field perform two clear functions: first, they create a symbolic dichotomy with the city of Thebes and the uncultivated area surrounding it as Teiresias and Eteocles leave the city just like Tydeus and the Theban soldiers above. Second, they mirror the civil conflict that is at the heart of the war between Eteocles and Polynices: just as phantoms of the Spartoi continue to rise up and fight each other in eternal combat, so are the fifty Theban soldiers not at peace in death. Here at the edge of the forest the Thebans come face-to-face with the tragedies of their past and present. Statius gives a detailed ekphrasis of the forest (*Theb.* 4.419-427):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{silua capax aeui ualidaque incurua senecta,} \\
aeternum intonsae frondis, stat peruia nullis \\
solibus: haud illam brumae minuere Notusue \\
ius habet aut Getica Boreas impactus ab Vrsa. \\
subter operta quies, uacuusque silentia seruat \\
horror et exclusae pallet mala lucis imago. \\
nec caret umbra deo: nemori Latonia cultrix \\
additur. hanc picea cedroque et robore in omni \\
effictam sanctis occultat silua tenebris. \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[420\]

\[425\]

There is a forest ancient and bent by overpowering old age, its limbs never cut, through which the sun never shines. Winter never weakens it and neither the South Wind nor the North, driven from the Getic Bear, has power over it. Below is a hidden quiet; an empty

\(^{221}\) As noted by Nisbet (1987, 244) “battle-scenes are sometimes followed by tree-felling for funeral-pyres...[and] the sound and fury of the scene seems to repeat the violence of the battlefield: the destruction is at once a catharsis and a sacrifice.”
horror keeps the silence and a poor likeness of the excluded sun gives a pale light. Nor
does the shade lack a god: Latonia cultivates the grove. In its sacred shadows the forest
hides her formed in every pine and cedar and oak.  

Like the Sphinx’s forest, Diana’s forest is ancient, strange, and dark. Most chilling is the silence
and the horror that maintains it (uacuusque silentia seruat / horror, Theb. 4.423-424). This is
no pleasant locus amoenus but a dark, foreboding locus horridus. It is also sacred to Diana,
whom the forest “hides in every tree”—a phrase suggesting that there are images of the goddess
throughout the forest, or that the goddess herself is somehow present in the trees. 

The forest of Diana is adjacent to the field where Cadmus sowed the dragon’s teeth and where the Spartoi
sprang up and fought one another. The meadows are soft with blood (mollia sanguine prata,
Theb. 4.437) and it is pleasing to Teiresias because the soil is fat with living gore (uiuoque
placent sola pinguia tabo, Theb. 4.444). Not only is the field soaked with blood but it is the daily
scene of a ghostly battle of the Spartoi (nigri cum uana in proelia surgunt terrigenae, Theb.
4.440-441). This boundary between the gory field and the forest of Diana is especially
appropriate for rites that will break down the boundary between the worlds of the living and the
dead, summoning the dead from the Underworld. As they prepare the rites, Teiresias and his
daughter Manto roll tree trunks to make three pyres (focos, Theb. 4.457) for Hecate and three for
the Furies. They add a mound of pine (agger...pineus, Theb. 4.459-60) for Dis and a smaller one
for Persephone and cover them in cypress. These pyres represent a reversal from the pyres of the


222 Parkes (2012, 219): “In the Thebaid, compare the grove of 5.152-63 in which the Lemnian women call on
underworld powers and pledge their commitment to the massacre with the blood of Charops’ son. Statius engages
with a number of grove descriptions, including the lucus...niger (Sen. Oed. 530) chosen for the ghostly evocation by
Tiresias..., the wood of Erichtho’s necromancy [in Lucan]..., the grove of Massilia at Luc. 3.399-452..., the wood by
the palace at Sen. Thy. 650-82..., and the grove of Gargaphie from Ovid, Met. 3.”

223 Parkes (2012, 221): “the word horror, postponed for extra suspense, comes as a surprise after uacuus. It must
mean ‘awe’ (OLD s.v., 6b) or ‘horror’ (OLD s.v., 6a), rather than ‘bristling’ (OLD s.v., 1).”

224 Parkes (2012, 221-222).

also speaks to his poem’s interest in boundaries. The boundary separating the Under- and upper world of the epic is
particularly permeable, with continual traffic between the two spheres.”
Thebans killed by Tydeus. Instead of burying the dead, they are summoning them from the Underworld. In addition, Statius does not suggest that Diana’s forest is cut to make the pyres but rather that Teiresius and Manto gather fallen wood, possibly in an effort to avoid disturbing the forest’s silent horror.

With the Underworld opened into the world of the living, the fifty Theban ambushers make an appearance as restless ghosts covered in blood, stretching their hands towards Teiresias (nobis in sanguine multo / oraque pectoraque et falso clamore leuat as / intendunt sine pace manus, Theb. 4.594-596). The fifty, whom the Thebans had thought they put to rest by performing funeral rites and burning their bodies, are shown to be without peace in the Underworld, revealing that the furor-driven tree-cutting and funerals were useless. Furthermore, the fifty Theban soldiers are counted, along with Cadmus, Niobe, and Pentheus, among the tortured souls of Thebes’ past. Most notable among these is Maeon, the sole survivor of the ambush who, upon returning to Thebes, committed suicide in front of Eteocles in defiance of his king. Last of all, Laius, Eteocles’ grandfather, appears after Teiresias summons him. Laius declares that war is coming, calling the outcome a nefas (4.643), and tells Eteocles that Thebes will be victorious and that the Furies, and not Polynices, will be in possession of the kingdom. By mentioning the Furies, Laius re-introduces the central theme of furor just before Statius resumes the narrative of the Argives, for whom furor plays a central role in the violence against the Nemean landscape.

The forest setting plays an important role in continuing the conflict between Polynices and Eteocles. The permeability between the living and the dead enables Eteocles to contact his...
grandfather. The necromancy clarifies the disconnect between, on the one hand, Laius’ and Teiresias’ knowledge and, on the other hand, Eteocles’ ignorance. As Ganiban notes, Laius’ speech is “couched in calculated ambiguity about the fate of Eteocles himself” and by playing on “Eteocles self-destructive desire to see Polynices defeated...he encourages the fraternal nefas.”

Just as the Theban soldiers were deceived by the Sphinx’s forest, failing to stay away from an evil, tainted place, Eteocles is deceived by the necromancy in Diana’s forest and his ignorance is revealed.

6. Thebaid 6: Deforestation and an Urbs Capta in Nemea

In Nemea, the Argives encounter a forested wilderness which delays their progress to Thebes and against which they vent their anger and frustration. During the Argives’ sojourn in Nemea on their way to Thebes they cut down part of the Nemean forest to build a pyre for the baby Opheltes, also known as Archemorus, and his killer, the sacred snake of Jupiter. As they cut down the forest Statius compares them to soldiers sacking a city (6.96-117). Scholars have read these central books of the Thebaid as illustrating the destruction of a pastoral paradise in Nemea as the Argives disturb the local flora and fauna by muddying the Langia River, killing the sacred snake, and cutting down the forest.

This section focuses on Statius’ use of the tree-cutting scene and the manipulation of the topos’ tradition. By presenting the damage done to Nemea as the sack of a city, Statius blurs the line between city and wilderness, a dichotomy that he employs, as seen above, but here complicates. He also uses the tree-cutting to reflect on the ethics of conquest. The Argives’ pillaging of the forest triggers allusions to the fall of Troy in Aeneid 2 which serve to characterize the landscape of Nemea and its nonhuman inhabitants as an

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urbs capta. This is yet another motif with a rich historical and literary tradition that can be summarized as the description of the capture of a city, the ensuing pillaging, and the fates of the inhabitants.\textsuperscript{230} By combining tree-cutting with the motif of the urbs capta Statius elevates Nemea and makes it an object of the reader’s sympathy while simultaneously criticizing the Argives’ behavior.

The urbs capta motif has a long history in both Greek and Latin literature and is utilized by many authors including Homer, Thucydides, Euripides, Ennius, Livy, and Vergil. It was developed further in tragedy and, as Rossi argues, “Attic tragedy reveals the potential adaptability of the theme of the Iliupersis and transforms it into the topos of the urbs capta...[and] shows how the most important images of the topos may be universalized and successfully applied to the description of the fate of other cities.”\textsuperscript{231} From there it became part of the repertoire of Greek rhetoricians from the time of Aristotle and appeared in Roman oratory and rhetoric not only for the purpose of description but also as a rhetorical device to arouse the pity of the audience.\textsuperscript{232} As Paul argues, “the popularity of the theme of the destruction of Troy” in particular provided the greatest impetus for the diffusion of this motif.\textsuperscript{233} The crucial element of the motif is the overall reversal of a city’s fortunes while typical features are the destruction of the city by fire, the killing of the inhabitants and their flight from the city, the carrying off of

\textsuperscript{230} See Paul (1982), Heinze (1993, 3-49), and Rossi (2004). Stories of the fall of Troy abound, including Vergil’s Aeneid 2, the Iliupersis of Arctinus, the Little Iliad of Leches of Mytilene, the Posthomerica of Quintus Smyrnaeus, and The Capture of Troy, an epyllion by Tryphiodorus. Other famous urbes captae include the capture of Miletus by Darius in 494 B.C.E. (Hdt. 6.18-21), Athens by Xerxes in 480 B.C.E. (Hdt. 8.51-53), Thebes by Alexander in 335 B.C.E. (Diod. Sic. 17.13), Persepolis by Alexander in 330 B.C.E. (Diod. Sic. 17.70), Syracuse by Agathocles in 317 B.C.E. (Diod. Sic. 19.6-8) and by Roman forces in 212 B.C.E. (Liv. 25.31.8), Carthago Nova by Roman forces under Scipio Africanus in 209 B.C.E. (Liv. 26.46.10). Literary works on famous city sackings, historical and mythological, include Phrynichus’ Miletou halosis, Aeschylus’ Septem contra Thebas, Euripides’ Trojan plays, and Ennius’ Ambracia.

\textsuperscript{231} Rossi (2004, 21).

\textsuperscript{232} Paul (1982, 150).

\textsuperscript{233} Paul (1982, 147).
women and children, the plunder of temples, the violent separation of families, and the lamentation of the conquered. The motif could be used in actual descriptions of captured cities or simply alluded to or transferred to other contexts. By employing the *urbs capta* motif Statius is operating in a long tradition that spanned multiple genres including epic, historiography, tragedy, and oratory. I show how Statius presents Nemea as a pathless wilderness that confounds the Argives and how he innovates by combining tree-cutting with the *urbs capta* motif to surpass his literary predecessors’ tree-cutting scenes. Statius portrays the destruction of the Nemean forest as inherently negative and wasteful of its productive potential. Statius presents the manner in which the Argives cut down the forest as immoral and attributes to the Argives the worst behavior of conquering armies thereby commenting on the ethical implications of the fraternal war. Nemea’s fall prefigures the destructive war of the sons of Oedipus, but, ironically, only in Nemea does Polynices realize his ambitions. Finally, I discuss how the tree-cutting scene alludes to Vergil’s *Aeneid* and elevates the Nemean forest to the level of the destruction of Troy.

**The Deforestation of Nemea**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Argives leave Argos eager to sack Thebes but are delayed in Nemea by the drought caused by Bacchus. They eventually attack the Langia River and kill Jupiter’s sacred snake. The Argives compound the suffering already inflicted on Nemea when they set about preparing a funeral to expiate the crime of the snake’s killing.

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234 For other brief appearances of this motif in the *Thebaid* see 1.632-633, 7.597-601, 9.554-556.


236 This suggest that the Argives know they have committed a sacrilege and even that they may feel that the war...
Much like their attack on the Langia and the killing of the snake, the Argives violently attack the Nemean forest to obtain fuel for the pyres. Statius engages with the tradition of epic tree-cutting by explicitly describing how the Argives cut down the forest (Theb. 6.90-98):

\[
\text{sternitur extemplo ueteres incaedua ferro} \\
\text{silua comas, largae qua non opulentior umbrae} \\
\text{Argolicos inter saltusque educta Lycaeos} \\
\text{extulerat super astra caput: stat sacra senectae} \\
\text{numine nec solos hominum transgressa ueterno} \\
\text{fertur auos, Nymphas etiam mutasse superstes} \\
\text{Faunorumque greges. aderat miserabile luco} \\
\text{excidium: fugere ferae, nidoque tepent}
\]

Immediately they raze the forest whose ancient boughs had never been cut with iron. There is no forest growing in the woodlands of Argolis and Lycaeus richer in plentiful shade that had raised its head above the stars: it stands sacred in the majesty of old age, considered to have surpassed not only the ancestors of humans in age but even to have seen the generations of Nymphs and herds of Fauns change. Pitiably destruction was at hand for the grove: terror urging them, the wild animals flee and the birds leap from their warm nests.

The forest is ancient, has never been cut by an axe, and is unparalleled by other nearby forests, characteristics which serve to elevate the majesty of the forest and increase the impact of its loss. \textit{Veteres} and \textit{senectae} in particular emphasize the extreme age of the forest and its numinous quality.\footnote{On the numinous quality of such ancient groves see quotations from Seneca and Pliny above in section 2. For \textit{sternitur extemplo ueteres incaedua ferro / silua comas} (6.90-91) with \textit{sterno} used in a similar context cf. Sil. 10.529 \textit{sparsoque propinquos / agmine prosternunt lucos}. Fortgens (1934, 73) notes \textit{incaeduus} is an Ovidian epithet and otherwise uncommon: Ov. \textit{Am.} 3.1.1, \textit{Fast}. 1.243, 2.435; Serv. Verg. \textit{G}. 5.63. Robinson (2011, 282) notes \textit{incaeduus} is “used in all cases of groves or woods...The unsullied grove is something of a favourite with Ovid (cf. e.g. \textit{Met}. 2.418, 8.329).”} Statius elaborates on the forest’s age by stating that it is older than the ancestors of humans and has even outlived crowds of Nymphs and Fauns, woodland deities that will itself is wrong, or at least that this is an inauspicious beginning to it, emphasized especially by \textit{infausti belli} (Theb. 6.87). The poet expresses dismay at the destruction of the forest not from an environmentalist standpoint or because he is concerned with deforestation but rather because it is the violent destruction of a sublime space that can be considered sacred to Jupiter as the home of the giant serpent and the location of Jupiter’s shrine.
ultimately flee the forest when the Argives attack it.\textsuperscript{238} Its age and size make the forest noteworthy and give it a numinous character but the presence of Jupiter’s serpent and the woodland deities makes it explicitly sacred, which increases the criminality of the Argives’ actions. Furthermore, \textit{incaedua} indicates that the forest has never been cut and presents the Argives’ actions as an unprecedented act of deforestation.\textsuperscript{239} The adjective \textit{opulentior} marks the richness, in age and size, of the forest and serves to present the forests of Nemea as having wealth which the Argives will plunder.\textsuperscript{240} \textit{Sternitur}, the first word of the passage can mean simply ‘to lay flat’ or ‘bring down’ but also has a strong connection with the language of war and battle meaning ‘to strike down (a person)’ or even ‘to defeat utterly.’\textsuperscript{241} Given the \textit{urbs capta} simile with which Statius ends the passage (6.114-117) the latter sense seems to be closest. Statius signals from the beginning that this is no ordinary tree-cutting but instead a battle resulting in the destruction of the forest.

Next, a catalogue details the different species of trees present in the forest that are cut down by the Argives (\textit{Theb.} 6.98-107):

\begin{verbatim}
cadit ardua fagus Chaoniumque nemus brumaeque inlaesa cupressus.
procumbunt piceae flammaeque alimenta supremis
ornique ilicæaque trapes metuendaque suo
taxus et infandos belli potura cruores
fraxinus atque situ non expugnabile robur.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{238} Fortgens (1934, 76) “Nymphae (= Hamadryades) enim una cum arboribus vivunt et moriuntur (cf. Serv. ad Verg. \textit{Ecl.} 10.62).”

\textsuperscript{239} Cf. the description of the Sphinx’s forest, \textit{tum ferro retegunt siluas collisque propinqui / annosum truncant apicem, Theb.} 3.174-175. Fortgens (1934, 75) notes the alliteration and compares the passage with the grove near Massilia cut down by Caesar in Lucan’s \textit{Bellum Civile} 3.429-452. Vessey (1973, 193-195) argues that the description of the tree-felling Statius is “extreme in his approach, but this is characteristic of his mannerism, to which classical restraint is generally alien,” in response to Williams’ (1968, 267) comment that Statius’ “composition is decorative and devoid of fresh inspiration.”

\textsuperscript{240} \textit{Opulens} is typically used to describe a city’s abundant wealth and population in passages describing the sack of cities.

\textsuperscript{241} \textit{OLD} s.v. 6, 7a and b.
Statius describes each tree according to its most notable qualities. The Chaonium nemus recalls the sacred grove of Dodona where there was an ancient oracle of Jupiter, again marking the sacrality of the Nemean grove. The oak, it is well known, is sacred to Jupiter and thus belongs in a forest that is guarded by his serpent and its destruction can be seen as particularly sacrilegious, though hardly more so than the killing of the serpent. The other trees’ qualities are highlighted as well: the height of the beech, the poisonous sap of the yew, the evergreen cypress, and the rot-resistant robur-oak. Statius also notes ways in which these types of trees are useful to humans: the ash used to make spears; the fir, daring because it is most suitable for shipbuilding and dares to sail on the ocean; the elm, hospitable to vines, and thus useful for farmers. Of all the trees, only the spruce tree is specifically suitable for building pyres, presumably in part because it produces pitch and burns well. By detailing the ways in which these trees could have been useful, Statius portrays their destruction as fundamentally unproductive and as a use that is contrary to their nature, except for the spruces, a point to which we will return below. This

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242 Cf. the catalogue of the Seven Argive heroes that dominates the first half of Thebaid 4. For Theb. 6.107 dat gemitum tellus cf. Ov. Met. 8.758 gemitumque dedit Deoia quercus.

243 Chaonia is a district in north-western Epirus and by extension refers to Dodona where there was a famous oracle of Jupiter. The OLD cites this passage as an example of the adjective Chaonius simply referring to oaks in general but cites frondes...Chaonias (Stat. Theb. 3.476) as specifically referring to Dodona. Although the latter occurs in a passage in which the prophet Amphiaraus prays to Jupiter, the presence of the shrine of Jupiter in the Nemean forest suggests that Chaonium is not an arbitrary adjective here.

244 Sargeaunt (1920, 99-101).
reinforces the truly destructive nature of the Argives’ tree-cutting. Although tree-cutting is not inherently bad, its purpose, the manner in which it is done, and the consequences all matter. The Nemean trees could have been used productively to make weapons, build ships, and grow vines but these possibilities have been eliminated. That the trees are burned as fuel for funeral pyres makes this no better since the Argives’ violent manner has already tarnished their expiatory rites. Furthermore, funerals, as seen with the pyre of Eteocles and Polynices at the end of the poem, are notoriously useless for righting wrongs or ending conflict in the *Thebaid*.

**Nemea as an urbs capta**

The preparation of the pyres for Opheltes and the snake by the Argives is not an occasion for honoring Nemea but instead the cause of further suffering that culminates in Nemea being plundered like a captured city (*urbs capta*). As the Argives cut down the Nemean forest the inhabitants flee its destruction, one of the hallmarks of the *urbs capta* motif (*Theb. 6.110-117*):

Weeping they leave their beloved homes, ancient places of tranquility, Pales and Silvanus, the lord of the shade, and the semi-divine flock. The forest groans for those leaving but the Nymphs, embracing the oaks, do not release them. Just as when a general gives a captured city to his greedy victorious soldiers to plunder, scarcely is the signal heard and you would no longer find a city: without restraint they lead away and scatter and plunder and carry off [the city]; they make less noise in battle.

The Nymphs, Fauns, and personified Nemea lamented the death of the snake and now they lament the destruction of their home. The forest itself grieves for them and the Nymphs seem to choose death rather than flee as they cling to their trees. Statius punctuates the passage with a
simile comparing the Nemean forest to a city being sacked by victorious soldiers. The Argives are not only victorious but also greedy (auidis) which reminds us of their earlier eagerness to plunder Thebes (ferre domos ardent, Theb. 4.649). The Argives have now sated their appetite for destruction in Nemea except, ironically, they have only succeeded in plundering the Nemean forest, not destroying a city, much less Thebes, as they had envisioned. As often with the urbs capta motif, in which a city experiences a reversal of fortune, the reversal of Nemea’s fortunes is complete: where once stood an ancient, uncut forest, now, in the blink of an eye, nothing remains (uix signa audit nec urbem / inuenias, 6.115-116). Statius emphasizes both the speed and the violence of the attacking army and line 116 is especially striking as it is composed entirely of verbs, four out of five of them describing the actions of soldiers as they plunder a city: inuenias ducunt sternuntque abiguntque feruntque. The concentration of verbs and polysyndeton communicate the speed with which the Argives plunder the forest and Statius marks the Argives’ violence as excessive by calling them inmodici. The conquest of cities is a reality of war but there is a right way and a wrong way to go about it and Statius highlights that difference while communicating that the destruction of a captured city is inexcusable.

Roman writers often utilized the urbs capta motif to comment on the treatment of a captured city and reflect on the conquerors’ behavior. For example, Livy describes the sack of Carthago Nova in the Second Punic War but states that the Romans stopped pillaging once they

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245 For these deities abandoning the forest cf. Verg. G. 1.16 ipse nemus linquens patrium saltusque Lycae i / Pan. For the Nymphs refusing to let go cf. Ovid’s Erisyction episode: Ov. Met. 8.770-771 redditus e medio sonus est cum robore talis / ‘nympha sub hoc ego sum Cereri gratissima ligno.’ This is an excellent parallel for tree-nymphs being in trees or closely connected to them and, in this passage, dying with them.

246 Via Nisbet (1987, 244) this seems to recall Ennius’ (Ann. fr. 175-79 Skutsch) caedunt, percellunt, exciditur, frangitur, consternitur, peruortunt, six words used in a matter of five lines to describe the destruction of a forest.

247 Laurence (1996, 117): “The destruction of the city is consistently viewed as an action that is impious, whereas the destruction of human beings was a relatively normal activity in war.”
were ordered to do so. He also remarks on the many examples of greed and anger, including the murder of Archimedes, that accompanied the Roman conquest of Syracuse. Livy laments the capture of Syracuse as the beginning of the Roman admiration for Greek art and of the license to despoil all things sacred and secular. As he argues, the Romans later turned this appetite for destruction against Roman temples and cities. Indeed, this perspective on the dangers of greed and despoliation emerges in Statius’ characterization of the Argives. While they remain oblivious to the violent manner of their funeral preparations, Statius ensures that the reader is made aware of the excessive nature of their actions by means of the urbs capta simile. Statius thus makes his version of this epic topos particularly transgressive because the Argives commit a further crime and despoil the forest when they attempt to expiate the crime of killing the sacred snake.

**Nemea and Troy**

Statius condemns the Argives as sacrilegious conquerors and the deforestation of Nemea triggers allusions to tree-cutting in Vergil’s *Aeneid*. Through these allusions Statius compares the Nemean forest to Troy, the urbs capta par excellence, thereby elevating it from a forest to a symbol of human civilization. Statius alludes first to the tree-cutting for the funeral of Misenus in

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248 Liv. 26.46.10.

249 Liv. 25.31.8.

250 Liv. 25.40.2 ceterum inde primum initium mirandi Graecarum artium opera licentiaeque hinc sacra profanaque omnia ulgo spoliandi factum est, quae postremo in Romanos deos, templum id ipsum primum quod a Marcello eximie ornatum est, uertit.

251 Laurence (1996, 114): In the “mythological tradition [of Troy], the Greek victors were punished, because they had destroyed and violated the temples whilst destroying the city...In other words, they had not enacted the war in the preferred manner and, in consequence, they had disrupted the fabric of their own society and endangered themselves as individuals. To remain within the concepts of Roman *Kriegethik* upon victory over an enemy city, it was necessary to maintain a magnanimous attitude towards the vanquished. This was expressed in terms that are associated with the Latin word *clementia.*”
Aeneid 6.252 Of all the trees in the forest, Statius draws attention to the spruces (piceae) by describing only these and no other trees as being suitable for building pyres and thus as being used correctly. Statius’ procumbunt piceae (Theb. 6.100) echoes Vergil’s procumbunt piceae (Aen. 6.180) used in the same metrical position to describe the Trojans cutting down trees to build a pyre for Misenus (Aen. 6.176-182).253

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tum iussa Sibyllae,  
haud mora, festinant flentes aramque sepulcri  
congerere arboribus caeloque educere certant.  
itur in antiquam siluam, stabula alta ferarum;  
procumbunt piceae, sonat icta securibus ilex  
fraxineaeque trabes cuneis et fissile robur  
scinditur, aduoluunt ingentis montibus ornos.254
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Then weeping they hurry without delay to obey the Sibyl’s commands and strive to pile up the funeral pyre with trees and to build it to the sky. They go into the ancient forest, the lofty den of wild animals. The spruces fall, the holm-oak, struck by axes, resounds and beams of mountain ash and oak, easily broken, are split with wedges, and they roll huge manna-ash trees down the mountain.

Like the Nemean forest, this forest is ancient, suggesting a sacred and numinous quality, and Vergil details the different types of trees that the Trojans cut down. He does not present their actions as violent or excessive but rather makes matter-of-fact statements about the Trojans cutting down the trees.255 Statius takes these four lines and expands them into twenty-eight, complete with a description of the inhabitants of the forest that flee its destruction. By means of

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252 On the passage as a whole see Horsfall (2013, 164-188) and his bibliography on p.185.

253 Horsfall (2013, 186) calls procumbunt “a weighty word, well suited to the fall of the great trees.”

254 Horsfall (2013, 183) notes “Felling the forest. The extraordinary quality (as high as anything in V., as anything, indeed, in Latin epic.”

255 I am more than pleased to have a titan such as Horsfall on my side on this one (2013, 167): “the case against Aen. as brutal, violent and sacrilegious seems a good deal weaker than some of his recent critics have supposed, and here...mildly encouraged by the silence of those late-antique critics, who are sometimes roused to frenzy by ritual minutiae, we should remember that it is by no means established, and certain...that these narrative discrepancies mattered a scrap to the poet. Likewise, after forty years of (I hope) increasingly wary work on such religious detail in Aen....it becomes ever less clear to me that the minor particulars of ritual acts mattered nearly as much to V. as they did to Serv. and Macr. (not to mention those critics just cited.” Does this cause my analysis of Statius’ tree-cutting to unravel? I think not, since the differences between his and Vergil’s passages are clear.
this allusion to the funeral of Misenus, Statius looks back even further to Aeneid 2 and the simile comparing the fall of Troy to an ash-tree falling on a mountainside (Aen. 2.624-631):

Tum uero omne mihi uisum considere in ignis
Ilium et ex imo uerti Neptunia Troia:
ac ueluti summis antiquam in montibus ornum
cum ferro accisam crebrisque bipennibus instant
eruere agricolae certatim, illa usque minatur
et tremefacta comam concusso uertice nutat,
uulneribus donec paulatim euicta supremum
congemuit traxitque iugis auulsa ruinam.

Then all Ilium seemed to me to sink into the fires and Neptunian Troy seemed to topple over from its depths: just as when on the heights of a mountain the locals eagerly strive to bring down an ancient ash cut with iron and repeated blows of axes, and the tree all the time threatens [to fall] and, its peak shaken and leaves trembling, nods, until little by little overcome by wounds finally groans and torn from the mountainside drags itself down in ruin.

Antiquam siluam (Aen. 6.179) and ingentis montibus ornos (Aen. 6.182) in the Misenus passage recall antiquam in montibus ornum (Aen. 2.626) in the ash-tree simile in Aeneid 2. In this simile, a single tree represents the entire city of Troy but Statius reverses this and expands it by comparing the entire forest to a city. Statius uses this secondary allusion to Aeneid 2 to emphasize the Argives’ destructiveness and portray them like the Greeks sacking Troy. Like the Nemean forest, the ash-tree is antiqua, marking its venerability and inherent nobility, an adjective which also applies to Troy. Vergil humanizes the falling ash tree by describing it as conquered by its wounds (uulnera), which in turn humanizes the trees of Statius’ Nemean

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256 Of antiquam in 6.179 Horsfall (2013, 186) notes the “strong affective force” of the adjective. On the ash tree in 2.626 Horsfall (2008, 449) observes “Estevez suggests that V.’s choice of tree is somehow prompted by the application to Priam, ter in II. of the epithet ἐὔμμελίης, of the good ash-wood spear, which is acute and ingenious, but hardly mandatory here.”

257 Horsfall (2008, 449): “above all, the tree is elaborately personified (Briggs suggests a debt to Cat.64.105-111) and we share in the suffering of its/the city’s fall.”
Like the Trojans in book 6, the _agricolae_ compete (certatim, _Aen._ 2.628) to cut down the tree. The Argives also cut quickly (_Theb._ 6.115-116) but Statius makes their eagerness and speed inappropriate and violent by comparing them to soldiers sacking a city.

The connection between Nemea and these passages from Vergil is further reinforced by an intertext with a battle-scene in _Aeneid_ 2. Statius exploits the similarities between the situations (the fall of Nemea and the fall of Troy) and between humans and trees, further emphasizing that the Nemean forest is an _urbs capta_ whose fall is comparable to that of Troy. While trying to rescue Cassandra, Aeneas and his men, disguised in Greek armor, are attacked both by Trojans and Greeks who see through their disguises (_Aen._ 2.424-30):

.ilicet obtuimur numero, primusque Coroebus
Penelei dextra dieae armipotentis ad aram
procumbit; cadit et Rhipeus, iustissimus unus
qui fuit in Teucris et seruantissimus aequi
(dis aliter uisum); pereunt Hypanisque Dymasque
confixi a sociis; nec te tua plurima, Panthu,
labentem pietas nec Apollinis infula texti.

At once we are outnumbered, and Coroebus first, by the right hand of Peneleus near the altar of the warrior goddess, falls; and Rhipeus falls, the most righteous man in Troy and greatest protector of justice (but the gods thought otherwise); then died Hypanis and Dymas, pierced by allies; neither did your utmost devotion nor your fillet of Apollo protect you when you fell, Panthus.

Vergil constructs a fairly straightforward catalogue of Aeneas’ allies that fall in battle. Statius, however, may have had this catalogue in mind when constructing his tree catalogue as Vergil’s _procumbit_ and _cadit_ (_Aen._ 2.426) are echoed by Statius’ _procumbunt_ (_Theb._ 6.100) and _cadit_ (_Theb._ 6.98). Statius assimilates the trees of Nemea to the Trojans, and just as Aeneas flees Troy,

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258 Of _uuulnera_ Horsfall (2008, 451) notes this is “the first time, apparently, that the word is so used, and no surprise that it should have been V., and in such a context, to do so.”

259 On _agricolae_ Horsfall (2008, 450-451) argues they are “rather less the men who felled trees as the young V. watched...than a complex and attractive lit. tradition, if you consider the simile’s sources as a whole: so _Il._ 4.485 ἀμματοπηγός, 13.390 τάκτονες ἄνδρες, _AR_ 4.1684 ὠλοτόμοι, in addition to V.’s own _arator_ at _G._ 2.207.”

so do the rustic deities of Nemea flee from the forest. The simile explicitly comparing Nemea to an *urbs capta* and the allusions to Troy reveal Polynices to be the leader of a violent and greedy army and not the sympathetic exiled king and rightful ruler of Thebes he purports to be.

Statius makes his version of the epic *topos* of tree-cutting especially violent and transgressive by combining it with the *urbs capta* motif. The Romans recognized that nature can be mastered and used productively but the Argives dominate nature in a fundamentally unproductive way. Statius associates the Argives with the worst practices of Roman generals, as seen in Livy, and condemns their actions as excessive and self-destructive. The Argive sack of the Nemean forest stands in contrast to their expected, but ultimately unsuccessful, conquest of Thebes. Ironically, the forest of Nemea is the only city that Polynices will conquer.261 By showing how Polynices and the Argives treat a conquered city of nature, Statius impugns their motives and reveals their violent, destructive tendencies toward humans and nature alike.

7. Conclusion

This chapter examined forests, tree-cutting, and their interaction with the main themes of the Flavian epics. Although each poet uses forests and tree-cutting differently, there are several commonalities among the three poems. Trees can be tools for performing funeral rites, but the manner of cutting varies and speaks to the differences between those doing the cutting. Argus works cooperatively with the forests of Pelion to build the Argo while the Argives violently plunder the Nemean forest and the Carthaginians prepare pyres without feeling any appropriate grief or sadness. Thus, when compared to previous iterations in the epic tradition, all three poets innovate with the tree-cutting *topos*. All three poems also characterize forests as wild and dangerous places lacking cultivation. The language of pathlessness (*inuia, auia*) is especially

261 Likewise, McNelis (2007, 77) similarly notes about the whole Nemea episode that “this action about the death of a child deflates the realization of heroic warfare” in the poem.
noteworthy. After the Argonauts leave Greece the forests they encounter are dark or deceptively pleasant but dangerous, seen especially when Hylas is abducted and both he and Hercules find an enemy in the *auia* of the Mysian forest. Similarly, all of the forest landscapes of the *Thebaid* between Argos and Thebes are dark and strange (the Sphinx’s forest, Diana’s forest) or openly hostile (the Nemean forest). Silius’ trees at Trasimene similarly deceive the Sicilian soldiers and cause their deaths.

These passages create a disconnect between the characters’ and the reader’s experience. While characters throughout all three poems fail to recognize forests for what they are (strange, numinous, dark, dangerous, etc.), this fact becomes abundantly clear to the reader and appeals to the contemporary Flavian audience’s taste for such unknown, dark landscapes. These forests, which embody the main elements and characteristics of distant real-life geography at the edges of the empire, evoke feelings of wonder and awe at the unknown landscapes that are being explored in the text and the real landscapes they evoke. This aspect is crucial for understanding the appeal and impact of such passages on the contemporary audience and their relation to the Flavian dynasty and its military achievements.
CHAPTER 3

THE RIVER’S RED: RIVERS, IDENTITY, AND SINGLE-COMBAT

Continuing the themes from the previous two chapters (expansion, transgression, wilderness), this chapter focuses on rivers and the battles between rivers and humans. In both the *Punica* and *Thebaid*, humans enter inhospitable riverine environments and are forced into, or actively seek, conflict with nonhuman nature. Rivers emerge as nonhuman agents acting in their own interest to defend their identities but are also closely tied to one side of the human conflicts in the narrative. For example, Hannibal crosses numerous rivers despite their resistance and Eridanus, the god of the Po, fights against the elder Scipio in an effort to defend his river, showing that he has sided with Hannibal. Similarly, Ismenos remains loyal to Thebes and attacks Hippomedon, one of the Seven, because of the damage he has caused to his river and in retribution for the death of his grandson. Silius and Statius were the first poets (whose work we have) to feature such river-battles since Homer’s battle between Achilles and the Scamander in *Iliad* 21 and were greatly influenced by this scene. However, they have their heroes, Scipio and Hippomedon, outdo Achilles by standing their ground against the might of the Trebia and Ismenos, respectively. Thus, while borrowing heavily from Homer, both Flavian poets challenge the literary past.

Statius and Silius employ river-battles to crystalize the interactions and conflicts between humans and nature, specifically anthropomorphized nature gods. In a way, the previous two chapters featured passages in which humans and the gods of nature danced around each other, getting close but never fully making contact. These two scenes from the *Punica* and *Thebaid* shatter the apparent boundary between gods and humans. Such interactions, common in Homer,

262 Haselmann (2018, 161 n.489) provides a clear and concise summary of river-battles in epic from Homer to Silius.
became less and less frequent in epic until Silius and Statius, likely in competition with each other, took up the challenge.

This chapter then has two main strains. One continues the theme of encounters and transgression seen in the previous two chapters as rivers and humans come into direct conflict in both the *Punica* and the *Thebaid*. The second examines the role of river status and identity in these conflicts. The identity of the Trebia River is muddled in the *Punica* since the eponymous battle takes place at and in the Trebia, a tributary of the Po (Padus in Latin), but it is Eridanus, the god of the Po, that emerges to fight Scipio. Thus the greater river asserts itself over its lesser tributary.\textsuperscript{263} Therefore, if we think of the Po as the primary actor at the battle, we solve the question as to why the Trebia, an Italian river, supports Hannibal: the Po was once the southern boundary of the Alps and has its source in the Alps, which Hannibal conquers just before the battle. As such, he controls the mountains, the area of the Alps up to the Po, as their southern boundary, and the river itself since he has conquered its source.\textsuperscript{264} In the *Thebaid*, during the battle in the Ismenos River, the Argive Hippomedon is differentiated from the Theban Crenaeus and his grandfather Ismenos, the river god, by the nature of their home waters. For Crenaeus and Ismenos, Hippomedon represents the poisonous waters of Lerna while Ismenos is located near and supports Thebes.

\textsuperscript{263} The Po was one of the 'great' rivers of the Mediterranean along with the Nile, Rhine, Danube, and, for the Romans in particular, the Tiber.

\textsuperscript{264} As Campbell (2006) notes, “To control a river and master its source was tantamount to controlling the people in the river's vicinity.”
1. Rivers, Status, and Identity

In the ancient world, rivers were seen to have their own unique identity and were closely identified with the local population, representing “nations, peoples, and even ideologies.” Prudence Jones supports this idea arguing that:

As is evident from ethnographic works as well as poetic and artistic conventions, a great deal of similarity appears to exist between people and the rivers of their territory. A river may serve as an emblem of the landscape and, as such, may advertise the identification of people with place.

Furthermore, “rivers had their own status, which they could win, increase, or forfeit to another river.” In Pliny’s *Natural History* in particular, a river’s tributaries bring it greater status and “fame, which is to say definite standing in a socially ordered system of value.” Not only do tributaries determine a river’s status and fame, its “spring is an index to the river’s character: the nature of the spring determines the significance of the river.” Thus, rivers have their own identity and status which they can gain or lose and “the submission of one river to another...[is] a real matter of prestige.” In addition, “in the religious life of the Romans, as is well documented, rivers were divine beings, their cult old and widespread.” As Brian Campbell argues:

The idea of a river in human form was of course a literary device in order to enliven a narrative or add poetic color. But the fact that writers had their own agenda does not rob the concept of wider significance. For the idea of rivers in the shape of a man was deep-seated in popular consciousness and fitted easily into the existing ideology of deities

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265 Campbell (2012, 127).
266 Jones (2005, 41).
267 Campbell (2012, 126).
268 Murphy (2003, 318).
269 Murphy (2003, 319).
271 Murphy (2003, 314).
intervening in human affairs. Personification was also part of an intellectual process in illustrating or reinforcing a historical point or judgment, which was often bound up with local life and culture. Therefore, personification blended with the divine spirit of the watery environment and linked directly to river legends, in which well-known rivers were portrayed as forceful agents in either the local or the international arena.²⁷²

Thus the personification of the Trebia and Ismenos in the Punica and Thebaid while extreme is reflective of a certain reality of belief, ideology, and iconography.²⁷³ This is important for my overall approach since I argue that nature plays an important role in Flavian epic and that this in turn reflects on contemporary culture and imperial ideology.

2. Rivers and River-battles in the Punica

Rivers appear throughout Silius’ Punica and the many river-crossings and river-battles illustrate their impact on and importance to the narrative.²⁷⁴ The Carthaginians’ and Romans’ encounters with rivers both in and out of battle present a nonhuman sphere with which human actors interact and come into conflict while Hannibal’s journey through Gaul provides evidence for his encounters with landscapes and rivers. However, the battle scenes in Italy at the Ticinus, Trebia, and Trasimene are more complex since they show both the Carthaginians and Romans interacting with the landscape. Although these bodies of water are in part the collateral damage of the battles and Silius portrays them as being polluted by the dead, they are also active participants in the battles. The Italian rivers sometimes side with the Carthaginians against the Romans which complicates the image of the foreign Hannibal invading and harming the Italian

²⁷² Campbell (2012, 144).

²⁷³ With respect to iconography, rivers were commonly depicted as human figures in statues and also appeared in the apparatus of Roman triumphs.

²⁷⁴ As Haselmann (2018, 32) argues, river passages in Silius and worthy of discussion regardless of whether or not they can all be brought under one heading of “ecological motifs,” as Santini (1991) does. They are in fact inseparable from the narrative context of the poem: “Das sogenannte Flussmotiv, das Santini für die Punica ausmacht, ist jedoch – so die These der vorliegenden Arbeit – vielmehr als tragendes Element dieser Geschichte und nicht als isolierte Entität zu betrachten, die ohne den Erzählzusammenhang zum Zweiten Punischen Krieg gelesen werden könnte” (Haselmann 2018, 34).
countryside or the view that both the Carthaginians and the Romans harm nature. Juno also
plays an important role in these battles by making the Trebia and Lake Trasimene support
Hannibal to the detriment of the rivers themselves.

During Hannibal’s march through Gaul he crosses the Rhone and Druentia. Both have
their source in the Alps and share a common heritage, so to speak, as Alpine rivers and with the
Alps form a barrier to Hannibal’s march into Italy. These two rivers stand in contrast to the
Trebia and Po which support Hannibal after he has crossed the Alps and mastered the source of
the Po in the Alps. Although the Trebia’s source is in the Apennines, since it is merely a tributary
of the Po, the greater river determines the lesser’s character. Silius uses these shifting riverine
allegiances to communicate Hannibal’s progress, to contrast the state of the landscape before and
after he crosses the Alps, and to illustrate his control over the region while simultaneously
showing the agency of nature, in particular rivers, to shape his campaign and in turn the Romans’
defense.

Into Gaul: The Rhone and Arar

Hannibal’s march from Spain to Italy in Punica 3 presents the Carthaginian army’s
difficulties navigating the Gallic landscape and its rivers. Silius glosses over the diplomatic and
military conflicts with local Gallic peoples seen in Livy’s account and instead dramatizes
Hannibal’s struggles with crossing various Gallic rivers in anticipation of the crossing of the
Alps, crossings which Livy barely mentions and Polybius omits altogether. These river-
crossings prefigure both the crossing of the Alps and the water-battles of books 4 and 5 at
Ticinus, Trebia, and Trasimene. For Hannibal and his soldiers, the landscape of Gaul, rather

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275 This is Santini’s (1991) view.

276 Liv. 21.30-35.
than its people, is their greatest enemy and the greatest obstacle to their advance, a theme familiar from accounts of military campaigns.\textsuperscript{278}

In book 3 of the \textit{Punica}, following the catalogue of the Carthaginian forces, Hannibal descends into Gaul where he and his forces must navigate the landscape.\textsuperscript{279} Silius only briefly mentions the inhabitants of the area, the Bebrycians and the Volcae, whose lands Hannibal must traverse, and they are quickly dispatched. Instead, the landscape itself presents the most serious barrier to his advance. The Carthaginians travel through a hilly landscape dense with pine forests (\textit{per et colles et densos abiete lucos, 3.442}) to reach the Rhone:

\begin{verbatim}
tumidique minaces accedit Rhodani festino milite ripas. aggeribus caput Alpinis et rupe niuali proserit in Celtas ingentemque extrahit amnem spumanti Rhodanus proscindens gurgite campos ac propere in pontum lato ruit incitus alueo. auget opes stanti similis tacitoque liquore mixtus Arar, quem gurgitibus complexus anhelis cunctantem immergit pelago raptumque per arua ferre uetat patrium uicina ad litora nomen.\end{verbatim}

And by a quick march they reach the threatening banks of the swollen Rhone. The Rhone produces its source from the snowy cliffs and rocks of the Alps into the lands of the Celts and it draws out its huge course cutting the fields with its foaming current and rushes headlong through its swift channel into the sea. The Arar, almost motionless and with a silent current, mixes and increases its strength, and [the Rhone] embracing its slow current with its panting flood plunges it into the sea and, captured, forbids it from carrying its paternal name through the fields to the neighboring shores.

In describing the Arar and its relationship with the Rhone, Silius engages with the same ideas seen in Pliny above. There is a clear hierarchy of the two rivers with the Arar, the lesser

\textsuperscript{277} See Haselmann (2018, 68) on Silius’ foreshadowing the crossing of the Alps.

\textsuperscript{278} Cf. Tac. Ag. 25.1 \textit{cum simul terra, simul mari bellum impelleretur, ac saepe isdem castris pedes equesque et nauticus miles mixti copis et laetitia sua quisque facta, suos casus attollerent, ac modo siluarum ac montium profunda, modo tempestatum ac fluctuum adversa, hinc terra et hostis, hinc uictus Oceanus militari iactantia compararentur.}

\textsuperscript{279} Garrison (1992, 104-108) discusses Caesar’s encounters with this then-strange, unknown, and difficult landscape.
tributary, being subsumed by the Rhone, the greater river, and not only losing its identity (nomen) but having it actively taken away (uetat). The loss of its name means the loss of its identity and particular characteristics, namely, its slow, almost stationary course (stanti similis). One of the Rhone’s main characteristics is the fact that it has its source in the Alps and as such is closely identified with them. The Alpine Rhone thus subsumes the lesser Arar, making the Rhone and its Alpine nature central to the riverine environment that the Carthaginians approach and cross in Gaul. This further extends the influence of the Alps beyond the mountains themselves into the surrounding landscape, making them even more significant actors that are resistant to the Carthaginians’ advance.

The Rhone cannot be bridged and so the Carthaginians plunge into the river (inuadunt alacres inimicum pontibus amnem, 3.455). The martial tone of inuadunt is emphasized by the adjective inimicus. Although specifically hostile to bridges, that is, to human control, the river is by extension hostile to the Carthaginians who are seeking to cross it. The martial aspect of the passage is further emphasized by Silius’ statement that the current is broken by the soldiers’ strong arms fighting with it (ualidis gurges certatim frangitur ulnis, 3.457). Silius contrasts the strength and eagerness of the Carthaginian men with the terror of their horses and elephants which must be carried across on barges (3.458-462) and personifies the river, which is frightened by the crossing of the elephants (at gregis illapsu fremebundo territus atras / expauit moles Rhodanus, 3.463). Specifically, the Rhone fears their trumpeting cries (fremebundo) and their dark color (atras expauit moles). These details further emphasize the unfamiliarity of the elephants, which are not called elephants but rather Libyan beasts (belua...Libyssa, 3.459), a descriptor that serves to further mark the elephants, and the Carthaginians by extension, as

280 For Haselmann (2018, 66) the Rhone is purely a natural boundary without a political function like the Ebro; “Die direkte Interaktion Hannibals mit der Landschaft ist ein wichtiger Aspekt der Ekphrasis der Rhone” (69).
foreign and to characterize their crossing as an affront to the river. The Rhone itself reacts violently to the elephant crossing by turning back its course and sending up a threatening rumble from its depths (*stagnisque refusis / torsit harenosos mimitantia murmura fundo*, 3.464-5). The *adynaton* of the river reversing its course and the rumblings from the depths indicate its objection to being crossed by the elephants and the Carthaginian army, but it is unable to resist effectively.\(^{281}\)

**The Druentia**

The Druentia provides the next obstacle to Hannibal’s march, a river which Livy calls the most difficult of rivers in Gaul to cross because of its multiple shifting channels and pools.\(^{282}\) Also springing from the Alps, the river, rough with stones and tree trunks, disrupts Hannibal’s progress (*turbidus hic truncis saxisque Druentia laetum / ductoris uastauit iter*, 3.468-469).\(^{283}\) The verb *uasto* characterizes the river as an army attacking an enemy and laying waste to their territory.\(^{284}\) Though not related semantically, *uastauit iter* seems to echo *populatur* previously used to describe Hannibal’s march through the lands of the Volcae (*per inhospita rura / Volcarum populatur iter*, 3.444-445). Here, then, Silius reverses the roles of Hannibal and the landscape with the River Druentia portrayed as a devastator disrupting Hannibal’s march. Silius makes it clear why the river is so dangerous: it has its source in the Alps (*namque Alpibus ortus*, 3.469) just like the Rhone. This foreshadows the obstacle that the Alps will shortly present to the

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281 On rivers reversing their courses see below and Campbell (2012).

282 Liv. 21.31.10-11 *Is et ipse Alpinus amnis longe omnium Galliae fluminum difficillimus transitu est; nam cum aquae uim uehat ingentem, non tamen nautium patiens est, quia nullis coercitus ripis, pluribus simul neque iisdem alueis fluens*. Haselmann (2018, 71-72) argues the Druentia is more powerful than the Rhone and illustrates an escalation of the resistance to Hannibal but the Druentia has little effect on Hannibal, an apparent contradiction. Santini (1991, 94) argues the crossing of the Druentia anticipates the crossing of the Alps.

283 See below on Hippomedon’s and the Ismenos’ description as *turbidus*, indicating a shared characteristic or nature.

284 *OLD* s.v. 2a and c.
Carthaginians. The power that the Druentia derives from its origin high up in the Alps causes it to “carry away with a roar uprooted ash-trees and eroded fragments of the mountain and it continues on with barking waves and, changing its course, it shifts the deceitful shallows” (aulsas ornos et adesi fragmina montis / cum sonitu uoluens fertur latrantibus undis / ac uada translato mutat fallacia cursu, 3.470-472). Unlike the Rhone, the Druentia cannot be forded nor is it safe for ships (non pediti fidus, patulis non puppibus aequus, 3.473). Given the poem’s central theme of perfidia, the river’s fallacia uada and the fact that it is non pediti fidus are noteworthy. Much like the forests of chapter 2, the Druentia is deceptive and difficult in addition to being outright hostile to Hannibal’s army (uastauit iter). The Druentia seizes and drowns many of Hannibal’s men during their crossing and, as Hannibal reaches the Alps, Silius leaves the reader wondering how the Carthaginians managed to cross the river.

**The Ticinus**

The battle at the Ticinus River owes its name to the proximity to the river rather than the battle having been fought in the river itself, but nevertheless it continues the motif of river-crossings and battles seen from the beginning of the poem and is a crucial first victory for Hannibal against the Romans. The presence of the Ticinus and Silius’ use of water imagery makes water an important factor even when the armies are not fighting with or in the river itself. Before the battle, Silius describes the Ticinus, which appears like a locus amoenus (4.82-87):

caeruleas Ticinus aquas et stagna uadoso
perspicuus seruat turbari nescia fundo
ac ntitdum uiridi lente trahit amne liquorem.
uix credas labi; ripis tam mitis opacis
argutos inter uolucrum certamine cantus
somniferam ducit lucenti gurgite lympham.

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285 Cf. Liv. 21.31.11 noua semper <per> uada nouosque gurgites – et ob eadem pediti quoque incerta uia est – ad hoc saxa glareosa uoluens, nihil stabile nec tutum ingredienti praebet.

286 On the battles of Punica 4 and their allusivity see Connor (2018).
The clear Ticinus preserves its blue waters and its pool’s shallow beds are never disturbed and it slowly carries its water shining with its green stream. You would scarcely think it flows; so gently between its shady banks, among the melodious singing of competing birds, it leads sleep-bringing waters with its shining current.

The Ticinus’ calm blue waters, shady banks, and birds singing in competition like shepherds in bucolic landscapes paint the river as a *locus amoenus*, one that is about to be disturbed by the first battle between Carthage and Rome.287 Through this characterization of the Ticinus as a *locus amoenus* Silius connects the location of the battle with the Roman soldiers whom the Carthaginians will defeat, for Hannibal kills two men whom Silius directly associates with Italian landscapes and similar *loci amoeni*. This makes Hannibal a metaphorical attacker of the Italian landscape and makes the Romans soft, more bucolic shepherds than warriors. Hannibal’s first victim Collinus is “from a cool home [and] Lake Fucinus nourished him in a green cave and allowed him to swim across the lake” (*domoque / Collinum gelida, uiridi quem Fucinus antro / nutrierat dederatque lacum tramittere nando*, 4.343-345). Geographic determinism, the idea that people’s characteristics are determined by the character of the lands in which they live, was a commonly held belief in antiquity and its apparent deployment here would suggest that while Collinus may well feel at home near Ticinus’ cool waters and shady banks he is no match for Hannibal, as his death makes clear.288 Similarly, Hannibal kills a certain Massicus who was “born from the sacred peak of a vine-bearing mountain and raised by the waters of the Liris a calm, hidden stream never touched by the rain (*uitiferi sacro generatus uertice montis / et Liris nutritus aquis*, 4.347-348). Massicus, who is named after the mountain in Campania famous for its wine, is also no match for Hannibal. Silius closely associates both men with the waters of

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287 Cf. Silius’ description of the Arar as *stanti similis* (3.452). See Haselmann (2018, 73-78, 92-122) on the Ticinus as a *locus amoenus*; for Haselmann (2018, 75) the omission of the bridging of the Ticinus contributes to its portrayal as an idealized part of the Italian landscape.

their native lands and presents them not only as the products of those lands but even as their children, as indicated by nutrierat, generatus, and nutritus.\textsuperscript{289}

While the deaths of Collinus and Massicus foreshadow violence against the Italian landscape which they symbolize, the Ticinus itself soon feels the effects of the battle.\textsuperscript{290} After the elder Scipio threatens to kill himself should his soldiers retreat, Jupiter sends Mars to intervene by spurring the younger Scipio to rescue his father. Mars drives along with him Anger, the Furies, and Bellona (4.436-439), a storm bursts over the earth, the Saturnian land trembles at the approach of the god and the Ticinus leaves its banks at the sound of the chariot, and flows back to its source (\textit{quatitur Saturnia sedes / ingressu tremefacta dei ripasque relinquit, / audito curru, fontique relabitur amnis}, 4.442-444). Just as during Hannibal’s crossing of the Rhone, here the Ticinus achieves another \textit{adynaton} going against its own nature by leaping from its banks and reversing its course. Yet here the river flees the war god, rather than the Carthaginian general. The river reacts violently to war itself, not simply one side or the other, Carthaginian or Roman. Unlike at Trebia, the battle does not take place in the Ticinus itself and so it is not directly impacted by the battle. Rather, Silius connects the Ticinus’ idyllic riverscape with the Roman soldiers first killed by Hannibal to show how they are similar to the river, peaceful and unwarlike, and to prefigure Hannibal’s victory.

\textsuperscript{289} This suggests a sympathetic view of geographic determinism.

\textsuperscript{290} Haselmann (2018, 153): “Es kann festgehalten werden, das der \textit{locus amoenus} Italiens durch den punischen Einmarsch gewissermaßen zu einem \textit{locus horridus} transformiert wird.”
The Trebia

In the narrative of the battle of the Trebia, Silius crafts a *mache parapotamios* with Scipio’s themachy against the river god Eridanus as its focal-point. The Trebia’s and Po’s allegiance to Hannibal confirms his conquest of the Alps and control of the Po while simultaneously illustrating their opposition to the Romans and the Romans’ loss of power. Eridanus becomes a powerful ally of Hannibal, a fact that illustrates the dynamics of conquest between nature and conqueror. Silius clearly presents the river as both an active participant in and a victim of the battle which leaves it burnt and polluted with blood and bodies. As the battle rages between the Carthaginians and Romans, missiles and bodies cover the ground (4.551-553) and Hannibal drives the Romans back into the river (4.570-572):

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et iam dispersis Romana per agmina signis 570
  palantes agit ad ripas, miserabile, Poenus
  impellens trepidos fluvioque immergere certat.
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And now with the Roman standards scattered throughout their ranks the Carthaginian drives them wandering to the banks, a miserable sight, [and] pressing the fearful men he strives to drown them in the river.

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291 For a detailed analysis of the battle, see Haselmann (2018, 174-218). Scipio’s battle with Eridanus contains many points of contact with Statius’ narrative of Hippomedon’s battle with Ismenos. It seems that, while both Silius and Statius look back to Achilles’ battle with the Scamander in *Iliad* 21, they are also influencing each other. Although an interesting question, I am not here focused in the direction or dynamics of influence but rather what each poet is saying about rivers, geography, and the divine. It is impossible to say who influenced whom since they were contemporaries writing at about the same time. However, it is possible to say that they clearly exercised some influence over each other and that this influence was probably bidirectional. For more on who influences whom and the intractability of this interpretive problem see Marks (2014). On the battle as a whole, see Niemann (1975, 89-105). Many have noted the connection between Scipio’s battle and Achilles’ including Wezel (1873, 12), Groesst (1887, 7), Klotz (1933, 6), Nicol (1936, 30-31), von Albrecht (1964, 148-149), Delz (1969, 97 n.25), Romano (1969, 75-76), Juhnke (1972, 13-24, 201), Niemann (1975, 94-99), Burck (1979, 272), Spaltenstein (1986), Feeney (1991, 308-310), and Haselmann (2018). For the connection with Hippomedon’s battle with the Ismenos in *Thebaid* 9, see Legras (1905, 366-368), Romano (1969, 75-76), and Niemann (1975, 99-100). For the Po/Eridanus in Vergil’s *Georgics*, see Goodfellow (1981).

292 Haselmann (2018, 179-180) prefers attributing the Trebia’s alliance with Hannibal to Juno’s command and its fear of the consequences of not obeying her. This is certainly true, but does not invalidate the influence of Hannibal’s conquest of the Alps.

293 Cf. when after the low-point at Cannae, Italy and the ground itself (*tellus*) returns to the side of the Romans: *sed percita falli / sub tanto motu Tellus nequit. implicat actas / caeco errore uias umbrisque fauentibus arto / circumagit spatio sua per uestigia ductos*, Sil. 15.617-620.
Hannibal seeks to use the water as a weapon against the Romans, thereby directly involving the river in the battle for the first time. As if in response to Hannibal using it against the Romans, “the Trebia begins a new battle, its current a source of misfortune for the tired men, and rouses its waves at Juno’s command.” (tum Trebia infausto noua proelia gurgite fessis / incohat ac precibus Iunonis suscitat undas, 4.573-574). The river rouses its waters and attacks the Romans driven into the water and its obedience to Juno immediately aligns it with the Carthaginians. In a passage with many similarities to Hippomedon’s battle in the Ismenos (Theb. 9.225-283), the Romans fight against the riverscape, the river and its banks, rather than against the Carthaginian soldiers (4.575-584):

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haurit subsidens fugientum corpora tellus
infidaque soli frustrata uoragine sorbet.
nec niti lenoque datur conuellere limo
mersa pedum penitus uestigia; labe tenaci
haerent deuinki gressus, resolutaque ripa
implicat aut caeca prostermit fraude paludis.
imque alius super atque alius per lubrica surgens.
dum sibi quisque uiam per inextricabile litus
praeripit et putri luctatur caespite, lapsi
occumbunt sesque sua pressere ruina.
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Falling away, the earth swallows the bodies of the fleeing men and deceptively absorbs them with the faithless chasm in the ground. They cannot support themselves or pull their deeply sunken feet from the soft mud. Their feet stick, held by the tenacious ground and the crumbling bank grasped them or knocked them over with the deception of the unseen swamp. And now one after another rises through the slippery muck. While each man seeks for himself a path up the impassable bank and struggles against the crumbling grass, they slip and fall and crush each other with their bodies.

The Trebia’s banks crumble and the collapsed riverbank turns into a quagmire of mud and water from which there is no escape. Silius varies his description of the scene: first the soldiers are the

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294 See Haselmann (2018, 174-181) on the Trebia’s high water level, the influence of the historical sources, and Juno’s command as the cause for the high level. Niemann (1975, 95) argues Juno’s intervention is necessary because Trebia is an Italian river and inherently allied with Rome. However, as I argue, Hannibal essentially controls the Trebia and Po because of his conquest of the Alps.
focalizers (*datur conuellere, haerent...gressus*), then the river (*ripa implicat, proster nit*), then the soldiers once again (*alius...alius, praeripit, lactatur, occumbunt*). This technique serves to create the impression of an actual back-and-forth battle between the men and the river. The Roman soldiers are reduced to fighting as individuals (*alius...alius*) with each trying to find a way out for himself (*sibi quisque uiam*) and their individual efforts result in their combined disaster (4.583-584). Silius reinforces once again the Trebia’s faithlessness and betrayal (*infida, 4.576*) by stating that the riverbank brings down the Roman soldiers with the hidden deceit of its swamp. This recalls the difficulty that the Carthaginians had with crossing the Druentia (*uada translato mutat fallacia cursu, 3.472*), but here it is reversed as the Trebia is allied with Hannibal although not entirely under his control. By using this language of deception and faithlessness to describe the actions of the river, Silius evokes the language of *perfidia* that he uses to describe the Carthaginians throughout the poem, who are known for breaking their agreement with Rome (*perfida pacti, 1.5*) and are characterized by their *Punica fides*. Just as in the previous chapter the trees that failed to protect the Roman-allied soldiers in *Punica* 10 were described as faithless, so too is the Trebia faithless and deceptive as it attacks the Romans. Silius thus reinforces the Trebia’s alignment with the Carthaginians against the Romans and presents the river as treacherous for obeying Juno and attacking the Romans. We might be tempted to read the river as a pawn of Juno caught between the Carthaginians and Romans and siding with the Carthaginians who will be victorious until after Cannae, but Eridanus, the god of the river, later asserts himself and his agency by attacking the elder Scipio and the Romans independent of Juno.

Silius and Statius both highlight similar motifs in these river-battle passages. Much like Statius’ passage on the battle in the Ismenos, Silius details the fates of individual soldiers in the
Trebia. One, a fast swimmer making his way to the riverbank, is killed by a spear and pinned to the bank (*contorta ripae pendens affigitur hasta*, 4.588). Another Roman, having lost his weapon, grapples with an enemy and drowns them both (4.589-590). This is very similar to the death of Agenor who attempts to pull his brother from the Ismenos but, unwilling to let him go and unable to pull him out, ends up drowning both of them (9.272-275). Additional motifs include the collapse of the riverbanks, the power of the river’s whirlpools, the inability of the soldiers to escape the river, and the different forms of death inflicted upon the human combatants. Both authors make this last motif explicit. Statius comments that “the same death overcomes the miserable men in a thousand forms of death,” (*mille modis leti miserōs mors una fatigat*, *Theb.* 9.280) while Silius writes that there were “a thousand faces of death all at once,” (*mille simul leti facies*, 4.591). These two lines have both linguistic and thematic features in common and suggest the poets may have had some influence on each other. Although it is impossible to say who influenced whom in this particular passage, both seem to be alluding to a similar passage featuring a naval battle in book 3 of Lucan’s *Bellum Ciuile*. In the naval battle near Massilia soldiers on both sides die in various ways and Lucan comments that “among a thousand forms of death, only one death causes fear, that by which one is going to die,” (*mille modos inter leti mors una timori est*, / *qua coepere mori*, 3.689-690). Lucan emphasizes how, as their ships catch fire, soldiers jump into the sea and die in different ways. He ends line 690 with “nor does courage end because of a shipwreck,” (*nec cessat naufraga uirtus*), reiterating that, despite being in the water the soldiers continue to fight. Silius’ and Statius’ scenes featuring two soldiers drowning together are probably based on Lucan’s next lines in the passage (Luc. 3.693-696):

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nunc, rara datur si copia ferri,
utuntur pelago: saeus conplectitur hostem
hostis, et implicitis gaudent subsidere membris
mergentesque mori.

Now, if no sword is at hand, they use the sea itself: the savage enemies embrace and with
limbs intertwined they rejoice to sink and to die drowning.

Lucan explicitly states that the soldiers on both sides use the sea as a weapon to drown their
enemies. This gives the impression that the soldiers themselves are in control and using the sea
as a tool rather than simply at the mercy of the sea. However, Statius and Silius present the
Argive and Romans soldiers, respectively, as at the mercy of the rivers they are fighting in. They
have trouble keeping their footing much less fighting in the ruined quagmires into which the
rivers have transformed. They even find themselves impaled by spears that are not thrown but
impelled by the river itself. In Lucan the water is a danger but in Silius and Statius it is an
outright enemy.

As the battle continues Carthaginian elephants are driven into the river. This is the second
river whose encounter with Hannibal’s elephants Silius explicitly dramatizes, the first being the
Rhone in Gaul. Just like the Rhone the fear of the unknown terrifies the Trebia as the elephants
rush headlong into the river (Sil. 4.598-602):

Accumulat clades subito conspecta per undas
uis elephantorum turrito concita dorso.
namque uadis rapitur praeceps ceu proruta cautes
auulsi montis Trebiamque insueta timentem
praes se pectore agit spumantique incubat alueo.

Suddenly, the disaster increased when elephants, with towers on their backs, were
violently driven into the river. For they crash headlong through the shallows like a broken
cliff torn from a mountain and drive the Trebia, fearing the unknown, before them and
settle in the foaming riverbed.

The elephants’ entrance into the river is a sudden disaster comparable to the impact of a cliff
falling from a mountainside. Although the Trebia had been, and remains, on the Carthaginians’
side, it is afraid of the elephants because of their strangeness and because they are a complete unknown (*insueta*).\(^{296}\) Just as with the Rhone, the Trebia has not seen or experienced elephants before and naturally reacts fearfully. It is simultaneously a partisan of the Carthaginians and, as the theater of the battle, a victim of the war’s violence. This becomes especially clear when the Romans manage to kill one of the elephants and its carcass blocks the river (*condidit et clausit magna uada pressa ruina*, 4.621).\(^{297}\)

**Scipio the Elder’s Theomachy**

Scipio the Elder’s battle with Eridanus, the god of the Po of which the Trebia is a tributary, brings Rome a short-lived victory with the help of the gods in the midst of a defeat at the Trebia. Through Scipio’s battle with the river Silius extends the sphere of the war to include nature thereby making the Italian landscape, which should have been an ally, an unexpected enemy of Rome. Reflecting its nature as the once-southern boundary of the Alps, the Trebia sides with Hannibal who has just conquered the Alps and attacks Scipio at Juno’s instigation.\(^{298}\) Scipio threatens to destroy the Trebia and cut it off from its source, a serious threat to a river, which were seen as individuals with identities and part of hierarchies dependent on their size and number of tributaries. Eridanus, then, fights to save itself from destruction and to save its identity. In addition, Silius makes the battle between the Roman general and the river a matter of *fides* as Scipio accuses the river of *perfidia* for having betrayed the Romans, the very Carthaginian characteristic that started the war, making this battle a microcosm of the war as a whole. In this way, Scipio is the defender of *fides* fighting and defeating the river god, with the

\(^{296}\) Haselmann (2018, 198-200) argues the Trebia’s fear of the elephants is symptomatic of its fear of Juno and contradicts its tough talk in its speech to Scipio.

\(^{297}\) This is obvious hyperbole in reference to the elephant’s size as the Trebia is a large river.

\(^{298}\) Murphy (2003, 320).
help of the Olympian gods, much like his son defends *fides* by siding with personified *Virtus* later in the poem. This also prefigures the younger Scipio Africanus’ victory that Silius puts in geographic terms as a victory over Africa, Spain, and their various mountains and rivers. Furthermore, the river’s apparent perfidy thematizes the unpredictability of nature in military campaigns and the importance of rivers as boundaries between peoples, in particular for the Flavians, a topic I explore further in the next chapter.

When Scipio enters the river, he kills countless Carthaginians, making the river so packed with bodies that it is almost impossible to see the water (*corporibus clipeisque simul galeisque cadentum congetitur Trebia, et uix cernere linquitur undas*, 4.625-626). In a scene modeled on the battle between Achilles and the Scamander in *Iliad* 21, the Trebia responds to Scipio’s attack and takes on Hannibal’s key characteristics: it swells with anger (*intumuit*, 4.638), is fierce (*ferox*, 4.639), and rages (*furit*, 4.640). Scipio’s anger only becomes greater in response (*accensa ductor uiolentius ira*, 4.642) and he addresses the river (4.643-648): 299

> ‘magnas, o Trebia, et meritas mihi, perfide, poenas exsolu
exsolues’ inquit. ‘lacerum per Gallica riu
dispergam rura atque amnis tibi nomina demam,
quoque aperis te fonte, premam, nec tangere ripas illabique Pado dabitur. quaenam ista repente Sidonium, infelix, rabies te redidit amnem?’

> “Oh faithless Trebia, you will deservedly suffer great punishments from me,” he said. “Torn from your streams I will scatter you throughout the lands of Gaul and I will cut off the name of your river, and I will overwhelm you at the spring with which you open yourself, nor will you be allowed to touch your banks or join with the Po. What is this madness, you wretch, that suddenly turns you into a Carthaginian river?”

In his address to the Trebia, which contains many allusions to the *Aeneid*, Scipio uses the vocabulary of deception to attack and insult the river. It is faithless, *perfide*, the very word Dido uses to address Aeneas (*dissimulare etiam sperasti, perfide, tantum / posse nefas tacitusque mea* furiis accensus et ira / terribilis. Silius uses language that associates Scipio with Aeneas at his most violent and, according to the pessimists, problematic.

299 Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 12.946-947 *furiis accensus et ira / terribilis*. Silius uses language that associates Scipio with Aeneas at his most violent and, according to the pessimists, problematic.
decedere terra,’ Verg. Aen. 4.305-306), making this an ironic reversal in which a Roman general calls an Italian river fighting for the Carthaginians perfide. In threatening to take away the Trebia’s name and to remove it from its source (its head, as it were) Scipio evokes the decapitation of Vergil’s Priam (auulsumque umerus caput et sine nomine corpus, Verg. Aen. 2.558) as well as Lucan’s Pompey. In addition, Scipio identifies the river as his enemy by calling it Carthaginian, Sidonium, even though it is clearly an Italian river.\(^{300}\)

The river’s identity is the key element in this passage. Like the Arar that loses its identity when subsumed by the Rhone, the Trebia flows into the Po (Eridanus) River and loses its separate identity once it does so. Eridanus is both the god of the Po and the Trebia since the Trebia is a tributary and inferior to the Po. Scipio threatens to cut off the Trebia from its source and as such he represents a threat to not only the identity of the Trebia but also the identity, status, and power of the Po. Scipio, furthermore, threatens to remove the Trebia from Italy altogether and force it to flow through Gaul, a threat on which Roman engineering could hypothetically make good. The Trebia, closely identified with its particular location, would thus lose its identity as an Italian river and an important tributary of the Po. The nomina, its name and unique characteristics, that it would lose is the same that the Arar loses to the Rhone (ferre uetat patrium uicina ad litora nomen, 3.454), indicating Scipio’s rather hubristic belief in his ability to radically alter geography. Scipio then shifts from threats to statements of opinion: the Trebia is now Carthaginian. In the Punica there is no worse insult. This reflects his disbelief at the river’s betrayal and the depth of his anger toward it. The river has seemingly altered its immutable characteristics and become a Carthaginian river in Italy.

\(^{300}\) As Chaudhuri (2014, 205) notes, this is the only true theomachy in the poem, one in which Scipio is portrayed as greater than Achilles fighting the Scamander. He resists the Trebia’s attack without the support of Venus or Vulcan (Haselmann 2018, 191). However, Scipio is not portrayed negatively, despite fighting a god (Haselmann 2018, 190).
Initially, Eridanus asserts himself and attacks Scipio but finds Scipio able to match his strength (*stat ductor clipeoque ruentem sustulit annem*, 4.652). However, Eridanus remains in control of his river as seen by his power over the riverbed which he uses to prevent Scipio from moving through the water and finding firm footing (*ire uadis stabilemque uetat defigere gressum / subducta tellure deus*, 4.655-656). As he attacks, he addresses Scipio (4.660-666):

> ‘poenasne superbas 660
> insuper et nomen Trebiae delere minaris,
> o regnis inimice meis? quot corpora porto
dextra fusa tua! clipeis gaiteisque uirorum,
quos mactas, artatus iter cursumque reliqui.
> caede, uides, stagna alta rubent retroque feruntur. 665
> adde modum dextrae aut campis incumbe propinquis.’

“You threaten further arrogant punishments and to destroy the name of Trebia, enemy of my kingdom? So many bodies, scattered by your right hand, do I carry! My stream is choked by the shields and helmets of the men whom you killed, and I have abandoned my course. As you see, the deep pools turn red with slaughter and are carried backwards. Set a limit to your right hand or attack the nearby fields.”

Eridanus immediately clarifies the relationship between himself and Scipio: he views the Roman general as an *inimicus* who threatens his very existence. *Inimicus* suggests not so much a martial enemy, more typically denoted by *hostis*, but rather a personal enemy and Eridanus reveals his personal enmity for Scipio. The accusation that Scipio is dealing out *poenae superbae* marks him, in Eridanus’ estimation, as an arrogant theomach. Yet again, the topic of *nomina* and identity emerges. Eridanus’ concern for the *nomen Trebiae* is two-fold: the existence of the Trebia is part of his identity as a river god and his power over the Trebia is a mark of his status and the hierarchy of the Po and its tributaries. By threatening the Trebia’s identity, Scipio threatens to usurp Eridanus’ power over his rivers. Thus, the battle between them is in part symbolic of more than the war between Rome and Carthage and suggests a fundamental struggle between humans and nature.

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301 With *uetat* here cf. the Rhone in relation to the Arar, Sil. 3.454 *ferre uetat patrium uicina ad litora nomen.*
Scipio stops the flow of the river and causes it to reverse its course but is at a loss as to how to defeat the river god, declaring that he is worthy of a death better than drowning in a river (forte animam hanc excindere dextra / indignum est uisum?, 4.672-673) and calling upon Venus to help him. She directs Vulcan to torch the river, its banks, and the surrounding trees, destroying the entire area (4.685-689).

flamma uorax imo penitus de gurgite tractos absorbet latices, saeuoque urgente uapore siccus inarescit ripis cruor. horrida late scinditur in rimas et hiatu rupta dehiscit tellus, ac stagnis aliae sedere fauillae.

The insatiable flame devours the water drawn from the lowest depths and the dry blood on the banks burns with the cruel heat bearing down. All over the rough earth splits and cracks and broken gaps yawn and the embers settle deep in the pools.

With Vulcan’s help, Scipio achieves what he threatened to do and not only stops the river from flowing but completely evaporates the water, showing that he is in complete control of the river. While Eridanus marvels that his river has stopped flowing, the river Nymphs lament the destruction of their home and fill their caves with wailing (Nympharumque intima maestus / impleuit chorus attonitis ululatibus antra, 4.691-692). Their mourning, full of pathos, casts them as the victims of the battle and of Vulcan’s fire. Although the river supports Hannibal in the battle, it is nonetheless a victim of the war and Silius heightens the pathos of this scene by describing how Eridanus strove and failed three times to lift his head against the fire of Vulcan.

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302 This foreshadows his death in battle in Spain, an important catalyst for the development of the younger Scipio, the future Africanus. Here, Scipio the Elder is apparently successful in stopping the river and resisting its attacks but also at a loss as how to defeat it. Statius handles this better. For the motif of wishing for a better death, namely one coming in battle, cf. Verg. Aen. 1.97-98 and Stat. Theb. 9.509-510.

303 Silius presents a catalogue of the trees destroyed by Vulcan with each species of tree named as it is destroyed (4.680-684). The poplar stands without a top and with only a trunk remaining, solo trunco. This again recalls the language of decapitation seen just above in Scipio’s threats against the river. The fate of the poplar mirrors that of the Trebia as it stands headless and Vulcan’s fire evaporates the Trebia, temporarily cutting it off from its source. Yet the groves of trees on either side of the river remain destroyed, the collateral damage of the battle and those that do stand are trunks without leafy tops to identify them, mere bodies without names.

304 As Feeney (1991, 309) humorously phrases it, “Venus turns her mute husband’s fiery essence against the river as if he were a flamethrower.”
Only when he prays for the punishment to stop is he allowed to survive (tum demum admissae uoces et uota precantis, / orantique datum ripas seruare priores, 4.696-697). Although it is implied that Vulcan and Venus hears his prayers, no audience is mentioned. Rather, immediately after Silius notes that Eridanus may keep his river, he tells how Scipio retreats from the river to a nearby hill. This closely ties Scipio’s departure with Eridanus’ reprieve making Scipio implicitly responsible rather than Venus or Vulcan. Although the reality is that the Romans were beaten, Silius elides such details about the battle and instead suggests that Scipio’s troops were simply tired (fessas /...cohortes, 4.698-699) allowing Scipio to seemingly retreat from a near-victory rather than from a defeat. Ultimately, the Trebia is allowed to resume its course only after it has been polluted by countless bodies and devastated by Vulcan’s fire, Scipio and the Roman-allied gods’ punishment for its betrayal and *Punica fides.*

Hannibal, however, recognizes the Trebia’s contribution and honors it by piling up altars of sod for the allied river (at Poenus, multo fluuium ueneratus honore, / gramineas undis statuit socialibus aras, 4.700-701). This honor and the language of alliance (undis socialibus) signal the Trebia’s alliance with Carthage. Silius notes that at this point Hannibal is unaware of the great things in store for him and the grief Trasimene was preparing for the Romans. In this way Silius pairs the Trebia with Lake Trasimene as two Italian bodies of water allied with Carthage. Yet we must not lose sight of the fact that it is Juno that spurred the Trebia to support Hannibal. The Trebia’s Carthaginian partisanship is ultimately a function of the disasters that Rome is fated to suffer. The river sides with Hannibal and gives the Romans one more enemy to fight, a treacherous Italian river supporting a foreign enemy. This extends the us-versus-them, Carthage-versus-Rome conflict to nature itself, which makes the conquest of nature and geography a

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305 Haselmann (2018, 218) interestingly suggests that the burning of the Trebia acts as both punishment and expiation of the river’s betrayal of the Romans and ultimately allows it to return to its normal course as an Italian river.
necessary part of winning the war. Indeed it will be in these terms that Scipio’s ultimate victory is expressed.

**Lake Trasimene**

Similar to the Trebia, Lake Trasimene is both an active participant and a victim of the war and is filled with the corpses of Roman soldiers. After the battle at the Trebia, Juno once again drives the war to a body of water, this time Lake Trasimene. Juno appears to Hannibal in a dream in the guise of Lake Trasimene and urges him to hasten onwards (*pelle moras*, Sil. 4.732) and recalls the vow he made to his father that he would make Italy run with blood (*fluet Ausonio tibi corpore tantum / sanguinis*, 4.734-735). This flowing blood has become literal rivers of blood as prophesied by Juno in book 1 (*Idaeoque lacus flagrantes sanguine cerno*, 1.126; *fluit ecce cruentus / Eridanus*, 1.131-132), reinforcing Hannibal’s belief in his ultimate victory.306

During the battle, Hannibal makes good on his vow and slaughters countless Romans and Silius reverses his previous characterization of Hannibal. Whereas at the battle of the Trebia the river itself took on the characteristics of Hannibal in its *perfidia* and rage (*furit*, 4.640), Silius uses a simile to compare the Carthaginian general to boiling water (5.603-608):

```latex
sic memorans torquet fumanatem ex ore uaporem, 
iraque anhelatum proturbat pectore murmur, 
ut multo accensis feruore exuberat undis, 605 
clausus ubi exusto liquor indignatur aeno. 
tum praeceps ruit in medios solumque fatigat 
Flaminium incessens
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Thus remembering he twists a smoking vapor from his mouth and anger drives an exhaled roar from his chest, as when water closed in burnt bronze is resentful and boils over with waves roused by much heat. Then headlong he rushes into the middle and attacking him, pursued Flaminius alone.

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Hissing and steaming Hannibal boils with rage and rushes against Flaminius like a torrent. Here Silius recalls the Trebia’s attack on Scipio (4.651-652):

> arduus aduersa mole incurrentibus undis
> stat ductor clipeoque ruentem sustulit amnem.

The general stood tall against the opposing mass with the waves attacking and held off the rushing river with his shield.

The *accensis undis* (4.605) of the first passage recall the *incurrentibus undis* (4.651) of the second as *ruit* (4.607) similarly recalls *ruentem amnem* (4.652). Silius compares Hannibal to raging water, which evokes the Trebia and its assault against Scipio. The result of the battle at Lake Trasimene is the complete rout of the Romans and the death of the consul Flaminius. Once again, like at the Trebia, the nearby body of water serves as a weapon for Hannibal into which he can drive the fleeing enemy. As Hannibal surveys the battlefield he sees the possibility for Roman victory through defeat (*ipsis deuincat cladibus orbem*, 5.676), undermining his efforts and driving him to failure. The destruction of Italy’s naturescapes is a necessary sacrifice along with the defeats of Rome’s armies (*per uulnera regnum*, 3.588).  

**3. Thebaid 4 and the Langia River**

As seen in the previous chapter, the naturescape between Argos and Thebes is not spared similar destruction and it is in Nemea that the Argives engage in their first battle as they turn their delayed appetite for destruction against the Langia River. After meeting Hypsipyle, she guides them to the Langia River and the Argives, desperate for water, rush into it indiscriminately. Any semblance of order in the Argive army that was left now evaporates as they chaotically storm the river (*incubuere uadis passim discrimine nullo / turba simul primique*, *Theb*. 4.809-810) and even drive their chariots into the water (*frenata suis in curribus intrant /

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307 See Marks (2005b).
They even go so far as to trample each other in their desperate need for water, showing a complete disregard for one another in what amounts to a miniature civil war on the banks of the Langia (*nec implicitos fluuiu reuerentia reges / proterere aut mersisse uado clamantis amici / ora, Theb. 4.814-816*). Statius describes the damage to the river (4.816-823):

\[
\text{fremunt undae longusque a fontibus amnis diripitur: modo lene uirens et gurgite puro perspicuus nunc sordet aquis egestus ab imo alueus. inde tori riparum et proruta turbant gramina. iam crassus caenoque et puluere torrens, quamquam expleta sitis, bibitur tamen. agmina bello decertare putes iustumque in gurgite Martem perfurere aut captam tolli uictoribus urbem.}\]

The waves roar and the long river is torn from its source: the river, just now green, calm, and transparent with a clear current, now it is dirty with the river bed torn up from the deepest waters. Then the ridged, grassy banks tumbling down disturb the river. And now, though muddy and rushing with filth and dirt, nevertheless they drink. You would think armies were fighting a war and a pitched battle raged in the stream or that a captured city was sacked by the victors.

Once green and transparent the Langia is now dirtied and churned up from the depths. Not only do the Argives show no concern for one another as they rush into the river, they also show no concern for the water they are trying to drink, with the river hyperbolically plundered and

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308 Cf. the thirsty Athenians rushing into the Assarinos River at Thuc. 7.84.2-5; also Sil. 4.570-703 and Theb. 3.114-117 *aegrique parentes / moenibus effusi per plana per inuia passim / quisque suas auidi ad lacrimas miserabile currunt / certamen; Theb. 3.125 *turba furit.*

309 Hall reads *toros* instead of *tori* at 4.819, but *tori* allows for the subject to remain the river and its banks, which are the subject throughout the passage. See Parkes (2012, 323) and Ker (1953, 178); on madness in the *Thebaid* see Hershkowitz (1998a, 247-301).

310 Cf. Luc. 4.367 *flumina turbat.* The muddying of the Langia provides an initial indication that Statius is using Nemea to comment on his poetic project. Poetry as a clear stream, which the Argives here disturb, is a traditionally Callimachaeanc characterization of elegant poetry: “the army, thirsty for epic bloodshed, churns up the clear stream, transforming it again into the muddy effulgence rejected by Apollo, Callimachus *Hymn to Apollo* 108ff.” (Brown 1994, 202). See Brown (1994, ch. 1), Newlands (2004, 142), Hunter (2006, 20), and McNelis (2007, 76-96); also Jones (2005) for rivers as literary phenomena often identified with the poet.
destroyed. Here diripio indicates several different ideas at the same time: the general violent destruction inflicted by the Argives, the possibility of the course of the Langia being disrupted and separated from its source, and the pillaging and plundering that accompanies the destruction of cities. This third point is further confirmed by the urbs capta simile just a few lines later, a comparison Statius repeats when narrating the destruction of the Nemean forest.

The Argives continue to drink the muddy water of the Langia even after their thirst has been satisfied illustrating their unmitigated greed which in turn drives and reinforces their madness, indicated by the verb perfurere. Statius’ description of their attack on the river as a iustum Martem, understood as a ‘pitched battle,’ and as the sack of a city suggests that the Argives are not merely scrambling over each other but that they are outright fighting each other. The comparison to the sack of a city serves to blur the boundary between city and nature and the scene as a whole presents the Argives’ actions as excessive, destructive, and driven by furor, the same madness with which Tisiphone infects Eteocles in book 1 in order to begin the war (1.123) and which permeates the poem. Ultimately, Statius’ use of perfurere and the

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311 I take longusque a fontibus amnis diripitur to mean both that this section of the river is far from its source (longus a fontibus) and that the river has been separated from its source, if only temporarily.

312 iustum...Martem is puzzling. It brings to mind the iusta ira of Theseus (12.589). Parkes (2012, 324) notes “the phrase iustum...Martem probably here indicates ‘regular war’, as opposed to a skirmish (so OLD s.v. iustus, 7b), which is a far cry from the actual tussle in the stream. It surely also has overtones of ‘legitimate war’. Again, the expression jars with the situation. One of the ways in which a iustum bellum was defined was against nefarious civil war (see e.g. Cic. Att. 9.19.1). The men in the water are fighting against their comrades and are on their way to attack the people of their leader.”


313 Furor has been observed as one of the central themes of the poem. Dominik (2015) argues that similes show “the supernatural infusion of humanity with furor” (269) and goes on to note the critical role of similes in Statius
comparison to the sack of a city presents the actions of the Argives as destructive and excessive and portrays the Argives as violently attacking the river which acts as a poor replacement for Thebes.\textsuperscript{314}

Immediately after the Argives have assaulted the river like victors sacking a city and temporarily slaked their thirst for water and destruction, an unnamed member of the Seven addresses Nemea with an ironic speech (4.825-833, 839-843):

\begin{quote}
\textquote{siluarum o Nemea longe regina uirentum,}
lecta Ioui sedes, tu quae non Herculis actis
dura magis rabidi cum colla minantium monstri
angeret et tumidos animam angustaret in artus,
hac saeuisse tenus populorum in coepta tuorum
sufficiat; tuque, o cunctis insuete domari
solibus aeternae largitor corniger undae,
laetus eas quacumque domo gelida ora resoluis
immortale tumens:

\ldots
\end{quote}

\textquote{... tu pace mihi tu nube sub ipsa\textsuperscript{315}
armorum festasque super celebrabere mensas}
a Ioue primus honos, bellis modo laetus ouantes
accipias fessisque libens iterum hospita pandas
flumina defensasque uelis agnoscere turmas.‘

“Oh Nemea, long the queen of green forests, chosen seat of Jupiter, you who were not more harsh to the tasks of Hercules when he strangled the threatening necks of the raging monster and choked the life in its swollen limbs, it is enough to have raged this much at your people’s undertakings. And you, oh horned giver of eternal water unaccustomed to being mastered by any sun, may you go happily from whatever home you, forever swelling, release your icy mouth.

\ldots

You will be celebrated by me in times of peace, you, under this very cloud of arms and over festive tables, honored first after Jupiter, just happily receive us triumphing in war and this time willingly open your hospitable stream to these tired men and recognize the army defended by you.”

\ \textsuperscript{314} As seen in chapter 2, this desire for destruction culminates in the deforestation of Nemea.

\textsuperscript{315} Hall emends to \textit{ista} but I retain the manuscript reading.
Although it is most likely Adrastus since he previously was in charge of sending out scouts (4.733) and addressed Hypsipyle (4.746), the speaker is anonymous and could be any of the Argives. As Parkes notes, this suggests “the common outlook of the princes.” He personifies Nemea by calling her the queen of the forest and asks that she punish them no further, asserting that Nemea was not so cruel even to Hercules after he killed the Nemean lion. The speaker goes on to say that it should be enough for her to have defended her people this much (hac...tenus). He also promises to honor Nemea and asks that she welcome them. His tripartite request uses three words to describe how the river should welcome the Argives – laetus, libens, and uelis. The general thus makes it clear that Nemea should welcome them willingly while he fails to acknowledge the damage the Argives have done to the river. Statius uses the language of triumph to describe the arrival of the Argives at the river in this speech, essentially saying that conquered Nemea should graciously welcome her conquerors. Then he turns to the Langia declaring that it will flow happily and promises to honor the river. The speaker asks the river to welcome them, offering mercy and honor if he (personified rivers and their deities are masculine) does so gladly while they process in triumph (ouantes). Ouantes can be read two ways. First, that the Argives expect the Langia to welcome them and provide them with water when they return from Thebes victorious. But it can also be read that the Langia should welcome them now as they process in triumph. Both are plausible, but the latter interpretation is supported by the urbs capta simile that has already portrayed the Argives as victorious soldiers. This


317 The main model for this speech is Aeneas’ prayer at Verg. Aen. 8.71-78; see Parkes (2012, 325-329). Cf. Jupiter’s question to Juno in Aeneid 12 asking how much is enough for her (quae iam finis erit, coniux? quid denique restat?, Verg. Aen. 12.793). The speaker seems to be comparing the actions of the Argives with the killing of the Nemean lion. However, Hercules killed the lion and was then punished, according to Adrastus, but the Argives were deprived of water then destroyed the river because of their thirst, and now Adrastus claims that Nemea is being cruel by not flowing freely with water. This shows that he is clearly not aware of the role of Bacchus in the drought and so he instead blames the landscape. In addition, the serpent itself begs comparison with the Nemean lion.
reading ironizes the general’s speech and turns it into a critique of their arrival in the river essentially saying that conquered Nemea should graciously welcome her conquerors who have nearly destroyed the river. The damage to the Langia is confirmed by the subsequent lines, the first of book 5, where the poet tells us that the Argives have despoiled the river and it is smaller (\textit{populataque gurgitis alueum / agmina linquebant ripas amnemque minorem, Theb. 5.1-2}).\textsuperscript{318} This sets an important precedent for the interaction of the Argives with the landscape between Argos and Thebes. Here Statius establishes the pattern of Argive behavior seen later in book 6 when the Argives cut down the Nemean forest.

Returning to the general’s speech, by addressing Nemea as a collective entity, he indicates his belief that Nemea is responsible for their suffering. He does not hold any Olympian gods responsible, as might be expected, since the Argives are unaware of Bacchus’ involvement and of Nemea’s importance to Jupiter.\textsuperscript{319} Although the Argives are ignorant of the role of Bacchus, the fact that they blame the naturescape shows that they allow for the possibility that the land itself has agency which is enacted through the Nymphs who obey Bacchus’ command. By allowing for the agency of Nemea, the Argives approach the truth of who is responsible for their delay. As with the Aegean in the \textit{Argonautica} and the Alps in the \textit{Punica}, the landscape of Nemea is a powerful agent, both with respect to the narrative in the poem and in the eyes of the Argives. Their lack of knowledge leads them to attribute intention to the entire naturescape of Nemea. In this way the \textit{Thebaid} differs from the \textit{Argonautica} and the \textit{Punica} since the Argonauts attributed the storm to Neptune and Hannibal’s soldiers seem to feel \textit{natura} is holding them back whereas the unnamed speaker holds the naturescape of Nemea responsible.

\textsuperscript{318} \textit{Populata} suggests the river is akin to a city just as the rest of Nemea; or at any rate that it is part of the larger community or civilization of Nemea.

\textsuperscript{319} Cf. \textit{Theb.} 5.743-744 where Apollo is blamed for the delay. Statius does mention that Nemea is the “chosen seat of Jupiter” (\textit{lecta Ioui sedes}), acknowledging the area’s particular importance to Jupiter.
4. Hippomedon vs. the Ismenos River in *Thebaid 9*

*Thebaid 9* is practically swimming in water imagery and similes throughout the book, making the centerpiece battle between Hippomedon and the Ismenos River all the more significant. There is a clear development of this imagery and the associated similes that I will trace in this section. Hippomedon is initially characterized as an immovable rock, impervious to the sea, or a dolphin hunting fish, a characterization which presents him as being at home in the water while opposed to it. But when he is finally defeated by the river and the Theban soldiers he is compared to an oak falling on a mountainside. This comparison undoes the previous association between Hippomedon and water and presents his attack on the river as an act of folly. This emphasizes one of the fundamental aspects of river-battles, namely that humans are out of their element in water and face considerable danger in it and from it. The conflict between man and river provides a digression from the conflict between the Argives and the Thebans and pits a human against a deity in one of the few instances of direct human/divine interaction in the poem. The battle between Hippomedon and Ismenos also employs similar concepts of geographic identity seen in the *Punica* passages above. Ismenos is a Theban river and views Hippomedon, an Argive from Mycenae, as a foreign invader. The Ismenos is closely connected with its source on Mt. Cithaeron and with its sibling river, the Asopos, both of which aid it in its battle with Hippomedon. Unlike the Trebia, Ismenos’ source remains unconquered by the enemy and so it still identifies with the Thebans. This association is further driven by the fact that Ismenos’ grandson, Crenaeus, is Theban and fights against Hippomedon before being killed by him. Hippomedon contends with a succession of Ismenids (Crenaeus, his mother Ismenis, and
Ismenos himself) and Statius contrasts their water-related characteristics and riverine nature with Hippomedon by repeatedly comparing him to an immovable rock opposed to the sea.\textsuperscript{320}

**Water Similes and Imagery**

Statius consistently presents Hippomedon in opposition to water through the use of similes.\textsuperscript{321} Book 9 begins with the aftermath of Tydeus’ death when Hippomedon guards Tydeus’ corpse and Statius foreshadows his battle with the Ismenos River in a simile when Eteocles and the Thebans attack him in an attempt to steal Tydeus’ body (9.91-94):\textsuperscript{322}

\begin{verbatim}
ceu fluctibus obuia rupes,
cui nec de caelo metus et fracta aequora cedunt
stat cunctis inmota minis: fugit ipse rigentem
pontus et ex alto miserae nouere carinae.
\end{verbatim}

Just like a rock exposed to the waves, which does not fear the sky and from which the sea retreats broken, stands unmoved by any threat. The sea itself flees the unyielding rock and wretched ships come to know it from the depths.

Here Hippomedon is compared to an immovable rock upon which the waves break with no effect, reflecting the ineffectual attack of Eteocles and his men.\textsuperscript{323} Statius emphasizes that it is as if the waters yield and that the sea flees from him, a powerful image of Hippomedon’s martial prowess. A few lines later, Hippomedon, an immovable rock, shifts to being a nimble warrior, moving and retreating as he attacks the Thebans while still defending Tydeus’ body. He fights well while remaining cognizant of the danger all around him, constantly attacking and retreating \textit{(inque eadem sese uestigia semper / obuersus cunctis profert recipitque, 9.111-112)}. He is a

\textsuperscript{320} Statius innovates by creating this episode apparently out of whole cloth in which the Ismenos plays a key role in defeating Hippomedon.

\textsuperscript{321} On the programmatic function of similes in the \textit{Thebaid} see Dominik (2015).

\textsuperscript{322} Cf. Verg. Aen. 10.693-696 \textit{ille uelut rupes uastum quae prodit in aequor, / obuia uentorum furiis expostaque ponto, / uim cunctam atque minas perfert caelique marisque / ipsa immota manens.}

\textsuperscript{323} Dewar (1991, 76) notes “frango is naturally common of waves breaking...but is also used of crushing military defeats...So too cedunt means both ‘ebb’ and ‘yield.’” Statius cleverly blends these two meanings to evoke both the actual events of the battle and the characterization of Hippomedon in the simile.
careful warrior compared to a cow protecting its calf (9.115), an almost endearing image of the warrior protecting the body of the cannibal Tydeus. It is the loss of this prudence that will be Hippomedon’s downfall when he later throws caution to the wind and charges into the Ismenos.

Statius also uses water similes in this passage to describe the Theban and Argive soldiers. As they fight over Tydeus’ body Statius compares them to the sea in the Strait of Messina (9.140-143):

\[
\text{ter Cadmea phalanx toruum abduxere cadauer}
\]
\[
\text{ter retrahunt Danai: Siculi uelut anxia puppis}
\]
\[
\text{seditione maris nequiquam obstante magistro}
\]
\[
\text{errat et auerso redit in uestigia uelo.}
\]

Three times the Cadmean army tried to steal the savage corpse, three times the Danaans drag it back. Just as a ship wanders anxiously in the turbulent sea of Sicily as the helmsman fights in vain and with the sail reversed it retreats back the way it came.

This simile continues the use of water imagery begun just fifty lines before to describe Hippomedon as an immovable rock upon which the waves of the Thebans crash. Here both sides of the battle fighting for Tydeus’ body are figured as opposing sides of the Strait of Messina fighting over a helpless ship. However, unlike the immovable Hippomedon, the body of Tydeus is totally at the mercy of the “seas” fighting over it, a reversal which may prefigure Hippomedon’s own struggles with the Ismenos.

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324 Dewar (1991, 86) notes “Storms are a traditional subject for the rhetorical *descriptio*. The Theban legend contained none, and so Statius ingeniously accommodates the topos by having a storm on land (1.336ff.) and several similes (cf. 459ff.). The choice of location here, however, is surely dictated by Virgil’s great storm at A. 1.34ff. (‘vix e conspectu *Siculae* telluris’ etc.). The more traditional dangers of the seas off Sicily were Scylla and Charybdis (*Silv.* 3.2.85ff.).”
Into the River

Tisiphone soon distracts Hippomedon and tricks him into abandoning Tydeus’ corpse and he chases the Theban soldiers to the river on Tydeus’ horse. Tisiphone’s intervention creates a clear break from the earlier part of the battle (9.225-231):

uentum erat ad fluvium: solito tum plenior alueo, 225
signa mali, magna se mole Ismenos agebat.
illa breuis requies, illo timida agmina lassam
de campis egere fugam: stupet hospita belli
unda uiros claraque armorum incenditur umbra.
insiluere uadis, magnoque fragore solutus
agger et aduersae latuerunt puluere ripae. 230

They came to the river. It was higher than usual (a bad sign) and Ismenos was driving himself along in a great mass. There is a brief respite as the timid soldiers flee wearily to the river from the battlefield. The water, welcoming the war, marvels at the men and burns with the clear reflection of their weapons. They leapt into the shallows and the bank crumbled with a loud crash and the opposite bank was hidden with dust.

Statius sets an ominous tone as soon as Hippomedon reaches the Ismenos by noting that it is a sign of ill omen (signa mali) that the river is running fuller than usual. But a brief pause in the fighting allows the Thebans to enter the river which Statius personifies and, focalizing through it, presents it as marveling at the men and their weapons. The river, although personified, is not yet anthropomorphized as a river god. In addition to surprising the river, the fleeing Thebans damage its banks. Despite being a Theban river, the Theban soldiers struggle when they enter and

325 Hippomedon, along with the others on the field, experiences acute fear at Tisiphone’s approach (tamen ille loquentis / extimuit uultus admiraturque timorem, 9.155-156). As ever, Tisiphone exerts a greater influence on the action of the poem than many, or any, of the Olympian gods and she is crucial here for furthering the plot and causing Hippomedon to abandon Tydeus’ body and ultimately causing his death. The loss of Tydeus’ body to the Thebans causes a shift in Hippomedon turning him from a prudent soldier to a raging warrior. He swings his sword indiscriminately (caecum rotat irreuocabilis ensem, / uix socios hostesque, nihil dam tardet euntem, / secernens, 9.198-200) and even a wound does not slow him down or dull his rage (ardens, 9.203). Rage (juror, ira) is a key marker of aristeiai in the Thebaid.

326 However, given the typically unsound nature of riverbanks, this could be seen as a reaction to rather than damage from the soldiers. Cf. Theb. 4.819-820 inde toros riparum et proruta turbant / gramina, and the scene in the Punica where the Romans are forced by Hannibal into the Trebia as discussed above.
some drown while attempting to swim across, illustrating the inherently hostile and dangerous nature of a river.

Hippomedon charges into the river still riding Tydeus’ horse and man and horse are together compared to a dolphin chasing terrified fish (9.242-251):

qualis caeruleis tumido sub gurgite terror piscibus, arcani quotiens deuexa profundi scrutantem delphina uident: fugit omnis in imos turba lacus uiridesque metu stipantur in algas nec prius emersi quam summa per aequora flexus emicet et uisis malit certare carinis: talis agit sparsos mediiisque in fluctibus heros frena manu pariter pariter regit arma, pedumque remigio sustentat equus, consuetaque campo fluctuat et mersas leuis ungula quaerit harenas.

Just as when under the swollen whirlpool, blue fish are terrified whenever they see a dolphin examining the hidden slopes of the deep: the whole school flees into the deepest part of the water and terrified press themselves together in the green rockweed. They do not emerge until he bolts through the upper water in a flash and prefers to race the ships he spotted. Just so does the warrior drive them scattered in the middle of the river, wielding reins in one hand and sword in the other, and the horse holds him up with its paddling feet, and its nimble hooves, accustomed to the plains, flail and seek the sunken sands.

Just like Tydeus before him, Hippomedon is a predator hunting his prey. The simile serves to present Hippomedon as still being in his element when faced with human enemies in the river, although he needs his horse to help him traverse the river as the horse swims with Hippomedon on his back. The Theban soldiers, represented by the fish in the simile, make use of the river to

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327 Cf. Theb. 2.675-681 for Tydeus compared to a lion. Tydeus is also compared to the Centaur Pholus at 2.564.

328 The codices read *equum* in line 250 but Hall, following Jortin, reads *equus*. The implausibility of the former reading, to which he adhered, leads Shackleton Baily in the Loeb edition to exclaim: “The rider keeps the horse afloat instead of vice versa!” (2003, 77). Dewar (1991, 106) notes “Controlling the reins of his horses and his weapons simultaneously is something Homer expressly says Automedon cannot do (II. 17.464f.). The superhuman feat is successfully performed in the *Thebaid*, however, by both the mortal Amphaiaraus (4.219) and the god Apollo (7.752f.). Hippomedon, who will soon prove no mean opponent for a god, is not an ordinary warrior. The remarkable nature of the feat described is better appreciated by the reader who remembers that the ancients never invented the stirrup.”
hide from Hippomedon, suggesting that the river is on their side (fugit omnis in imos / turba lacus, 9.244-245).

In the Ismenos

As the battle rages, Statius continues to emphasize Hippomedon’s apparent comfort and familiarity with fighting in the river against human enemies. His success against the Thebans, who struggle to fight in the river, gives Hippomedon a false sense of security and causes him to wrongly believe that the river is on his side. In addition, we get the first hint that the river is not simply analogous to land, that it is actively hostile to intruders, and that it is concerned for its identity, purity, and existence (9.255-265):

premit agmina Thebes
Hippomedon, turbat Danaos Asopius Hypseus.
amnis utrumque timet: crasso uada mutat uterque sanguine, at e fluvio neutri fatale reuerti.
iam laceri pronis uoluuntur cursibus artus uoraque et abscisae redeunt in pectora\textsuperscript{329} dextrae.
spicula iam clipeosque leues arcusque remissos unda uehit, galeasque uetant descendere cristae.
summa uagis late sternuntur flumina telis,
ima uiris: illic luctantur corpora leto,
efflantesque animas retro premit obuis amnis.

Hippomedon presses the Theban soldiers while Asopian Hypseus throws the Danaans into confusion. The river fears both. Each man alters the water with thick blood but neither will return from the fateful river. Now mangled arms and heads roll in the headlong current and severed hands return to their chests, now the waves carry light shields and lost bows, and their crests prevent helmets from sinking. Far and wide the surface of the river is awash with scattered weapons, the depths with men. In the deep, bodies fight against death and the hostile river forces back their last breath.

Statius makes the river a mass of bodies, body parts, and weapons that flow in the current. In the grotesque, almost Lucanian description of the dead, the current causes severed hands to come back to torsos (\textit{abscisae redeunt in pectora dextrae}) while heads and limbs roll downstream. The river fears both Hippomedon and the Theban Hypseus because they are spilling blood in the

\textsuperscript{329} Hall emends to \textit{corpora} but the manuscripts all read \textit{pectora}.

162
The Ismenos fears pollution and loss of identity, like the Trebia/Eridanus in *Punica* 4. The narrator notes that neither Hippomedon nor Hypseus will leave the river alive, suggesting that their deaths may be punishment for their actions.
Capetus, about to strike a killing blow is pulled under, *sorbebat*, and drowned by a whirlpool. Statius uses the same verb in book 8 to describe the earth swallowing Amphiarraus and his chariot (*currus humus impia sorbet*, 8.141). This connection to Amphiarraus’ death reinforces the suddenness of Capetus’ disappearance which is cinematically described with his face, hair, and hand disappearing in turn. This is not the only death caused by the river, but in fact “the same death wears down the miserable men with a thousand forms of death,” (*mille modis leti miserors mors una fatigat*, 9.280). *Una mors* can be taken two ways: either the deaths are the same in that they all die and all dead men are the same regardless of how they died. Conversely, it could mean that the river, as it did to Capetus, causes similar deaths for many other soldiers. Both interpretations have their merits but the former is somewhat pedestrian whereas the latter allows for reading the river as having a significant impact on the battle. The next lines seem to confirm this (9.281-283):

> induit a tergo Mycalesia cuspis Agyrten, respesit, nusquam auctor erat, sed concita tractu gurgitis effugiens inuenerat hasta cruorem.

A Mycalesian spear impaled Agyrtes in his back. He whirled around; no one had thrown it but the spear, hurled by the force of the current, escaped and found blood.

A spear buries itself into the back of one Agyrtes, who, upon looking around, does not see anyone who threw it. Rather, the river itself by the force of its current or a whirlpool (*tractu gurgitis*) found a target for the spear, one more death out of the thousands (*mille modis leti*).

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331 Using *sorbeo* for the earth swallowing Amphiarraus communicates clearly the changed nature of the earth in that passage, that it is no longer solid and is in fact permeable and dangerous. Sallust (*Hist*. 4.28) and Vergil (*Aen*. 3.422) also use *sorbeo* when describing the action of Charybdis. Cf. the description of rivers at Sen. *Nat*. 5.13.1 *ita ut circumlata in se sorbeantur et uerticem efficiant*.

332 Hall’s text also confirms this since he puts a colon at the end of line 280 making the following lines an explanation of *mors una* in line 280.

333 Cf. Sil. 4.594-597 *enabat tandem medio uix gurgite pulcher / Hirpinus sociumque manus clamore uocabat, cum rapidis illatus aquis et uulnere multo / impulit asper equus fessumque sub aequora misit*. 

164
When Hippomedon’s horse is killed by an unknown enemy and he is forced to return to the battle on foot (9.284-288) he gives voice to the earth/water dichotomy of the battle. After killing Thespiades he addresses his twin brother Panemus (9.294-301):

‘uiue superstes’ ait ‘diraeque ad moenia Thebes solus abi, miser os non dece ptur parentes.

di bene quod pugnas rapidum deiecit in amnem sanguinea Bellona manu: trahit unda timentes gurgite gentili, nuda nec flebilis umbra stridebit uestros Tydeus inhumatus ad ignes.

ibiitis aequoreis crudelia pabula monstris:

illum terra uelhit suaque in primordia soluet.’

He says, “Live as a survivor and go alone to the dreadful walls of Thebes and do not deceive your miserable parents. Thank the gods that Bellona drove the battle into the swift river with her bloody hand: the waves drown cowards with its kindred current and unburied Tydeus, his bare shade unworthy of tears, will shriek at your funeral pyres. You will go as crude fodder for monsters of the sea but the earth carries him and will dissolve him into his primary elements.”

Hippomedon’s speech looks back to an earlier episode in which Tydeus killed two twins (Theb. 2.629-643) and it also specifically thematizes the river battle. Hippomedon is grateful that the battle has spilled over into the river, an irony since it will be the death of him. He sees the river as, on the one hand, a relative (gentili) of the Thebans since it is located near Thebes but, on the other hand, as a partisan of the Argives since it is for the moment apparently helping him fight against the Thebans. They are cowards (timentes) in his eyes since they cannot survive or fight in the river’s current and whirlpools like he has. He connects their cowardice with a promise that Tydeus’ unburied shade will not shriek by their pyres, meaning that he will reclaim Tydeus’ body which he lost and see that it is buried. Hippomedon contrasts burial for Tydeus with the fate of the Thebans fighting against him: Tydeus will be buried but the unburied Thebans will be fodder for sea-monsters in a final indignity. The last line of Hippomedon’s speech makes clear the earth/water dichotomy: “the earth carries him and will resolve him into his elements.”
phrase *illum terra uelit* is not a reference to Tydeus’ burial but rather to the fact that he died on land rather than in a river or at sea. The earth carries him already and so he will be resolved into his elements. Those that die on land and are buried are transformed, broken down into their primordial elements and pass into the earth. But those that die in rivers do not. Their bodies are swept out to sea and devoured by sea-monsters, never to receive proper burial or to decompose *in sua primordia*.

He continues his slaughter of the enemy using weapons floating in the water (*nunc tele natantia raptans / ingerit aduersis*, 9.303-304a,302b), the river seemingly acting as his ally.\(^{334}\) The enemies that Hippomedon kills remind us of the ocean similes used to describe him: Erginus wanders the waves (*fluctiuago*, 9.305) and Cretheus scorces the ocean depths (*contemptoremque profundi*, 9.306) and often dared to sail from Greece to Euboea in a tiny boat (*nimbosam qui saepe Caphereos arcem / Eucoicasque hiemes parua transfugerat alno*, 9.307-308). Hippomedon pierces Cretheus with a spear and “he rolls into the flood, oh! shipwrecked in these waves” (*uoluitur in fluctus, heu cuius naufragus undae*, 9.310). Initially it seems odd to have a shipwreck in a river since *naufragus undae* more readily evokes images of the sea. However, Statius refers multiple times to the Isemnos with the word *gurges*, which typically means ‘the open sea,’ which could explain the unusual use of *naufragus*.\(^{335}\) Regardless, Hippomedon is, for the moment, in his element and very comfortable in the river, but the killing of Crenaeus soon changes this.

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\(^{334}\) Hall rearranges 9.302-304. See Hall’s text for this unusual line numbering.

\(^{335}\) Dewar (1991, 106) on *tumido sub gurgite* in 9.242: “The swollen stream of Isemnos in flood, however, is almost as rough as the sea itself (315, esp. 413).”
Crenaeus’ Death

In the brief duel between Hippomedon and Crenaeus, the grandson of Ismenos, Statius contrasts not only the two warriors but also the waters (rivers, lakes) with which they are associated. This pits the warriors and their native waters against each other, giving the battle a clear geographic coloring. Statius begins the narrative of Hippomedon’s battle with the anthropomorphized Ismenos with an invocation of the Muses (9.315-317). Unlike in Scipio’s battle with Eridanus, where Juno roused the god against him, for Ismenos to emerge Hippomedon must make the battle personal: he kills Crenaeus, the grandson of Ismenos and the son of Faunus and the Nymph Ismenis, Ismenos’ daughter. Not only is Crenaeus related to the river, he is closely identified with it. He rejoices to fight in the waters in which he was born and which were his cradle (et natale uadum et uirides cunabula ripae, 9.322). He thinks that fate has no power over him in the river, across which he apparently walks miraculously (hoc nunc margine ab illo / transit auum, 9.324-325) and which changes its current to aid him (9.326-327). His shield features Europa riding a bull swimming in the sea (secura maris, 9.335) and the waves on the shield seem to blend with the Ismenos (adiuat unda fidem pelago nec discolor amnis, 9.338). Crenaeus, however, contrasts the Ismenos with the waters of Hippomedon’s home as he recklessly challenges him (9.340-343):

‘non haec fecunda ueneno

336 Dewar (1991, 119) notes “Such invocations are especially made at the beginning of the poem, but are common elsewhere when the poet prepares to deal with a particularly difficult or challenging part of his tale...Statius has such invocations before the aristeiai of Aphiaraus (7.628ff.) and Capaneus (10.831), the second day of battle (8.373ff.), the Argive catalogue (4.32ff.), the devotio of Menoeceus (10.628ff.), and here, where it seems to stress the magnificence of Hippomedon’s fatal battle with the god.”

337 Faber (2006, 108): “Even the name Crenaeus, which derives from κεράνυμι, evokes the close bond that exists between Ismenos and the youth who was born in the trusted stream and whose cradle was the river bank.” Faber argues that the ekphrasis of Crenaeus’ shield foreshadows his death through allusions to other similar ekphrases, especially the description of Turnus’ shield in Aeneid 7.

338 (Dewar 1991, 123): “The choice of Europa here seems intended to continue the mood of the preceding similes: like Crenaeus, Europa is now without fear in the water and fully trusts the god.”
Lerna nec Herculeis haustae serpentibus undae:
sacrum annem sacrum – et[m] miser experiere – deumque
altrices inrumpis aquas.’

“This is not Lerna, pregnant with poison. These are not waters drunk by Herculean
serpents. A sacred river, sacred and the nourishing waters of the gods you invade (you
will be sorry you tried!).”

Crenaeus’ challenge figures Hippomedon as an invader of sacred waters that nourish gods,
presenting him as being far from the poisonous waters of Lerna that are the home of the
monstrous Hydra and near Hippomedon’s home of Mycenae. Crenaeus makes a distinction
between Lerna and Ismenos, closely identifying himself with the latter sacred river (sacrum
annem sacrum) and Hippomedon with the poisonous, monster-bearing waters of Lerna. As
demonstrated in section 1 of this chapter, rivers are often closely identified with their local
populations, and vice versa. The conflict between Hippomedon and Crenaeus (and Ismenos),
then, is one between rival geographies; Lerna with its Hydra versus sacred Ismenos. In his
arrogance and misplaced faith in the Ismenos, Crenaeus assumes that because Hippomedon
seems to be almost a monster born from Lerna’s poisonous waters that he will fail to defeat him
or Ismenos. But Crenaeus is mistaken since Hippomedon’s earlier attack on Jupiter’s giant snake
made him a theomach, readily attacking the gods and Ismenos. Hippomedon did not hesitate to
attack the giant snake and does not here hesitate to invade the Ismenos and kill the river’s
grandson.341

339 The manuscripts have et which Hall emends to ut.

340 Eur. Ph. 125. The distinction is one “between a land whose waters rear foul monsters inimical to civilization and
one whose holy river has ‘nursed’ gods” (Dewar 1991, 125).

341 If he is even aware of Crenaeus’ lineage.
Ismenis’ Search for Crenaeus

The killing of Crenaeus is the turning-point for Hippomedon’s battle in and with the Ismenos River and Statius’ uses his death to remark on the changing nature of rivers. Hippomedon easily kills Crenaeus despite the aid of the river whose water slows Hippomedon’s attack but fails to stop his throw (9.345). Crenaeus’ death makes the battle personal for his mother Ismenis and his grandfather Ismenos. Ismenis, calling for her son, realizes he is dead because his shield is floating in the water but he is nowhere to be found (nusquam ille, 9.356). Although to Ismenis he is nowhere, the narrator tells us that his body lies at the mouth of the Ismenos “where the first margins of the sea, mixed up, change the end of Ismenos,” (qua mixta supremum / Ismenon primi mutant confinia ponti, 9.358-359). Crenaeus’ body is carried by the current all the way to the point where the Ismenos itself loses its identity in the waters of the sea. Statius temporarily deprives Ismenis of her son’s body thereby simultaneously depriving Crenaeus of his identity. The loss of Crenaeus’ corpse at the river’s mouth mirrors the river’s own loss of identity when it reaches the sea (Ismenon...mutant), and the very loss of identity that rivers fear, as seen with Scipio’s threat to decapitate the Trebia in the Punic.

Ismenis searches the flotsam in the river and the depths of the sea where a group of Nereids return her son’s body to her. Ismenis addresses her son’s dead body (9.376-380):

‘hoc tibi semidei munus tribuere parentes
nec mortalis auus? sic nostro in gurgite regnas?’

342 Unlike Achilles’ battle with the Scamander, Ismenos does not react until his daughter shames him into avenging the death of her son at which point he objects to the pollution of his river and the death of his grandson. This illustrates the demarcation between the physical Ismenos River and the anthropomorphized river deity Ismenos, making Hippomedon’s conflict with, on the one hand, the riverine environment and its water, and, on the other hand, with the god himself. This shows how the line between nature and the gods is often unclear, even to the point of being inseparable.

343 Cf. Theb. 9.300-301 ibitis aequoreis crudelia pabula monstris: / illum terra uehit suaque in primordia soluet.

344 This scene shares many similarities with the grieving Thebans in book 3 searching among the dead soldiers killed by Tydeus.
mitior heu misero discors alienaque tellus,
mitior unda maris quae iuxta flumina corpus
rettulit et miseram uisa expectasse parentem.’

“Is this the gift that your demigod parents and immortal grandfather gave you? Is this how you rule in our waters? Discordant foreign soil would be gentler to a miserable man, the waves of the sea would be gentler, the sea which received your body at the river’s mouth and seemed to wait for your miserable mother.”

Ismenis remarks that the earth and the sea are gentler to Crenaeus than his parents and grandfather. The phrase *aliena tellus* is striking. *Aliena* could mean ‘strange’ or ‘belonging to another,’ which seems to be a comment on the fact that Crenaeus was born of and in the river and not on land. The earth would have been gentler to him because he would have easily received burial but, instead, the Ismenos failed him and the Nereids of the sea had to return his body to his mother. As Hippomedon says, those he kills in the river will be carried out to sea but Tydeus will be buried and return to his *primordia* (9.300-301). Thus Ismenis, because of Ismenos’ failure to guard her son, rebukes the river and argues Crenaeus would have been better off dying on land or even dying at sea.  

**Ismenis’ Rebuke and the Inescapable Swamp**

Statius uses the nature of the river as a seemingly inescapable (*ineluctabilis*) place to contrast Ismenos, who inhabits the river and has power over it, with Hippomedon, who is a foreign invader that is revealed to be out of his depth. Because of Ismenos’ failure to protect Crenaeus either when he was alive or dead, Ismenis calls out to her father and attempts to shame him into taking action (9.389-398):  

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345 This is a slight reversal of the typical epic focus on the absolute importance of burial. Cf. Elpenor in the *Odyssey* and Palinurus in the *Aeneid.*

346 Women have been established as an important force in the *Thebaid* and Flavian Epic in general and Ismenis is no exception; see Keith (2000), Augoustakis (2010), and McAuley (2016). This entire sequence of the death of Crenaeus, Ismenis’ mourning, and Ismenos’ eventual action reflects the importance and centrality of family and family conflict in the *Thebaid,* as proclaimed by Statius in the proem to book 1: *fraternas acies* (1.1), *Oedipodae confusa domus* (1.17).
‘nonne et te tantae pudet heu miseretque ruinae, 
dure parens? quae te alta et ineluctabilis imo 
condidit amne palus, quo iam nec cruda nepotis 
funera nec nostri uaeant perrumpere planctus? 
cec fuit iactatque tuo se in gurgite maior 
Hippomedon. illum ripaeque undaeque tremescunt, 
illius impulsu nostrum bibit unda cruorem: 
ecce furit et trucibus facilis seruire Pelasgis. 
ad cineres saltem supremaque iusta tuorum, 
saeue, ueni, non hic solum accensure nepotem.’

“Does such a disaster not shame you or cause you distress, cruel father? What deep and 
inescapable swamp hides you in the deepest part of the river, where neither the grievous 
death of your grandson nor my lamentation can reach you? Look! Hippomedon rages and 
boasts in your flood. The banks and the waves tremble at him and the water drinks the 
blood of our own because of his attacks. You, sluggish and offering no resistance, are a 
slave to the savage Pelasgians. Cruel one, at least come to the ashes and last rites of your 
own, you who are about to burn not only your grandson here.”

Ismenis casts in her father’s face his reticence to take action on her behalf or on behalf of her 
son. So far, he has taken no interest in the fact that Hippomedon impiously rages (furit) in the 
river and spills blood in its waters. The adjective ineluctabilis, modifying palus, is especially 
noteworthy.\footnote{Dewar (1991, 132) notes it is “a Virgilian neologism...[and] Statius is the only other classical poet to use it.”} 
Something that is ineluctabilis is something ‘that one cannot struggle out of’ or 
‘from which there is no escape.’\footnote{OLD s.v.} Ineluctabilis is a Vergilian coinage that first appeared in 
Aeneid 2 modifying tempus in reference to the end of Troy in dialogue spoken by Panthus to 
Aeneas (uenit summa dies et ineluctabile tempus / Dardaniae, Verg. Aen. 2.324-325) and also 
appears in Aeneid 8 in a similar sense modifying fatum in dialogue spoken by Evander 
referencing the unavoidable fate that drove him to Italy (ineluctabile fatum, Verg. Aen. 8.334).\footnote{See also Vell. Pat. 2.57.3 sed profecto ineluctabilis fatorum uis.} 
Here in the Thebaid we have not fate but a swamp, quite the shift from Vergil’s original usage. 
Seneca’s Naturales Quaestiones features two uses of ineluctabilis: one describes the constant

\footnote{Dewar (1991, 132) notes it is “a Virgilian neologism...[and] Statius is the only other classical poet to use it.”}
\footnote{OLD s.v.}
\footnote{See also Vell. Pat. 2.57.3 sed profecto ineluctabilis fatorum uis.}
assault of self-enslavement (*seruitutem suam...haec est adsidua et ineluctabilis*, Sen. *Nat.* 3.praef.16) and the other labels swamps as *ineluctabiles*, just as Statius does in Ismenis’ speech to her father. Seneca imagines someone arguing that water causes earthquakes since the earth is full of water including “very wide lakes, expanses of water surrounded by people unknown to each other, and swamps that are impossible to cross,” (*ineluctabiles nauigio paludes*, Sen. *Nat.* 6.7.2). Although it seems unlikely that Statius is directly alluding to an obscure passage in Seneca’s *Naturales Quaestiones*, the collocation of *ineluctabilis* and *palus* is hard to ignore.\(^{350}\)

The term as wielded by Ismenis here functions as an insult for Ismenos by suggesting that he does not have control over his own river and also sounds an ominous note for Hippomedon that for him the river will be *ineluctabilis*. Statius uses *ineluctabilis* in a similar sense to describe Nemea in book 5 where Adrastus addresses Hypsipyle and asks her to tell her story (5.43-45):

‘immo age, dum primi longe damus agmina uulgi
nec facilis Nemea latas euoluere uires,
quippe obtenta comis et ineluctabilis umbra’

“Come then, while we present the first columns of our multitude [and] Nemea is not ready to release [our] great strength, covered, as it is, with leaves and inescapable with its shade.”

Adrastus urges Hypsipyle to tell her story while the Argives marshal their forces in Nemea, or more particularly the Nemean forest in which the Argives meet Hypsipyle, which is *ineluctabilis*. The sense of lines 44-45 may be either that the Argives, having found water in Nemea after their drought-impeded march, are unwilling to yet leave or that the density of Nemea’s foliage (hence the trees) is making progress through the forest difficult. Either way, Nemea actively slows the Argives’ advance by not letting them leave (*nec facilis Nemea...euoluere*). Nemea’s unwillingness to help or release the Argives is echoed in reverse in Ismenis’ speech to her father.

\(^{350}\) Dewar (1991, 133) however also agrees that “Statius’ phrasing here has perhaps been influenced by” this passage from Seneca’s *NQ*.  

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where she calls him “ready to serve the savage Pelasgians,” (trucibus facilis seruire Pelasgis, 9.396). Ismenis’ speech is a reversal of that of Adrastus: Nemea is unwilling (nec facilis) and inescapable (ineluctabilis) but Ismenos, as characterized by Ismenis, is willing to serve (facilis seruire) and is himself trapped by an inescapable swamp (ineluctabilis palus).

The other most relevant use of ineluctabilis comes a mere 100 lines after Ismenis’ speech at the end of Hippomedon’s fight with Ismenos and is used to describe Hippomedon sinking into the river as “the waves crash upon him and an inescapable abyss rises and sinks in the mud and hollow eddies,” huc undae coeunt et ineluctabile caenum / uerticibusque cauis sidit crescitque barathrum (9.502-503). Here Statius transfers the adjective from describing Ismenos’ situation (according to Ismenis) at 9.390 to describing that of Hippomedon as he sinks into the riverbed. That Ismenos is held by an ineluctabilis palus is an attempt to shame him and goad him into taking action by suggesting that he is too weak to extricate himself from his cave hideout. The ineluctabilis palus that was (allegedly) holding back Ismenos now swallows Hippomedon in the form of inescapable mud (ineluctabile caenum). Statius combines the original context of Vergil’s ineluctabilis which is always found modifying tempus or fatum with his earlier usage of ineluctabilis as modifying elements of nature whether Nemea or Ismenos’ swamp, which is in turn influenced by Seneca. Ineluctabilis brings with it not only a sense of impending doom, as in Vergil’s usage of the word, but also of the grand scale of nature and Seneca’s usage to describe a swamp that cannot be crossed. Ismenos extricates himself from the ineluctabilis palus to avenge his grandson’s death but for Hippomedon, a mere human in the river, the mud is inescapable and will be his doom.
Ismenos Emerges

Ismenos finally hears his daughter’s lamentation and emerges from his cave, though he remains inextricably linked with the river itself as he only raises his head and chest out of the water and as he emerges “the woods and smaller rivers marvel at him,” (*illu...siluae fluuiique minores / mirantur*, 9.411-413). Like the Po in *Punica* 4, this marks him as a greater river and deity with superior status within the hierarchy of rivers in the area.\(^{351}\) Despite Ismenis’ complaints and her father’s delay, when he emerges she is nowhere to be found and he takes immediate action. He is disturbed (*turbidus*, 9.420) by what he is told and addresses Jupiter asking him if this is his reward after being his host and confidant (*huncne mihi, superum regnator, honorem / quod totiens hospesque tuis et conscius actis*, 9.421-422).\(^{352}\) We are led to believe that *hunc* is the death of his grandson Crenaeus. Certainly the death of Crenaeus is necessary to make Ismenis rouse her father but Ismenos never mentions his grandson and instead attacks Jupiter for what has happened to his river (9.429-433):

> *'aspice quas fluuio caedes quae funera portem, continuus telis altoque adopertus aceruo. omne uadum belli series tenet, omnis anhelat unda nefas, subterque animae supraque recentes errant et geminas iungunt caligine ripas.’*

> “Look at the slaughter in my river! What death I carry covered in an unending mass of weapons and bodies! The course of war possesses all the depths, every wave breathes with unspeakable crime. New spirits wander above and below and they join the two banks with darkness.”

Hippomedon’s battle with Ismenos is clearly based on Achilles’ battle with the Scamander in *Iliad* 21 and just like the Scamander, and Eridanus in the *Punica*, Ismenos is concerned for

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\(^{351}\) The marveling woods and streams suggest, beyond the facile pathetic fallacy, that there are other deities in the forests and rivers.

himself and his river and focuses on the damage to the riverine environment. The anthropomorphized Scamander becomes angry with Achilles because he has killed so many men that he has choked the river (Il. 21.218-221) but Ismenos makes no such complaint. Rather, in his speech to Jupiter, Ismenos emphasizes the pollution that has afflicted his river. Corpses (caedes, funera) and weapons (telis) not only cover the surface of the river but are also piled deep in it (altoque...acero). Ismenos highlights both the ritual impurity of the corpses and gore in the river as well as the pollution they cause in the more “modern” sense of the word, with the river’s course full of objects that do not belong there. He also looks back to the proem of book 1: belli series evokes longa retro series (1.7). Just as longa retro series suggests the long history of the line of Cadmus stretching back from Oedipus, so does belli series evoke a sense of seemingly unending war having overtaken the river (omne uadum...tenet), a war which is intimately and clearly connected to the house of Cadmus. Furthermore, the nefas of which Ismenos speaks seems not to allude to any other particular instance of nefas in the poem but rather invokes here the overarching theme of nefas. The verb anhelat gives the impression that the river, now polluted with corpses and weapons, is exhaling nefas and spreading it. Ismenos even likens his river to the Styx: he describes how the recently-deceased wander as spirits (animae) and that these spirits join both banks of the river with their darkness or gloom (caligine). Ismenos also

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353 Dewar (1991, 140) notes “This is Statius’ rhetorical expansion of Scamander’s complaint to Achilles at Il. 21.218ff....The same passage was imitated by Silius, to whom Statius’ very wording seems indebted...[but] Statius avoids Silius’ hyperbole of the river flowing backwards. Note also that Scamander and Trebia speak directly to the offending hero, but Ismenos appeals to a higher authority.” Ismenos will ask for help from neighboring rivers, as Scamander later summons the Simois to fight against Achilles because he is a threat to Troy which he will soon sack (Il. 21.308-310). Ismenos continues to expand on these themes throughout his speech, how the Strymon and Hebrus do not see such gore when Mars goes to war in Thrace (9.437-438). The Strymon and Hebrus are both border-rivers separating Macedonia from Thrace and Statius portrays them as the battlefields of Mar’s campaigns in Thrace. This has the effect of presenting the Ismenos as a border between the attacking Argives and Thebes and, because of its location, as a battlefield for the war.
complains that the corpses are preventing the river from flowing to the sea (9.436-437), a nod to the motif of rivers being blocked or flowing backward.\footnote{Cf. Scipio blocking the Trebia at Sil. 4.621 concidit et clausit magna uada pressa ruina, and Eridanus’ complaints about this fact at 4.662-665.}

As hinted by their differing experiences with the \textit{ineluctabilis amnis}, there are vast differences between Ismenos and Hippomedon. When Ismenos finally turns his attention from Jupiter to the Argive hero he highlights the crucial difference between them (\textit{Theb.} 9.442-445):

\begin{quote}
‘at tu, qui tumidus spoliis et sanguine gaudes
insontis pueri, non hoc ex amne potestem
Inachon aut saeuas uictor reuehere Mycenas,
ni mortalis ego et tibi ductus ab aethere sanguis.’
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
“But you, who arrogantly rejoice in the spoils and blood of an innocent boy, you will not leave this river as a victor to go back to powerful Inachus or cruel Mycenae, unless I am a mortal and your blood comes from the heavens.”
\end{quote}

Ismenos effectively declares the battle over before it has begun because, unlike Hippomedon, he is immortal. Like Crenaeus, Ismenos draws a distinction between himself and Hippomedon’s home waters: the Inachus is the greatest river in Argolis. He also contrasts himself with the men Hippomedon has already killed, including Crenaeus. His reference to Crenaeus as an \textit{insons puer} brings to mind another famous \textit{puer}: Pallas in Vergil’s \textit{Aeneid}. The placement of \textit{insonis pueri} at the beginning of the line even seems to allude directly to the moment when Aeneas sees the belt of Pallas that Turnus is wearing. Aeneas sees the belt (\textit{Aen.} 12.942) but Vergil does not acknowledge its former owner until the next line which begins with \textit{Pallantis pueri} (\textit{Aen.} 12.943). Both \textit{insonis pueri} and \textit{Pallantis pueri} are therefore in the same metrical position and both lines have the exact same metrical rhythm.\footnote{Spondee, dactyl, spondee, spondee, dactyl, spondee.} Although Ismenos does not mention anything specific like a belt that had belonged to Crenaeus, he does claim that Hippomedon is rejoicing in the spoils and blood (\textit{spoliis et sanguine gaudes}) of Crenaeus, a detail that reinforces the
connection with Vergil’s Pallas (*tune hinc spoliis indute meorum / eripiare mihi*, 12.947-948).\(^{357}\) This potential allusion and the overall thematic similarities present Ismenos as the righteous avenger of his grandson’s death. In his speech, Ismenos does seem more concerned with the condition of his river than with his grandson but the fact that he mentions Crenaeus last suggests that his death was both the final straw and the most important impetus for Ismenos’ retaliation. The connection with Aeneas and his righteous fury at the end of the *Aeneid* is further emphasized by the word *furentibus* right after Ismenos ends his speech. Aeneas is famously incensed with rage (*furiis accensus*, 12.946) at the sight of Pallas’ belt. Similarly, Ismenos, after ending his speech, gives the signal for his already raging waters to attack (*sponte furentibus undis*, 9.446).\(^{358}\) This further casts Ismenos’ attack as a righteous act of retribution against the impious Hippomedon for the death of Crenaeus.

Statius presents us with two motivations for Ismenos: the pollution of his river and the death of his grandson. Ismenos spends the most time in his speech talking about the former. But he directs this discussion of pollution towards Jupiter, in addition to mentioning the reasons why his river is sacred as a site of the worship of Bacchus (9.434-436). He does not mention Crenaeus until he changes the subject of his address from Jupiter to Hippomedon (*at tu*, 9.442). It is impossible to say which may be the greater driver for Ismenos to take action, but it seems significant that his final words and initial actions echo those of Aeneas in *Aeneid* 12 which puts greater emphasis on the death of Crenaeus as a motivating factor. This is a particularly humanizing move since it is easier to sympathize with losing a family member than with the pollution of a river. Ismenos, Ismenis, and Crenaeus are humanized and portrayed

\(^{357}\) Dewar (1991, 143) correctly argues this is “semi-metaphorical rather than literal: Hippomedon, far from stopping to strip Crenaeus of his armour, killed him and passed on without a word.” For *sanguine gaudes* cf. Verg. *G.* 2.510 *gaudent perfusi sanguine fratrum*; Luc. 4.278 *gaudebit sanguine fuso*.

\(^{358}\) Dewar (1991, 145): “i.e. already in spate and already seeking vengeance” [emphasis original].
sympathetically in their opposition to Hippomedon, a violator and polluter. The opposition of this passage is not between humans and nature or humans and the gods but the morally righteous Ismenos (and his kin) and the sacrilegious Hippomedon.

The Battle Begins

Ismenos does not stand alone against Hippomedon but fights united with Mt. Cithaeron and the Asopos River. Two rivers banding together is perhaps to be expected, but Cithaeron’s aid to Ismenos is not, until we consider that the Ismenos River has its source on Mt. Cithaeron. Thus, like the Po in Punica 4 that arises from the Alps, the Ismenos is closely identified and connected with its source. The Ismenos and the surrounding landscape turn against Hippomedon and present a united front against him. Ismenos does not simply call on Cithaeron’s waters but rather a personified Cithaeron actively sends help (mittit gelidus montana Cithaeron / auxilia, 9.447-448) in the form of melted snow (antiquasque niues, 9.448). The Asopos River also springs from Mt. Cithaeron and as such is closely related to the Ismenos. According to Apollodorus and Diodorus Siculus, Asopos was the father of Ismenos, making this a potentially four-generation fight against Hippomedon. However, seemingly following a different tradition, Statius calls it frater when the Asopos sends additional water to help (frater tacitas Asopos eunti / conciliat uires et hiulcis flumina uenis / suggerit, 9.449-451). Frater has a double purpose in this passage. It points to a real relationship between Ismenos and Asopos as related rivers in close proximity to one another with both arising from the same mountain, whatever their “real” genealogical connection is. In addition, it looks back to the Achilles/Scamander

359 Cf. the Simois aiding the Scamander in Hom. Il. 21.305-323.

360 Apollod. Bibl. 3.12.6; Diod. Sic. 4.72.1.

361 Note also that Hypseus, one of Hippomedon’s main opponents in book 9 and the Theban who will despoil him, is the son of Asopos making the book a battle of two great Theban rivers and their sons/grandsons against the single Argive hero.
conflict in *Iliad* 21 wherein the Scamander addresses the Simois as ‘dear brother’ (φιλε κασίγνητε, *Il. 21.308) when asking the Simois for aid against Achilles.

As he prepares to attack, Ismenos plumbs the earth for more water to marshal against Hippomedon (*ipse cauae scrutatur uiscera terrae, 9.451) and whips up the sluggish swamps (*pigrasque paludes, 9.452) in an apparent reference to Ismenis’ speech where she accused him of being held back by the inescapable swamp (9.390-391). His waters are compared to the ocean (*animosaque surgit / tempestas instar pelagi, 9.459-460), a comparison that mirrors the earlier unsuccessful attack of the Thebans on Hippomedon who withstood their assault like an immovable rock (9.91-94). But now, Ismenos tosses Hippomedon (*iacont Teumesius amnis / Hippomedonta, 9.462-463), who is no longer immovable, and flows over his shield. Ismenos tears trees and stones from his banks and throws them at Hippomedon. Initially overcome by the river, Hippomedon, recalling his earlier characterization as an immovable rock, enters and divides the oncoming waves with his shield (*uenientesque obuius undas / intrat et obiecta dispellit flumina parma, 9.471-472). This reverses Statius’ earlier description of the river as ‘in the way of’ or ‘hostile to’ the men it was drowning (*obuius, 9.265) with Hippomedon now the one that is *obuius* to the river. In a further inversion that points up the unusual nature of a battle between a river god and a human, instead of the river rushing around Hippomedon’s feet Statius has the earth flee from beneath them (*terra fugiente gradus, 9.473).

Just like Eridanus in *Punica* 4 (4.639-640), Ismenos becomes angry with Hippomedon, a common motif in the poem and a necessary emotion in battle, but Hippomedon, apparently oblivious to his crimes, questions Ismenos’ sudden anger (9.476-480):

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362 Dewar (1991, 144) argues that “Hippomedon is shown to be a greater hero than either Achilles or Silius’ Scipio. No sooner had Achilles been attacked than he turned to his elm-tree for help, and, when it broke, he fled in terror, quite unable to keep his footing on the slippery bottom. Hippomedon’s strength and resolution, however, keep him firmly on his feet and, miraculously, for some time.”
sic etiam increpitans: ‘unde haec, Ismene, repente
ira tibi quoe has traxisti gurgite uires,
imbelli famulate deo solumque cruorem
femineis experte choris cum Bacchica mugit
buxus et insanae maculant trieterida matres?’

Thus he shouts indignantly, “Why are you suddenly angry, Ismenos, or from what whirlpool have you drawn this strength, you slave of an unwarlike god who has only shed blood in feminine choruses when the Bacchic flute lows and the insane mothers pollute triennial rites?”

Ira takes pride of place in line 477 and Hippomedon’s tone echoes that of the narrator in Aeneid 1 (tantaene animis caelestibus irae, Verg. Aen. 1.11). Furthermore, what Ismenos had taken pride in, namely his importance to the worship of Bacchus, Hippomedon throws in his face, calling him “the slave of an unwarlike god.” Although Capaneus has often been recognized as the theomach par excellence in the Thebaid and Latin epic, Hippomedon shows disdain for the gods as he engages in a literal theomachy with Ismenos, something which Capaneus never succeeds in doing. In response, Ismenos comes face to face with Hippomedon (9.481-485):

dixerat, atque illi sese deus obtulit ultro
turbidus imbre genas et nube natantis harenae,
nec saeuit dictis trunca sed pectora quercu
ter quater oppositi, quantum ira deusque ualebat,
ipulit adsurgens.

He spoke and the god approached, stormy with rain on his cheeks and in a cloud of flowing sand. He does not attack him with words but rising up three and four times strikes his opponent’s chest with a oak trunk (so strong was his divine anger).

Ismenos is turbidus again just as at 9.420 and this is the same adjective used to describe Hippomedon in book 1 (Theb. 1.43-44: et hostilem propellens caedibus annem / turbidus Hippomedon). To defeat Hippomedon, or perhaps as an indication that he has defeated him, Ismenos takes on one of Hippomedon’s key characteristics and plays into the anger that Hippomedon decries. Ismenos remains silent but acts on his anger raging not with words but by

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363 Dewar (1991, 150) calls this “‘martial spirit,’ the anger a warrior needs in battle since killing cannot be done in cold blood.”
striking him three and four times with an oak tree with the full strength of his anger and divinity
(*ira deusque*). The meaning of *deus* seems to stray closer to *numen* here in describing the divine
power of Ismenos rather than the god himself. Statius makes it clear that this is an immortal god
fighting with all his might and Ismenos succeeds in forcing Hippomedon back and making him
drop his shield with which Hippomedon had been dividing the river (9.472). As Ismenos forces
Hippomedon back Statius emphasizes his retreat: he turns his steps (*uestigia flexit*, 9.485) and
turns his back (*conuersaque lente / terga refert*, 9.486-487) while Ismenos presses upon him
(*instant*, 9.487) and follows behind in triumph (*sequiturque labantem / amnis ouans*, 9.487-
488).\(^{364}\)

Finally overwhelmed, Hippomedon retreats from Ismenos’ assault and grasps at an ash
tree sticking out from the bank.\(^{365}\) The tree is close to the water and casts a long shadow over the
river (*ingentique uadum possederat umbra*, 9.494). What seems to have been a pleasant spot,
where the tree casts a shadow over the river, proves to be Hippomedon’s undoing as it collapses
on him. Again, as seen in book 6, Statius uses active verbs to describe the tree’s fall: *superne /
iniecit trepido sese ripamque nec ultra / passurum*, 9.499-501. The tree literally throws itself

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\(^{364}\) This passage is dense with allusions and double-meanings. First, Hippomedon is fighting a river, a potent symbol
of literary production. As he falters he turns his steps, *uestigia*, backwards and Ismenos follows him. *Vestigia* is a
well-worn term for literary predecessors, one which Statius himself employs at the end of the poem (*sed longe
sequere et uestigia semper adora*, 12.817). Where these two passages intersect is not readily apparent, but Statius
seems to be playing with ideas of literary production and succession with these intratexts. What we have here seems
to be the re-emergence of the theme of delay, but the reverse from books 4-6. Nemea and Hypsipyle delayed the
Argives but the Ismenos engages Hippomedon in the Seven’s war against Thebes, thereby becoming a part of the
gear pushing the poem forward. The swelling waters of the Ismenos symbolize the increasing thrust of the poet’s
productive efforts and the now-unavoidable fratricidal end of the poem. The literal meaning of *longe sequere et
uestigia semper adora* at the end of the poem is that the *Thebaid* should not seek to rival the *Aeneid*. Whether or not
Statius means this is another matter entirely. This intratext shows the Ismenos to be ignoring this sentiment and
instead chasing down Hippomedon ‘in triumph.’ Ismenos *ouans* is another unexpected reversal. Images of rivers and
conquered lands were often carried in Roman triumphs, as Scipio does in *Punica* 17. But here Ismenos himself is an
*amnis ouans*, a description that paints this Greek river as a victorious general processing triumphantly through
Rome.

across the river and on Hippomedon. The tree, riverbank, and water combine to finally overcome the hero (9.502-505):

```plaintext
huc undae coeunt et ineluctabile caenum
uertiaibusque causis sidet crescitque barathrum.
iamque umeros iam colla ducis sinuosa uorago
\text{circuit.} 505
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The waves and inescapable mud crash upon him and an abyss rises and sinks in the hollow eddies. And the chasm surrounds first the arms, then the knotted neck of the hero.

As mentioned above, the \textit{ineluctabile caenum} looks back to Ismenis’ accusation that Ismenos could not extricate himself from the \textit{ineluctabilis palus} in order to avenge his grandson. In yet another reversal, Hippomedon is the one stuck in the whirlpools and eddies of the Ismenos and the adjective \textit{ineluctabile} shows his death is near and unavoidable. As the waters rise around him he is defeated at last.

\textbf{Hippomedon’s Death}

In a passage that recalls Aeneas’ exclamation in \textit{Aeneid} 1, and Scipio’s above (Sil. 4.672-673), that it would have been better to die at Troy, Hippomedon asks Mars if he is really going to be killed like a shepherd in a flood and why does he not deserve to die in battle (\textit{adeone ocumbere ferro / non merui?}, 9.509-510).\textsuperscript{366} Juno hears his prayer and appeals to Jupiter on his behalf, who signals to Ismenos to stop his attack (\textit{et uiso sederunt flumina nutu}, 9.521). Statius renews the imagery of Hippomedon as an immovable rock in a simile that describes the effects of the waters receding (9.522-525):

```plaintext
illius exsangues umeri et perfossa patescunt
pectora: ceu uentis alte cum elata resedit
\text{tempestas, surgunt scopuli quaesitaque nautis}
terra et ab insessis descendunt aequora saxis. 525
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\textsuperscript{366} Hippomedon gives voice to his shame at being defeated not by enemy warriors but by a river. Cf. Verg. \textit{Aen.} 1.97-98 \textit{mene Iliacis occumbere campis / non potuisse tuaque animam hanc effundere dextra}. See Ahl (1967, 70).
His bloodless shoulders and pierced chest are visible: as when a storm raised high by the winds settles down, cliffs and land sought by sailors rise and the sea descends from the sunken rocks.

Hippomedon is now a rock emerging from the sea. But the river’s retreat causes further harm since, somehow, the water has been preventing Hippomedon’s blood from flowing from his wounds. This is another indication of the difference between Ismenos the river and Ismenos the god: the god is Hippomedon’s enemy but the water itself has been somehow staunching his wounds and keeping him alive. He manages to get out of the river (*quid ripas tenuisse iuuat?*, 9.526) but, now without his shield and exhausted, the Thebans attack him and he is completely defenseless (*omnisque patet leto*, 9.528).

Statius shifts similes when Hippomedon dies, presenting him as a falling oak tottering on Mount Haemus (9.532-536):

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procumbit, Getico qualis procumbit in Haemo
seu Boreae furiis putri seu robore quercus
caelo mixta comas, ingentemque aera\[367] laxat:
illam nutantem nemus et mons ipse tremescit
qua tellure cadat quas obruat ordine siluas.
non tamen aut ensem galeae audacia cuiquam
tangere: uix credunt oculis ingentiaque horrent
funera, et adstrictis accedunt comminus armis.
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He falls, like an oak does on Getic Haemus toppled by the fury of Boreas or its own decayed strength, and opens a huge space to the sky: the grove and the mountain itself tremble at it swaying and in the place where it falls it knocks down other trees in succession. No one is bold enough to touch his sword or helmet. They scarcely believe their eyes and shudder at the huge corpse and approach with their swords drawn.

Hippomedon is no longer an immovable rock and has become a weakened tree. *Procumbit* here looks back to the *procumbunt piceae* tree-felling passage in *Thebaid 6* where the Argives cut

\[367\] The manuscripts have *aera* which Hall emends to *aethera*. 
down part of the Nemean forest. This intratext is ironic since one of the Argives that previously felled the Nemean trees is compared to a falling oak. Statius repeats procumbit for emphasis and compares Hippomedon to an oak that is either overwhelmed by the wind (Boreae furii) or undermined by its own failing strength (putri robore), much like his is now failing. The tree is huge and as it falls it leaves a massive void in the space it once occupied (ingentem aera laxat) while the entire forest and the mountain tremble not with the force of its fall but in anticipation of where it will fall and how much of the nearby forest it will take with it. This comparison makes Hippomedon seem huge and monstrous. Indeed, when the Thebans approach, they do not dare to touch him, scarcely believe their eyes, and shrink from his huge corpse (ingentia funera). Ingens is well-established as an adjective denoting monstrosity and its deployment twice here certainly presents a characterization of Hippomedon in line with his earlier comparison to a Centaur (9.218-224).

When Hypseus finally removes Hippomedon’s helmet he vaunts over his body declaring that “here is the vanquisher of the bloody river” (debellatorque cruenti / gurgitis, 9.545-546). Hypseus is obviously sarcastic and is abusing the dead Hippomedon, but through him the poet communicates the folly of attempting to defeat the Ismenos. Hypseus’ boasting is particularly noteworthy because as the son of Asopos, an ally of Ismenos, he represents both the Thebans and the rivers. Hypseus makes clear that this was not a conflict between humans and nature but of Thebes and its allied rivers against Hippomedon. Whereas Achilles had the help of the gods to defeat the Scamander, Hippomedon attempted to beat the Ismenos alone marking him as a hubristic theomach, much like Capaneus. But unlike Capaneus, who is disdainful of all the gods, Juno’s support of Hippomedon shows him to be a favorite of hers. But her favoritism and

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368 See chapter 2 for a full discussion of this passage and its allusions to the funeral of Misenus in Aeneid 6. Cf. Verg. Aen. 5.447-449 where Entellus falls to the ground like an uprooted tree.
support only go so far as to ask Jupiter to prevent his body from being washed out to sea rather than allowing him to defeat Ismenos (9.514-519).

The aftermath of Hippomedon’s death cannot be ignored. Hypseus, vaunting over Hippomedon’s corpse, is killed by Capaneus who repeats much of what Hypseus did to Hippomedon. He tears away his sword and helmet (tunc ensem galeamque rapit, 9.560) and whereas Hypseus had denigrated the “great avenger of cursed Tydeus” (formidabilis ultor / Tydeus infandi, 9.544-545), Capaneus addresses Hippomedon’s corpse and calls himself Hippomedon’s avenger and buries him in a makeshift grave (hoc ultor Capaneus operit tua membra sepulcro, 9.565). The scene is rather touching as the disdainful, irascible theomach Capaneus shows respect for his dead comrade and provides him with a temporary grave, a crucial detail since they will all be denied burial by Creon.

Hippomedon’s fate shows the folly of directly fighting divine nature and acts as a metaphor for the domination of nature and of foreign places. Hippomedon is no longer in Argolis where he would have had the lakes of Lerna and the Inachus River as allies. This was Crenaeus’ and Ismenos’ point in contrasting the rivers of Boeotia with Hippomedon’s home waters. While rivers are inherently dangerous and deserving of respect, much like the auia loca of the previous chapter, they are doubly so when they are foreign and unfamiliar.

5. Conclusion

Silius and Statius both saw an opportunity to include in their poems a river battle modeled on Homer’s battle between Achilles and the Scamander, something which earlier Latin poets had not attempted.\textsuperscript{369} It seems, although it is impossible to be sure, that Silius wrote his

\textsuperscript{369} Dewar (1991, xxi).
passage first and Statius took up the challenge to outdo his poetic contemporary. The apparent poetic competition in these passages reinforces the importance of these river-battles to Silius’ and Statius’ poetic production and their poems as a whole. While Statius is arguably more successful than Silius in both his schema for the battle and his execution, both obviously saw it as an important opportunity to thematize direct human conflict between humans and the gods and in particular river gods and the naturescapes they inhabit. However, neither the god Ismenos nor Eridanus is synonymous or coterminous with their respective rivers. Both Hippomedon and Scipio, and the other soldiers in either narrative, first come into conflict with the very matter, the material of the river itself and its water, not the anthropomorphized deity of the river. While Silius closely, and perhaps unsuccessfully, mirrors and rivals Homer’s passage by having Vulcan burn the Trebia, Statius limits the conflict to Hippomedon and the Ismenos who is angered not only by the flotsam and jetsam of war awash in his river but also by the death of his grandson Crenaeus. All differences aside, both Statius and Silius play with the absurdity and strangeness of fighting a pitched battle in a river and fighting a river itself (as if a river can be wounded by a spear). The rivers defend themselves and their actions by arguing that the poems’ human actors have brought war, death, and destruction to their rivers. This is Ismenos’ reasoning, before even the death of his grandson. Eridanus, speaking for the Trebia, initially attacks on Juno’s orders but claims the damage done to the Trebia as the reason for opposing Scipio.

The identity of rivers is also of utmost importance in both Silius and Statius. Focusing on the Trebia/Po and Ismenos, both rivers are closely identified with their sources. The Po is an Alpine river and because the Trebia is an inferior tributary it is Alpine as well. Hannibal’s dominance of the Alps is reflected in Eridanus’ support of the Carthaginians. But the Po is an Italian river and its support of Hannibal leads Scipio the Elder to criticize the river for its

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betrayal of its geographic loyalties. Although the Romans lose the battle, Scipio’s attack leads to Venus’ and Vulcan’s intervention which righteously punishes the Po for its betrayal. Conversely, the Ismenos remains loyal to its Theban allies and Thebes and its riverscapes are contrasted with Hippomedon and the waters of Argolis. Whereas Scipio fights with a treacherous local river, Hippomedon fights a foreign river. These rivers are clearly portrayed as inhospitable environments for humans and ones that, once roused, will react violently to any incursion. The river is also a locus of discovery in which humans become aware of their physical limitations. Once in the water, the Roman and Argive soldiers are overwhelmed by the foreignness of the riverine environment and are unable to extricate themselves without divine help.
CHAPTER 4

WE ARE YOUR OVERLORDS: FLAVIAN IDEOLOGY AND THE CONQUEST OF NATURE

Starting from the premise that the poems reflect on real events, this chapter aims to present a plausible interpretation of how the scenes examined in the preceding chapters might have been received by the contemporary audience. I accept the difficulty of connecting passages with specific contemporary events, as argued by Bernstein, who persuasively differentiates between reading for specific events and for Valerius’ analysis of the imperial system as a whole. My analysis largely adheres to this approach, especially since my engagement with the texts focuses on themes and motifs, which can be viewed as evoking the broad themes of contemporary events without being overly concerned with the specifics of the events. However, I do not limit my analysis to themes; rather where the connection to contemporary events is explicit, as it often is in the proemias of epic poems, I take it as a given that Valerius, Statius, and Silius, are purposefully directing the reader to those events and in doing so invite the reader to consider others as well.

The Argonautica, Punic, and Thebaid all reflect on contemporary events and Flavian imperial ideology and military achievements. These epics have embedded in them the importance, and potential danger, of human expansion across the world and the conflict with nature that this necessitates. The role of nature in the poems is central to how they interrogate

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371 Bernstein (2014, 155).

372 Davis (2015, 159) argues Valerius is obviously concerned with the Roman present: “The first and most obvious way is through the allusions to Rome and Italy that are to be found in every book...[and] equally important is the fact that Valerius uses language that suggests that parallels exist between the ways in which politics operate in mythic Colchis and contemporary Rome.” On Silius, Mezzanotte (2016, 434) argues “like all writers, Silius is closely in touch with his time and more attentive than has been acknowledged to the taste of the period, its tendencies (literary and otherwise), and its most celebrated events.”
Flavian achievements and ideology. This is tied directly to Flavian imperial ideology which both mirrored Augustan ideology of the *Pax Romana* and stressed the importance of Flavian military achievements and imperial expansion. Vespasian, and to a lesser degree Titus, presented themselves as strong, competent generals and the restorers of Rome after the civil war of 69 and boasted of their military victories, especially over Judaea. Petillius Cerealis’ and Agricola’s campaigns in Britain in the 70s show Vespasian’s eagerness for further expansion in Britain. Domitian was eager for military glory and gladly celebrated triumphs, but was more concerned with the control and defense of the Rhine and Danube than with expansion. All of these military conflicts involve encounters with nature, interactions which the poems specifically thematize. I argue the passages in the preceding three chapters reflect on the various Flavian campaigns and illustrate contemporary thinking about the natural world in a way to which the poets’ audience would have been receptive.

The Flavian epics are decidedly products of their times, although their exact dates are a matter of debate. Given the influence of the emperor on the political atmosphere in Rome and

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373 Mezzanotte (2016, 440-441): “[A] theme of the Augustan propaganda that is reused by the Flavians is that of the wars of conquest...The emperor is imagined and represented as the lord of the world, capable of securing peace, well-being, and justice (a new Golden Age), but also as powerful enough to subdue the entire inhabited world by means of war. The motif of conquest is often echoed in the poetry of the period, celebrated primarily by Domitian himself, but also by Martial, by Statius in the *Silvae* and the *Achilleid*, and by Silius in *Punica* 3...where Jupiter forsees and glorifies the extraordinary feats of war accomplished by Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian.”

374 I follow Stover (2012, 7-26) who argues that Valerius’ *Argonautica* was composed in the 70s and the period of composition did not extend beyond, or far beyond, the reign of Vespasian. We know almost nothing about Valerius, but Stover posits from the internal and external evidence that he likely died in late 79 or early 80 after the eruption of Vesuvius and the accession of Titus but without having enough time to complete the poem or change its dedication.

Statius’ *Thebaid* is typically dated to ca. 80 to ca. 92. As Gervais (2017, xviii) notes, “Statius claims in his epilogue to have worked for twelve years on the poem (*Th.* 12.811f. ‘o mihi bis senos multum uigilata per annos / Thebai’). Second, in his prologue he alludes to Domitian’s first two Danubian expeditions of the 80s (1.19f. ‘bisque iugo Rhenum, bis adactum legibus Histrum / et coniurato dejectos uertice Dacos’), but not his Sarmatian victory of January 93 (which Statius praises at *S.* 3.3.170f.). Objections may be raised, but no better dating may be found.”

The *Punica* is traditionally dated to ca. 81 to ca. 96. Legras (1905), Wistrand (1956), Laudizi (1989), and Marks (2005) argue for a linear composition model that assumes one book composed per year from 81 through 96, but the dating of the poem is still an open question. Fröhlich (2000, 9-18), for example, argues for a more dynamic model, akin to Vergil’s composition practice for the *Aeneid* which, according to Suetonius, involved an initial prose draft
on the upper classes to which our three authors belonged, it should come as no surprise that Nero had quite the chilling effect on freedoms, especially towards the end of his reign, and Vespasian’s ascension was likely viewed with reserved optimism. Certainly Vergil’s *Aeneid* and Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* can be seen as products of the reigns of Augustus and Nero, respectively. We should therefore not underestimate the influence, especially on the lives of upper-class Romans, of the shift in the political reality in Rome from the Julio-Claudian dynasty to the Flavian dynasty. Fourteen years under Nero and eighteen months of civil war gave way to a new dynasty that promised stable rule under the guidance of a mature and experienced military commander. Vespasian was acknowledged as emperor by the Senate in December 69 CE after the first civil war since Octavian defeated Mark Antony at Actium in 31 BCE.

1. **Flavian Military Achievements**

Because many of the encounters between humans and nature that I have examined in the previous chapters are the result of wars and military conflicts, the military achievements of the Flavians are of central importance to my analysis of the connection between human/nature encounters in Flavian epic and Flavian ideology. A central part of any military expedition is conflict with the landscape and its features. This is apparent time and again throughout the preceding three chapters with respect to human/nature conflict in Flavian epic. The conflicts depicted in the three epics reflect on the achievements of the entire Flavian dynasty, as permitted by the composition dates of the poems. While specific correspondences may be difficult to prove, there are clear points of contact between human/nature encounters in the *Argonautica*, *Thebaid*, and *Punica* which reflect on contemporary campaigns and imperial ideology. Thus it is that was then versified in no particular order (Suet. *Vita Verg.* 23 *Aeneida prosa prius oratione formatam digestamque in XII libros particulatim componere instituit, prout liberet quidque, et nihil in ordinem arripiens*).
necessary to examine in detail the military careers of all three Flavian emperors before advancing
to an analysis of the points of contact between them and the poems.

Vespasian’s military career started in *Legio IV Scythica* on garrison duty in Thrace in 27
CE.\(^{375}\) Holding various political positions in the 30s, in 41 he was posted as legate of *Legio II
Augusta* on the Rhine in Argentorate (modern Strasbourg). Silius’ statement that he restrained
the Rhine (*compescet Rhenum*, Sil. 3.599) probably means that he arrived in 42 “too late for
campaigning [and] had to deal with the Rhine in flood, or he strengthened fortifications that kept
down rebellious Rhine tribes.”\(^{376}\) In 43, still as legate of *Legio II Augusta*, he experienced his
first formal campaign under the command of Aulus Plautius who oversaw Claudius’ invasion of
Britain, a campaign meant to gain Claudius favor with the legionaries and praetorians.\(^{377}\)
Vespasian distinguished himself in particular by taking the Isle of Wight and engaging the
enemy on thirty separate occasions, likely campaigning in Britain through 47.\(^{378}\) He received a
consulship for the last two months of 51 and by lot became proconsul of Africa in 62.\(^{379}\)
Although his exact title is unclear, by 67 Vespasian was in charge of three legions in Judaea with
Titus as a legate under his command.\(^{380}\) Subduing Judaea required taking both “guerilla
strongholds...[and] regular settlements...one by one in a series of sieges...[and it] would be hard
to overestimate the significance of Vespasian’s experience in reducing hill-top forts,” such as he

\(^{375}\) Levick (1999, 8).

\(^{376}\) Levick (1999, 16).

\(^{377}\) Levick (1999, 16). Suetonius (*Ves*. 4) notes Vespasian was partly under the command of Aulus Plautius and
partly under that of Claudius directly.


\(^{379}\) Levick (1999, 19; 23). According to Suetonius (*Ves*. 4) Vespasian was unpopular in Africa and had turnips
thrown at him in Hadrumetum.

\(^{380}\) Having one’s son as legate was a very unusual arrangement as Jones and Milns note (2002, 52).
gained in Britain. After a forty-day siege he took Jotapata, razed the city, and sold some twelve-hundred women and children into slavery. Josephus estimates the dead at 40,000. It was but one of many such sieges in Judaea. Vespasian had left the factions in Jerusalem to fight among themselves while undertaking other operations when he heard of Nero’s death which had taken place on June 9th of 68. By early 69, when Vespasian undertook his last campaign in Judaea, Galba had been overthrown by Otho and Otho defeated by Vitellius.

Vespasian of course emerged victorious from the Year of Four Emperors bringing an end to the civil war, but not before the Vitellians burned the Capitoline. Domitian, only 18 at the time, barely managed to escape the Vitellians’ attack, an event that he would later spin into a great victory. Once the Flavians won the civil war, Titus resumed campaigning in Judaea culminating in the capture of Jerusalem in 70 after which remaining strongholds were to be dealt with by subordinates. To say Jerusalem and its inhabitants were treated harshly would be an understatement. Combatants and civilians were slaughtered indiscriminately and the city was eventually consumed by fire. Seven months of celebrations followed, including a triumph for both Vespasian and Titus in June of 71.

In Britain, Petillius Cerealis campaigned in northern England during his governorship from 71-74 and the next to undertake significant campaigns was Gnaeus Julius Agricola,

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381 Levick (1999, 30).
382 Levick (1999, 32).
383 BI 3.339. For Josephus eye-witness account of the siege and capture see BI 3.141-339.
386 Jos. BI. 6.403-407; Jones (1984, 55). Josephus (BI 6.420-428) claims that 1.1 million people died in Jerusalem, the number of people in the city being so high because many had traveled there for Passover in the spring.
governor of Britain from 77-84. The father-in-law of Tacitus, Agricola campaigned against various British peoples throughout what is now Wales, northern England, and Scotland culminating in his victory at Mons Graupius in 83 and subsequent circumnavigation of Britain, establishing, according to Tacitus, that it was indeed an island.\textsuperscript{388} His exploits are the subject of Tacitus’ \textit{Agricola}, which I discuss in detail below.

Domitian, unlike his father and brother, was not an experienced military commander. This did not stop him from seeking military glory and, even though he “rejected the idea of expansionist warfare,” he was “the first emperor to spend a substantial part of his reign outside of Rome personally involved in his military ventures.”\textsuperscript{389} His first campaign was in 82 or 83 against the Chatti across the Rhine in central Germany but it consisted of building military roads in their territory and “taking various measures to control them for the future.”\textsuperscript{390} He celebrated a triumph for this victory in 83 and claimed the new title \textit{Germanicus}, which began appearing on coins in August 83.\textsuperscript{391} Domitian did achieve the “commencement of a defense system of forts, roads and watch-towers” in Germany but the Chatti were not conquered “as is indicated by their role in Saturninus’ revolt” in 89.\textsuperscript{392}

As shown by his quick triumph, Domitian wanted military glory like his father and brother but was also pragmatic about the realities of defending the empire. Although the exact reason is unclear, in 87 Domitian moved the Roman front line of Scottish forts 120 kilometers south but built a massive \textit{quadrifrons} arch at Richborough in southeast England to symbolize the

\textsuperscript{388} Although this was already well known, see Caes. \textit{BG} 4.20.2, 5.13.1; Cic. \textit{Att} 4.16.7; Plin. \textit{HN} 4.102.

\textsuperscript{389} Jones (1992, 126-127).

\textsuperscript{390} Jones (1992, 128).

\textsuperscript{391} Jones (1992, 129).

conquest, albeit incomplete, of Britain. Sallustius Lucullus, governor of Britain soon after Agricola, was executed by Domitian, possibly for opposing Domitian’s withdrawal south in Britain, the result of the generals’ hostility to “Domitian’s rejection of expansionist warfare in Germany and Britain.”

On the Danube, Domitian faced three opponents: the Sarmatians, consisting of the Iazyges and Roxolani, the Suebic Germans, consisting of the Marcomanni and Quadi, and the Dacians. The Sarmatians were the most formidable and Domitian continued Vespasian’s policy of strengthening the defenses on the Danube. Eager for glory, Domitian had war forced on him in 84/5 when the Dacians crossed the Danube and killed the governor of Moesia. Domitian forced the Dacians, led by their new leader Decebalus, back across the Danube and returned to Rome to celebrate another triumph in 86. Much like the brief campaign against the Chatti, Domitian was victorious, but his victories were accompanied by no great conquests. The rash decision of the new governor, Cornelius Fuscus, to cross the Danube and invade Dacia to avenge his predecessor forced Domitian to return late in 86 and further fortify the Danube with three more legions. The next governor of Upper Moesia, Tettius Julianus, defeated the Dacians at Tapae in late 88. In 89, on the 1st of January, L. Antonius Saturninus, the governor of Upper Germany, revolted against Domitian. The rebellion was short-lived. Domitian came from Rome with the praetorians but many legions in the area remained loyal and crushed Saturninus’ forces, aided by the fact that his Chattan allies failed to appear after the Rhine did not freeze as

393 Jones (1992, 133).
394 Jones (1992, 133).
396 Jones (1992, 139).
expected. The Chatti must have regretted their decision to support the rebellion, for they were then defeated and a peace treaty was signed.

Domitian was forced to end the war with the Dacians by coming to terms with Decebalus when hostilities flared with the Suebi on the Danube. It is unclear whether Domitian or the Suebi started the conflict and Domitian seems to have lost at least one battle and the whole conflict ended inconclusively. However, in 92 the Sarmatians joined the Suebi and Domitian led another campaign against them, celebrating only an ouatio on his return to Rome in 93. Although the evidence is scant, there seems to have been another Sarmatian campaign in 95.

In the east there were diplomatic conflicts with various groups between Roman and Parthian territory and significant jockeying for position, but the strangest and most significant threat came from the appearance of three false Neros in the east during the Flavians’ reigns. The first appeared in 69 and caused panic in Asia and Africa. The second and the third were both supported by the Parthians, the latter appearing in 88 when Domitian was otherwise occupied on the Danube. This points to the likelihood that Rome’s relationship with Parthia was deteriorating but “Roman control of the Caucasus remained as firm as ever.” There is little evidence that Domitian planned an eastern campaign in the 90s, mostly consisting of oblique literary references to the east. As Jones argues:

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397 Jones (1992, 144-146).
399 Jones (1992, 151).
400 Jones (1992, 153-155).
401 Tac. Hist. 2.8
402 Jones (1992, 158).
403 Jones (1992, 159).
There is no evidence and no need to postulate a grandiose eastern campaign. For one thing, Domitian could not afford it. Foreign policy may well have been made in the court but not by the court poets.405

As I will discuss below, this supports my theory about part of the purpose of the laudes Domitiani in Puncia 3.

2. Flavian Ideology and Iconography of Empire

Multiple forms of material remains, especially coins and monuments such as the Arch of Titus, have left a tremendous amount of evidence for the ideology and iconography of the Flavians’ presentation of their military achievements. Coins from the Flavian era provide important evidence for the type of iconography used by the Flavians. Most important for my analysis is the depiction of conquered peoples and regions since it is the Flavian military campaigns with which I am comparing portrayals of nature in Flavian epic. There are four types of depictions of provinces on Roman coins: prouincia capta, supplicatio and/or adoratio, prouincia restituta, and prouincia fidelis.406 Given the prominence of the theme of conquest in my analysis, I will focus on the capta and supplicatio/adoratio types. The capta type coins, the name of which is taken from the often accompanying inscription IUDAEA CAPTA, typically depict an utterly defeated enemy bound and seated under a tropaenum with the armor and weapons of the conquered.407 Originating in the Hellenistic period, the “Roman types represent conquered peoples of un-Romanised areas on the margins of the empire.”408

404 See Stat. Silu. 4.4.63-64 seruare datur metuendaque portae / limina Caspiacae.

405 Jones (1992, 159).


408 Cody (2003, 105).
immediate predecessors, who eschewed the *capta* type coins, the Flavians returned to using them in the first year of Vespasian’s reign and continuing through the reigns of Titus and Domitian.\footnote{Cody (2003, 107).}

Of great interest and significance is the fact that on coins relating to Vespasian’s and Titus’ subjugation of Judaea, despite the fact that Judaea had been a Roman province since 6 BCE, Jews on coins continued to be represented as non-Roman barbarians from outside the empire. Because of their different culture, resistance to Roman rule, and the revolt from 67-70 CE which had been quelled by Vespasian and Titus, the Jews were still seen as barbarians in the eyes of Romans and this was useful for presenting the conquest of Judaea as a victory over foreign enemies outside the empire. On coins depicting *Iudaea capta*, a palm tree often replaced the *tropaeum*, which attests to the ability of elements of nature to stand in for entire peoples, as seen with rivers in chapter 3. The tree itself thus acts as a kind of shorthand for Judaea and the conquered Jews. The *capta* type also appears on coins issued in Titus’ name in 79 CE, before and after Vespasian’s death, commemorating Agricola’s campaigns in Britain. Although the identity of the enemies changes through time, “a change made in response to the shifting frontiers and problem points of the empire...the ideal of the Roman leader as conqueror, ennobled by his victory over the barbarian foe, remains remarkably constant.”\footnote{Cody (2003, 123).}

The Flavians’ emphasis on their military exploits through the use of coin iconography gives a strong indication of the importance of their military achievements to their legitimacy, especially Vespasian as the victor of the civil war and founder of the dynasty. The insistence on portraying Judaea as a foreign country and Jews as barbarians shows that Vespasian and Titus were keen to portray themselves as conquerors of non-Roman others in distant lands. When this
involved the conquest of the east, as it did in Judaea, Vespasian and Titus are cast in the mold of Alexander the Great as bold conquerors going beyond the boundaries of the empire.

3. Tacitus’ \textit{Agricola}: A Flavian Text

While Vespasian and Titus found a convenient enemy in the Jews, in Tacitus’ \textit{Agricola} Roman troops find an enemy in nature itself. Written c. 98 CE and honoring the author’s father-in-law Gnaeus Julius Agricola, Tacitus’ biography focuses mainly on Agricola’s role as governor of Britain from 77-85 CE and his conquest of the island. Because of its close chronological connection with the Flavian dynasty, written only two years after the death of Domitian, it provides an important account of contemporary Roman thinking about conquest, nature at the edges of the empire, and the challenges of military campaigns.\footnote{Rutledge (2000, 75) argues that the \textit{Agricola} “turns the alien and distant land of Britain into a Roman space, with a Roman identity, whose people share and embrace Roman values and ideology with varying results, and that the ultimate aim of Tacitus’ text is to perpetuate the further expansion and spread of the Romanitas. Agricola imposes on Britain,” a goal he calls “textual colonization.” As such, Tacitus’ criticism of Domitian may also be due to his withdrawal south from Agricola’s northern-most point of expansion, mirroring Silius’ apparent issue with Domitian’s disinterest in expansionary conquest in \textit{Punica} 3, on which see below.} Throughout the \textit{Agricola}, Tacitus shows a sustained interest in the discovery and previous invasions of Britain, Vespasian’s role in Claudius’ expedition in 43 CE, and especially the challenges that the landscapes presented for Agricola’s campaigns. This last point in particular dovetails with the preceding three chapters’ focus on human conflicts with nature. Indeed, conflict with nature in the \textit{Agricola} is specifically thematized and nature is presented as a significant enemy, one that is possibly greater than the peoples of Britain.

\textbf{Vespasian in Britain}

Early in the work, Tacitus touches on the role of the then-future emperor Vespasian in the invasion of Britain by Claudius in 43 CE (Ag. 13.3):
diuus Claudius auctor tanti operis, transuectis legionibus auxiliisque et adsumpto in partem rerum Vespasiano, quod initium uenturae mox fortunae fuit: domitae gentes, capti reges et monstratus fatis Vespasianus.

The divine Claudius undertook the great task, and the legions and auxiliaries were transported [to Britain] and Vespasian was included in the campaign, which was the beginning of his future success: people were conquered, kings captured, and Vespasian was introduced by fate.

As Silius does in the *Punica* (*hinc pater ignotam denabit uincere Thylen, Theb. 3.597*), Tacitus presents Vespasian’s role in Claudius’ invasion as the beginning of all of his military successes, achievements which were crucial to his accession to the throne. It is also rather telling that although Claudius was the emperor and Aulus Plautius was the commander of the expedition, Tacitus attaches Vespasian’s name to the campaign’s achievements (*domitae gentes, capti reges*). Furthermore, the phrase *uenturae mox fortunae* foreshadows Vespasian’s future achievements which, incidentally, are the subject of the text. Despite Agricola being the commander in Britain, the fame and glory would go to the emperor, in this case the entire Flavian dynasty as Agricola’s tenure in Britain spanned the transition from Vespasian to Titus to Domitian.

**Agricola’s Exploration in Britain**

Throughout the *Agricola*, Tacitus notes and reflects on the role of nature in presenting challenges for Agricola’s campaigns. The themes of discovery and exploration of the unknown, central to many if not all of the human/nature encounters in Flavian epic, go hand-in-hand with encounters with nature in the *Agricola*. When on campaign in 79 CE in what is now north-west England, Agricola “himself chose campsites, and himself was first to explore estuaries and forests,” (*loca castris ipse capere, aestuaria ac siluas ipse praetemptare, Ag. 20.2*). This not only shows Agricola as a competent, hard-working, and motivated leader, but also shows that knowledge of the landscape was of the utmost importance and that it needed to be explored.
Praetemptare also echoes the same language that Valerius uses in Jason’s speech before sailing on the sea for the first time (scio me cunctis e gentibus unum / inlicitas temptare uias, V. Fl. 1.196-197).\textsuperscript{412} In both there is a clear sense of testing and searching, clear indicators of a desire to explore and to acquire knowledge of the unknown. In 82 CE, Agricola pushed into Scotland and “crossed [the Solway Firth] in the lead ship and conquered in brief and successful engagements peoples unknown until that time,” (naue prima transgressus ignotas ad id tempus gentes crebis simul ac prosperis proelis domuit, Ag. 24.1). Here again we have Agricola and the Roman legions discovering and conquering unknown peoples, and presumably unknown places. The fact that Agricola travels in the first ship suggests two things: that he is a good general who leads from the front and that he is embodying the principle, seen especially in the Argonautica and the Punica, of being the first to go somewhere. In the Argonautica, Britain is presented as having been closed to the Romans but opened to Vespasian (tuque o pelagi cui maior aperti / fama, Caledonius postquam tua carbasu uexit / Oceanus Phrygios prius indignatus Iulos, V. Fl. 1.7-9) and in the panegyric of the Flavians in Punica 3 Vespasian was the first to campaign in the far reaches of Britain (inque Caledonios primus trahet agmina lucos, Sil. 3.598).

Tacitus also dramatizes the Britons’ reactions to the Romans, presenting them as surprised by the Roman incursion (Ag. 25.2):

Britannos quoque, ut ex captiuis audiebatur, uisa classis obstupefaciebat, tamquam aperto maris sui secreto ultimum uictis perfugium clauderetur.

Likewise the Britons, as was learned from captives, were stunned at the appearance of the fleet, as if, with their hidden sea having been opened, the last refuge for the conquered was closed.

Not only are the Britons surprised by the Romans, they are presented as viewing the Roman incursion as discovering (aperto) a hidden, secret place, recalling Valerius’ language about

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\textsuperscript{412} Cf. Verg. Aen. 8.113 ignotas temptare uias.
Vespasian opening the seas (*tuque o pelagi cui maior aperti*, V. Fl. 1.7). The adjective *ultimum* also gives the impression that there is nowhere else for the Britons to hide and, therefore, that there is nowhere else for the Romans to conquer. As we will see below, Britain was often called *Thyle* to which is appended the adjective *ultima*, giving it the character of a mythical place at the edge of the world.

Tacitus in fact thematizes this very idea in Agricola’s speech before the battle at Mons Graupius. Declaring that it is better to die honorably than live dishonorably, Agricola states that “it would not be inglorious to die at the very edge of the world and of nature,” (*nec inglorium fuerit in ipso terrarum ac naturae fine cecidisse*, Ag. 33.6). In the Roman imagination, Britain was the edge of the known world and Agricola and his legions were, for all intents and purposes, off the edge of the map without any knowledge of what lay beyond the next hill. For Tacitus, as he writes in Agricola’s speech, knowledge and conquest go hand-in-hand (Ag. 33.3):

> ergo egressi, ego ueterum legatorum, uos priorum exercituum terminos, finem Britanniae non fama nec rumore sed castris et armis tenemus: inuenta Britannia et subacta.

Therefore we have surpassed the boundaries, I those of previous governors, you those of earlier armies. We know the limits of Britain not in myth or rumor but because of camps and arms: we have discovered and conquered Britain.

With *inuenta Britannia et subacta* Tacitus puts it in the clearest terms possible: conquest and discovery are inextricably linked. Thus where we see conflict between humans and nature in Flavian epic, the same principle of simultaneous discovery and conquest, or attempted conquest, occurs, whether with Hannibal crossing the Alps, the Argives entering Nemea, or the Argonauts sailing on the ocean. While it is unlikely that all three Flavian epicists had the conquest of Britain

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413 Cf. Gades as the end of the earth, Sil. 1.141 *hominum finem*; 17.637 *terrarum finis*.

414 Rutledge (2000, 78): “Britain’s nature is fully established only through conquest, which Tacitus closely links with the process of Agricola’s discovery...Tacitus further links the process of discovery and conquest through Agricola’s remark that what was once known only from report or hearsay was now occupied by arms and encampments (33.3).” Cf. Tac. Ag. 27.1 *penetrandam Caledonium inueniendumque tandem Britanniae terminum continuo proeliorum cursu fremeante.*
in mind when including human/nature conflicts and encounters in their poems, the degree of congruity here is striking.

**Nature as the Enemy**

Tacitus thematizes discovery and conquest with nature as a key obstacle to Agricola’s success. Two passages in particular highlight the role of nature as an obstacle and enemy. The first is an account of Agricola’s soldiers celebrating their successes and the second comes in Agricola’s speech before the battle of Mons Graupius. When the legions, advancing separately by land and sea, would come together they shared stories of their exploits (25.1):

> cum simul terra, simul mari bellum impelleretur, ac saepe isdem castris pedes equesque et nauticus miles mixti copis et laetitia sua quisque facta, suos casus attollerent, ac modo siluarum ac montium profunda, modo tempestatum ac fluctuum aduersa, hinc terra et hostis, hinc uictus Oceanus militari iactantia compararentur.

The war was prosecuted by land and sea at the same time, and often the infantry and cavalry in the same camps with the marines would share meals in happiness and extol their deeds and misfortunes: on one side the boundless forests and hills, on the other the hostile storms and waves; the soldiers compared [their exploits], [the soldiers] boasting of [the conquest of] the earth and the enemy peoples, [the sailors], the conquered ocean.

It is easy to think of a war as being between two peoples and their armies: Greeks against Persians, Romans against Carthaginians, Romans against Britons. But we forget that the vast majority of time in the field is not spent fighting the enemy but navigating the naturescapes of enemy, or friendly, territory and jockeying for position. The enemy Britons are mentioned only briefly in a passage that otherwise focuses entirely on the Roman legions’ struggles with the naturescapes of Britain: forests, hills, and the ocean. Not only are these naturescapes obstacles for the Romans, and viewed as such, but they are also sources of pride and boasting (*iaactantia*), showing that these were not merely hardships to be borne but achievements in which to take pride. Furthermore, the pairing of *terra* with *hostis* makes the landscape on par with the enemy
that they were attempting to conquer, suggesting that a victory over the land (i.e. being in control of it) was not a lesser victory than one over the local population.

The second passage comes in Agricola’s speech before Mons Graupius, where he presents *natura* itself as their opponent (33.2):

> tot expeditionibus, tot proeliis, seu fortitudine adversus hostes seu patientia ac labore paene adversus ipsam rerum naturam opus fuit, neque me militum neque uos ducis paenituit.

Through so many campaigns and so many battles, whether there was need of courage against the enemy or endurance and toil against Nature itself, you did not let me down, nor I you.

As I discuss in the Introduction, *natura* is an elusive word that is dense with meaning, but Tacitus’ usage here is particular and concrete. Just as *terra* and *hostis* were paired above, here *hostes* and *ipsam rerum naturam* are opposed to each other: the former are the Romans’ human enemies, the latter refers to all of the other obstacles encountered: forests, mountains, swamps, rivers, and seas. This is clarified just a short while later in three separate parts of Agricola’s speech where he refers specifically to these obstacles separately from the Britons. He tells his soldiers that “often swamps, mountains, and rivers exhausted you on the march,” (saepe in agmine, cum uos paludes montesue et flumina fatigarent, 33.4), and “[you] penetrated forests and glens,” (siluas saltusque penetrantibus, 34.1), and that “to have marched so far, to have escaped the forests, to have crossed the estuaries, is illustrious and seemly for an advancing army (nam ut superasse tantum itineris euasisse siluas, transisse aestuaria pulchrum ac decorum in frontem, 33.5). These three excerpts give essentially a definition of *ipsam rerum naturam*, one that is expansive but includes only elements of the natural world: *paludes, montes, flumina, siluas, saltus, aestuaria*.  

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The forests, mountains, and oceans of Britain represent serious obstacles to and even enemies of Agricola’s campaigns, victories over which were to be celebrated. Military campaigns facing such obstacles were not only part of the Roman consciousness, they were happening contemporaneously with the writing of the Flavian epics, here in Britain as well as in Germany and Dacia. Although they do not need to have happened contemporaneously to be culturally significant, it certainly helps make such real-life human/nature encounters significant to the literature of the period and the literary audience.

**Tacitus, the *Agricola*, and Domitian**

It should come as no surprise, given the publication date of the *Agricola* (ca. 98 CE), that Tacitus is critical of the then-dead Domitian since many turned on the emperor once his reign was over and gave voice to criticisms long held in check to negatively compare the dead emperor with his successor.\(^{415}\) Still, there may be some truth to Domitian’s reaction to Agricola’s success, as reported by Tacitus, who states that Domitian feigned happiness but was secretly anxious since his recent triumph over the Germans was risible (*fronte laetus, pectore anxius...inerat conscientia derisui fuisse nuper falsum e Germania triumphum*, 39.1). While Domitian did recall Agricola from Britain and move the northern Roman border far to the south of where Agricola had penetrated, Agricola had had an unusually long tenure in Britain. Whether or not Domitian was envious of him, Agricola’s subsequent popularity shows the importance of military success. Indeed, as Tacitus states, “imperial excellence was the character of a good general,” (*ducis boni imperatoriam uirtutem esse*, 39.2). Agricola’s success, according to Tacitus, may have put

\[^{415}\text{Sailor (2008, 52): the text commemorates “Agricola’s achievement fittingly, but also...[ensures] that Domitian, too, receives the sort of recognition he [emphasis original] had earned...the “damnatio memoriae” to which Domitian was posthumously subjected.” Sailor (2008, 53) further argues “the work asks to be read as closely bound to its peculiar historical moment, but by its claim to largescale correction of representation seems not just to mark but itself to enact the difference between Domitianic and post-Domitianic; that is, it is not merely a consequence of the new order produced by Nerva and Trajan, but in turn plays a role in creating the features of this order that distinguish it from the era of Domitian.”}\]
pressure on Domitian. However, Tacitus was probably keen to present Agricola’s failure to attain an additional post after Britain, the proconsulship of either Africa or Asia being “the supreme accolade and crowning achievement of a successful senatorial career,” as the fault of Domitian, who was jealous of Agricola’s success and fearful of the man himself.\footnote{Hanson (1987, 181).} As Hanson argues, “the only explanation for [Domitian’s] fear lies in Tacitus’ unfavourable characterisation of the emperor” and concludes that “few now accept Tacitus’ characterisation of Domitian.”\footnote{Hanson (1987, 182).} Hanson further argues that Domitian had no reason to be jealous of Agricola, whose successes were peripheral to the security and integrity of the empire.\footnote{Hanson (1987, 181).}

4. *Argonautica*: Vespasian, the Argonauts, and External War

In the proem to the *Argonautica*, Valerius praises the Flavians and employs a *recusatio* to give his reasons for not composing an epic explicitly about the Flavians’ achievements.\footnote{Galli (2013, 56) notes the general shift in the Flavian era in the *recusatio* from an opposition between epic and lyric to one between contemporary history and Greek mythology, although this does not apply to Silius who neither has a *recusatio* nor writes on Greek mythology.} But, he invokes Vespasian for poetic inspiration and declares that Domitian will be the one to sing their praises in poetry.\footnote{On the proem in general, see Taylor (1994): “The prooemium, then, provides strong evidence of its composition during the principate of Vespasian” (215). Mitousi (2014, 154-155) highlights the importance of the proem: “In searching for the intended meaning of Valerius’ poem, the epic’s proem is instructive” (154) and “the intended meaning of the epic, as it is clearly stated in the proem, is that the innovative voyage of the Argo stands for the Flavian dynastic enterprise” (155). Stover (2012, 62-70) concludes that Valerius implicitly compares Vespasian with the Argonauts, presenting Vespasian as a figure who has overcome difficulties, surpassed his predecessors, and earned himself a place in the heavens. Zissos (2008, 79) has collected an extended bibliography on the passage, “the
with the military expeditions and campaigns of the Flavians, beginning with Vespasian (1.7-13).\footnote{Given Valerius’ tacit acknowledgement that his epic is not in fact prima (Hershkowitz 1998b, 35; Davis 1989, 48-58) we should perhaps not be surprised with the comparison between the prima freta and Vespasian’s “first” invasion of Britain.}

\begin{verbatim}
tuque o pelagi cui maior aperti fama, Caledonius postquam tua carbasu uexit
Oceanus Phrygios prius indignatus Iulos, eripe me populis et habenti nubila terrae,
namque potes, ueterumque faue ueneranda canenti facta uirum: uersam proles tua pandit Idumen,
sancte pater.\footnote{Ehlers prints sancte pater, ueterumque faue ueneranda canenti / facta uirum: uersam proles tua pandit Idumen, / namque potest but Kleywegt (2005, 15-16), based on Samuelsson (1905/06, 82) who was the first to correct this, argues that there is no parallel for namque potest, though potes is common in invocations, and that sancte pater and namque potes should be transposed. Zissos (2008) also adopts this emendation.}
\end{verbatim}

And you too, who have greater fame for opening the sea, after the Caledonian Ocean, previously having scorned the Phrygian Julii, carried your sails – raise me above the peoples and the cloud-bearing earth (for you can do so), and favor me as I sing the honored deeds of ancient men. Your own son sings of Judaea overthrown, august father.

The parallels between the Argo’s voyage and the opening of the ocean in particular around Britain are obvious. The prima freta are paralleled by Caledonius Oceanus prius, putting Jason and Vespasian in the same role as explorers expanding the horizons of humanity and the Roman Empire, respectively.\footnote{Toohey (1993, 194) sees Jason as a “generic imperial prototype” although he more closely aligns Jason with Domitian since he dates the Argonautica, at least its second half, to Domitian’s reign.} Vespasian is also positioned as the inheritor of Jason’s mission made clear by Jupiter’s prophecy (\textit{pateant montes siluæque lacusque / cunctaque claustra maris, spes et metus omnibus esto}, 1.556-557). Vespasian’s realization of the prophecy’s goals most widely discussed of the poem.” As Zissos (2008, 81) argues, the passage “combines in elegant synthesis an elaborate laudatio of the emperor and his sons, an appeal to Vespasian for poetic inspiration, and a recusatio in which the poet excuses himself from writing historical epic.” Strand (1972, 30) notes the passage’s emphasis on the “unity and magnificence of the new dynasty.” The praise of the Flavians is, as ever with such passages, greatly exaggerated. Vespasian participated in Claudius’ invasion of Britian in 43 and met with success but his role was minor and he was not the commander, as noted above.
draws a direct line from Jason to the Flavians, much like Silius’ praise in *Punica* 3 draws a line from the Republican heroes of the Second Punic War to the Flavians.  

The ocean itself is the agent that enables Vespasian’s achievements and, by rejecting the Julio-Claudians, approves of the *translatio imperii*, in a manner of speaking, from the Julio-Claudians to Vespasian and the Flavians. Valerius personifies the ocean here making it ‘scorn’ or ‘resent’ (*indignatus*) the presence of the Julio-Claudians. *Phrygios prius indignatus Iulos* is likely a reference to a number of failed or aborted Julio-Claudian expeditions to Britain: Julius Caesar’s failed expeditions in 55 and 54 BCE, Augustus’ two aborted expeditions, the wreck of Germanicus’ fleet in 16 CE, and Caligula’s failed campaign. However, it accepts Vespasian’s fleet and the expedition to Britain, specifically Vespasian’s role in Claudius’ invasion of Britain in 43 (*Caleodniius tua carbasu uexit / Oceanus, 1.8-9*). Valerius’ *Caledonius Oceanus* is echoed in Silius’ *inque Caledonios primus trahet agmina lucos* (Sil. 3.598) in the encomium of the Flavians. Whereas Silius adapts Valerius’ phrasing to reflect Agricola’s campaigns in Britain from 77-83, Valerius aligns his presentation of Britain with Vespasian’s involvement in the

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424 Taylor (1994, 216): “the invocation and dedication marks the beginning of a new era: the Julio-Claudian dynasty had now given way to the Flavian dynasty.” Whether the Flavians or the Roman imperial system is the *telos* of the *Argonautica* or Valerius’ view of history is another question entirely, but the connection between Jason and Vespasian established by the text is undeniable; see also Mitousi (2014, 167): “Throughout the Flavian epic, the civilizing and redemptory role of Argo’s expedition, and through it, of Vespasian’s regime, endorses the intended meaning of the epic. The deliverance of Hesione, Phineus, and Prometheus, the punishment of Amycus, the Clashing Rocks, or the revenge taken on Aeetes, even the recovery of the Golden Fleece, aim at the restoration of justice, of ethical or physical order.” Penwill (2013, 34) sees Valerius connecting the opening of the sea with the “long tradition of presenting seafaring as emblematic of humankind’s fall from the Golden Age and so of the pursuit of wealth and power of which civil war is the ultimate manifestation.” While not wrong, this ignores the tone of the proem and the spirit of the Argo’s voyage.

425 As Taylor (1994, 235) argues, “The symbolic substratum [of the poem] concerns the succession of the Flavian dynasty after the demise of the Julio Claudians.” Kleywegt (2005, 14) notes the comparative *maior* (1.7) initially creates the contrast between Vespasian and his predecessors.


427 For this use of *ueho* cf. Verg. *Aen.* 6.326 *hi, quos uheit unda.*
invasion of 43 and most importantly with the main theme of the poem and the protagonists’ mission.

The ocean’s acceptance of Vespasian’s fleet (carbasa uexit Oceanus) parallels, but reverses, Boreas’ reaction to the Argo’s voyage, who deems the voyage of the Argonauts a nefas (1.598) and calls the Argo an insanam ratem (1.605). Valerius emphasizes this connection even more with the word carbasa, which appears in Boreas’ speech (tantum hominum compesce minas dum litora iuxta / Thessala necdum aliae uiderunt carbasa terrae, 1.606-607). Although the Ocean’s reaction to the Julio-Claudians makes us think that it could react the same way to the Flavians and view their entrance into the oceans surrounding Britain as a transgression, Valerius diffuses this interpretation through his portrayal of Jason, discussed in chapter 1. Jason is concerned about committing a sacrilege by sailing on the ocean, but Jupiter declares the entire world open, effectively nullifying any concerns about transgression.428 Valerius’ proem also praises the Flavians, Titus in particular, for making war on external enemies, namely Judaea (Solymo nigrantem puluere fratre / spargentemque faces et in omni turre furentem, 1.13-14). As Bernstein argues, this shows Valerius reflecting on Lucan’s challenge to Rome in the proem to the Bellum Ciuile to make external rather than internal war.429 For Valerius, the Flavians have accepted Lucan’s challenge and shown themselves capable of directing the Roman impulse for civil war against external enemies. Yet, this also shows a clever re-branding of the identity of Judaea which, as I mention above, had been a Roman province since 6 BCE but which the Flavians presented in their coinage as non-Roman, barbarian so as to create the impression that Vespasian and Titus had conquered a foreign people. Although we may be tempted to portray the

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428 This does not mean, however, that sailing is not challenging or dangerous; as seen in the Punic, Jupiter likes to challenge the Romans.

429 Bernstein (2014, 163). Luc. 1.9-12 gentibus inuisis Latium praebere cruorem / cumque superba foret Babylon spolianda tropaet / Ausoniis umbraque erraret Crassus inulta / bella geri placuit nullos habitura triumphos?
Roman subjugation of Judaea as a kind of civil war, it is doubtful that the Romans themselves would have considered it such. Judaea was geographically and culturally far removed from Rome and the Jews were sufficiently “other” to be considered non-Roman.

**Freta peruia et auia**

The *freta peruia* of Valerius’ proem echo throughout the epic, as seen in chapter 2 above, in the numerous references not to explored places (*peruia*) but to wild, pathless places (*auia*). However, the parallel between Vespasian and the Argonauts suggests that the Hylas episode should be taken as a warning about the likely dangers of wildernesses and the unknown. Jason’s civilizing mission of exploration is overall positively portrayed by Valerius but it is not without its victims, innocent and otherwise. Hylas is one of the innocent whose ignorance of nature, geography, and the divine led to his kidnapping and separation from Hercules. Valerius shows wildernesses (*auia*) to be dangerous even for heroes like Hercules and, by illustrating the dangers of the unknown through Hylas’ misadventure in the forests of Mysia, Valerius emphasizes the need for knowledge through encounters with and conquest of nature. As Neptune makes clear in book 1, many people will die at sea, but this is the price of progress. Thus the exploration and conquest of nature is a key way for Valerius to praise Vespasian who helped open the *Caledonius Oceanus* for the Romans and pursued further campaigns in Britain.

**The Construction of the Argo**

Not only is nature sometimes antagonistic toward human endeavors but, as Valerius makes clear, humans can also work with nature to further their objectives. This is seen especially in the passage describing the construction of the Argo, discussed in chapter 2 above. Valerius clearly portrays the construction of the Argo as a positive achievement, a view which the local nature deities share. The benefits of this relationship are clearly lopsided: the naturescape of
Thespiae does not explicitly benefit from the building of the Argo, nor is it damaged either. Although there is no reason to project onto this passage a kind of utopian vision of human/nature cooperation, and no evidence that Valerius aims at this kind of reading, the Fauns’, Nymphs’, and rivers’ praise of the expedition shows their approval of the construction even though the beneficiaries are first and foremost the Argonauts. Thus, Argus, with the help of Pallas, is working with nature to open the sea to human expansion and discovery.

Just as the Argonauts’ expedition explicitly parallels Vespasian’s accomplishments so does the construction of the Argo, the means of the Argonauts’ discoveries, parallel the emperor’s achievements.\textsuperscript{430} Vespasian is explicitly Argonautic and thus Valerius implies that the emperor too has the ability to work with nature rather than just against it. We have seen from Tacitus’ \textit{Agricola} that nature was viewed as presenting a very real opponent to military campaigns, and the opposition that the Argonauts face from Boreas in particular bears this out. However, we should also see nature as a potential partner and view the exploration of unknown naturescapes not as victims of subjugation but as new allies joined to Rome. This, as Campbell suggests, makes Roman mastery of nature “more than mere triumphalism” in that in addition to controlling nature it “showed Rome working with the natural environment and making areas more accessible.”\textsuperscript{431}

\textsuperscript{430} Davis (2015, 171) provides an argument that complicates my more positivistic reading, arguing that Jason’s attempt to persuade Acastus to join the Argo’s expedition clearly alludes to Lucan’s \textit{Bellum Civile} and “allusion to Lucan at this point...foreshadows the Argonauts’ involvement in the struggle between Perses and Aetetes in book 6. In other words, participation in civil war is one of the great purposes for which the Argonauts are opening the sea. And if we think back to Vespasian’s opening of the sea in the proem, we might well reflect that he too was a civil warrior.” I would take issue with presenting Vespasian’s opening of the sea as indicative of Vespasian’s nature as a “civil warrior.” But he certainly is a civil warrior in the sense that he fought and won the civil war of 69 CE. Also, the Argonauts do not set out on their voyage with any desire to or idea that they will fight a civil war.

\textsuperscript{431} Campbell (2012, 376).
5. *Punica*: The Flavians and the Second Punic War

In *Punica* 3, Jupiter declares that Rome has become complacent and needs to be tested in a war with Carthage. The Second Punic War allowed for Roman domination of much of the Mediterranean after defeating Carthage. For Silius, Rome once again needs renewal for, without Carthage, Rome descended into civil war in the first century BCE, complacency during the reign of the Julio-Claudians, and civil war again in 69 CE. When Silius likely began composing the *Punica* in 81, there had been three emperors in as many years and, although the transitions had been peaceful, the poem’s plea for renewal reflects the poet’s anxiety about the imperial succession and the future of the empire.⁴³²

Silius encourages the Flavian dynasty to preserve the integrity of Rome through war, expansion, and the conquest of distant lands. Silius uses geography to frame his praise of the Flavian emperors and to communicate Scipio’s victory. Scipio’s triumphal procession features representations of the places taken from Carthage and, just as Scipio is triumphant over Africa and Spain, in the panegyric of the Flavians in book 3 Jupiter declares that Domitian will conquer the Near East and India. Scipio’s achievements are thus paralleled by those of the Flavians and Silius’ praise of Domitian encourages him to conquer the east to recreate for Flavian Rome the invigorating challenge that Hannibal presented to the early republic. Silius echoes the plea of the proem to Lucan’s *Bellum Ciuile* to make external rather than civil war, but for Silius, war with

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⁴³² Wilson (2013, 13) argues strongly against a historicizing approach to the *Punica*, but if one takes a historicizing approach, it should be Neronian rather than Flavian. He further argues that Silius is reflecting on “his experience of multiple emperors, successive imperial dynasties and the shifting conditions of political life in the second half of the century.” Yet, these same conditions were present in 81 which saw the third emperor in as many years accede to the throne, albeit within the same dynasty. His further argument that a historicizing approach removes the “transhistorical significance and value” (22) of the poem seems off as well. The fact that we as readers of these texts find meaning in them proves they retain their transhistorical value.
traditional, external enemies is not only preferable but essential to direct Rome’s destructive impulses outward and provide moral renewal for Rome.  

**Scipio’s Victory**

During the battle of Zama in Punica 17, Silius puts the stakes of the battle in a geographic framing, listing places that Hannibal conquered and his crimes against Rome (17.494-502):

> qui muros rapuere tuos miserasesque nefandi principium belli fecere, Sagunte, ruinas, qui sacros, Thrasymenne, lacus Phaethontia quique pollutionant tabo stagna, ac fiducia tanta quos tulit, ut superum regi soliumque domosque irent direptum, mactantur comminus uno exitio, redduntque animas, temerata ferebant qui secreta deum et primos reserasse negatas gressibus humanis Alpes.

The men who seized your walls and miserable ruins, Saguntum, and started a nefarious war, who polluted your sacred lake with gore, Trasimene, and the pools of Phaeton, and whom such terrible faith drove to seize the throne and home of the king of the gods, they are slaughtered in the close combat of a single destruction, and they return their lives, the men who boasted that they had violated the secret places of the gods and were the first to open the Alps denied to human footsteps.

Silius presents a catalogue of Hannibal’s conquests in clearly geographic terms, listing the places that Hannibal has conquered. His men have polluted Trasimene and the Po, attacked the gods, boasted of having violated the sacred places of the gods, and profaned the Alps. In turn, the Carthaginians are slaughtered (mactantur, 17.499) in righteous punishment for their actions. This passage is remarkable for the outright condemnation of Hannibal coming from the poet himself.

Silius’ language recalls that used by Jupiter in in *Punica* 12 when he urges Juno to put a stop to

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433 Cf. Luc. 1.13-14, 21-23 *heu quantum terrae potuit pelagique parari / hoc quem ciules hauserunt sanguine dextrae,...tum, si tantus amor belli tibi, Roma, nefandi, / totum sub Latias leges cum miseris orbem, / in te uerte manus.*

434 Santini (1991, 71) argues that human violence causes pollution of nature, but this is clearly not always the case. Santini (1991, 79) also argues this passage “helps to underline the punishment destined for all those who are guilty of *hybris* not only towards the Roman people, but also towards nature.” Marks (1999, 12) notes that, like Hannibal crossing the Alps, a boundary is also crossed when Carthage falls: Sil. 17.618-619 *Hic finis bello. reserantur protinus arces / Ausonio iam sponte duci.*
Hannibal’s theomachic tendencies.435 There, Jupiter accuses Hannibal of destroying Saguntum, crossing the Alps, chaining the Trebia, polluting Lake Trasimene, and even preparing to attack the gods.436 When Scipio defeats the Carthaginians, they scatter to distant lands, (Spain, Cyrene, Egypt) an effect which Silius likens to Mount Vesuvius scattering ash across the world (uidere Eoi, monstrum admirabile, Seres / lanigeros cinere Ausonio canescere lucos, 17.595-596). The ash from Vesuvius flies east all the way to China covering the land with Roman ash, a powerful image of the expansion of Roman power and influence.437

After the victory at Zama, Silius states that Scipio, newly minted as Africanus, was the first to bear the name of a conquered land, making Scipio’s victory one that is decidedly geographic in nature, a victory over all Africa rather than just Carthage.438 In his triumph, Scipio parades captured soldiers and the images of conquered places through the city, as is traditional. Along with Syphax and the Carthaginian general Hanno are Macedonians, Maurians, Numidians, Garamantes, and peoples from the Syrtis, all representing Carthage and her allies, followed by the images of various conquered places (17.635-642):

mox uictas tendens Carthago ad sidera palmas
ibat et effigies orae iam lenis Hiberae,

435 Chaudhuri (2014, 247) notes that “In this passage, perhaps more explicit than any other in the epic tradition, Silius makes clear the fundamental inextricability of theomachy and the aspiration to divinity, but he does so in a way that highlights the categorical separation of the human and the divine, and thus the inevitable failure of Hannibal.”

436 Sil. 12.695-698 fuerit delere Saguntum, / exaequare Alpes, imponere uincula sacro / Eridano, foedare lacus: etiamne parabit / nostras ille domos, nostras perrumpere in arces?

437 In his discussion of the Roman defeats as Erinnerungsorte, Haselmann (2018, 289-297) shows that although Ticinus, Trebia, Trasimene, and the Aufidus River at Cannae are initially viewed negatively by the Romans as monuments to their defeats, Scipio’s victory at Zama anchors them as battlegrounds where the Romans experienced the hardships necessary to win ultimate victory and renewal, as dictated by Jupiter’s prophecy in Punica 3. Scipio’s victory at Zama ultimately re-inscribes the waters of the Roman defeats, and Carthaginian victories, as places of memory for Rome’s resurgence.

438 As I note below, in calling Scipio the first to bear the name of a conquered land “the contemporary reader would have recognized the allusion to Domitian’s assumption of the cognomen Germanicus after his triumph over the Chatti and Dacians in 83” (Mezzanotte 2016, 451).
terrarum finis Gades ac laudibus olim
terminus Herculeis Calpe Baetesque lauare
solis equos dulci consuetus fluminis unda,
frondosumque apicem subigens ad sidera mater 640
bellorum fera Pyrene nec mitis Hiberus
cum simul illidit ponto, quos attulit, amnes.

Then came Carthage holding her chained hands to the stars and the image of the face of Iberia, now gentle, and Gades, the end of the earth, and Calpe, once the end for the praises of Hercules, and the Baetis that is accustomed to wash the horses of the Sun with the waves of its sweet waters, and Pyrene, the fierce mother of wars, thrusting its leafy peak to the stars, and the Ebro, not gentle when it strikes the sea along with the rivers it brought down.

In Roman triumphs, the images of captured lands, cities, rivers, and mountains were carried through the city.439 Although Silius’ account of Scipio’s triumph is a fictionalized description that “echoes Vergil’s triumphal description on the shield of Aeneas and cannot be taken as a historical commentary on Scipio’s triumph...it does, however, presuppose that Silius’ own readers were familiar with the kinds of display depicted.”440 Here, Silius focuses on specifically those places that Carthage controlled before the war began, Spain south of the Ebro in particular. The last image, and the one that gets the most attention, is that of Hannibal fleeing from Zama. Silius’ focus here is on specifically the new lands in Spain and Africa that Scipio has now gained for Rome.441 Not only are these new lands but they extend west to the end of the earth, terrarum

439 On images in triumphs see Beard (2007, 143-186) and depictions of cities and landscapes Östenberg (1999: 2009, 199-244); on the idea of “triumphal geography” in Pliny’s Natural History see Murphy (2004, 129-164). Östenberg (1999, 195): “Thus, through their choice of terms, the Latin authors reveal that the paintings taken as booty and the representations produced for processional use were of two different kinds, as were these representations and the paintings of battles exhibited in public places.” Ruperti (1798, 604): “victas tendens Carthago ad s. p., feminae habitu, vt solitum, depicta...Simulacra vrbium eburnea quandoque, quandoque lignea.” Spaltenstein (1990, 485): “Les villes sont souvent représentées comme des femmes (e.g. n.4,408), qui prennent ici l’attitude des suppliants (vers 15, 561).”

440 Östenberg (1999, 200) continues: “ancient sources far more frequently suggest the use of three-dimensional models” rather than personifications for the representation of cities. However, Östenberg (1999, 215-216) notes that “peoples and rivers paraded in the triumphs were shown as personifications. The literary sources are clear on this point, and there is also the triumphal frieze preserved on the arch of Titus in Rome.”

441 Spaltenstein (1990, 485): “L’Espagne est traditionnellement belliqueuse (n.3,328), comme le précise ‘mater bellorum’ 640, d’où ‘iam lenis’ 636.”
fines, at Gades, showing that they have expanded as far west as possible and marking the end of Rome’s westward expansion and inviting the Flavians to expand in new directions.442

**Scipio and the Encomium of the Flavians**

Scipio’s triumph, with its clear geographic framing, looks back to the Flavian encomium in *Punica* 3 and in particular parallels Scipio’s achievements with Domitian’s.443 As Hannibal descends from the Alps into Italy, Venus approaches Jupiter and begs to know when Rome’s suffering will end, a scene modeled on the *parce metu* scene in *Aeneid* 1.444 Echoing Vergil’s *imperium sine fine*, Venus states that Hannibal threatens to end Roman *imperium* (*Alpibus imposuit Libyam finemque minatur / imperio, 3.563-564*). In response, Jupiter lays out his plan for Rome, to test them in war and reinvigorate the *virtus* that they have lost. He relates a narrative of decline since the founding of Rome and states that the war with Hannibal will make Romans strong enough to undertake the future creation of the Roman Empire. Specifically, the losses and difficulties of the war are the cause of Rome’s future greatness (3.584-590):445

\[
\text{iamque tibi ueniet tempus, quo maxima rerum} \\
\text{nobilior sit Roma malis. hinc nomina nostro} \\
\text{non indigna polo refert labor, hinc tibi Paulus,} \\
\text{hinc Fabius gratusque mihi Marcellus optimis.} \\
\text{hi tantum parient Latio per ululera regnum,} \\
\text{quod luxu et multum mutata mente nepotes} \\
\text{non tamen euertisse queant.}
\]

And there will come a time for you when Rome, the greatest of all, will be more outstanding because of its losses. Through this, labor brings not unworthy names to my domain, thus Paulus for you, thus Fabius and Marcellus beloved by me because of his

442 Spaltenstein (1990, 485): “La ville de Gadès (vers 637) est située aux confins du monde (n.1,141), comme Calpé (vers 638), qui représente la limite géographique des exploits d’Hercule.”

443 For a detailed analysis of this scene, see Wistrand (1956, 5-30); also Laudizi (1989, 29-54) and Marks (2005b).

444 On a similar scene in the *Thebaid* between Bacchus and Jupiter, see Hershkowitz (1997).

spoils. These men will provide through wounds for Latium such power, which luxury and
their descendants’ declining character will not be able to destroy.

Rome must suffer defeats, specifically the struggles and losses of Paulus, Fabius, and Marcellus,
before Scipio can emerge victorious. Their achievements, according to Jupiter, will be so great
that their descendants’ luxus and lackluster morals (mutata mente) will not ruin it. Jupiter
declares that Venus’ descendants will rule for a long time (longo regnabitur aeuo, 3.593) but
will give way to a new dynasty. He then skips two-hundred and fifty years of Roman history to
prophesy the coming of Vespasian, creating a direct connection between the Republican heroes
of the Second Punic War and the Flavian dynasty. One of the key elements of the panegyric of
the Flavian dynasty is their far-flung military exploits and those yet to be undertaken beyond the
borders of the Roman Empire. This future expansion is cast as a struggle against the lands
beyond the Roman world and Silius casts Vespasian as the conqueror of distant, nearly mythical
lands (3.597-600):

hinc pater ignotam denabit uincere Thylen
inque Caledonios primus trahet agmina lucos,
compescet ripis Rhenum, reget impiger Afros
palmiferamque senex bello domitabit Idymen. 600

Then the father will deign to conquer unknown Thyle, will be the first to lead an army
into the Caledonian forests, will control the Rhine with banks, will energetically rule
Africa, and as an old man will conquer palm-bearing Judaea in war.

Jupiter mentions events connected to five of Vespasian’s appointments or duties in the empire:
victory over Thyle, a campaign against Caledonia, restraining the Rhine, ruling Africa, and
conquering Judaea. In a matter of four lines Silius surveys much of the Roman Empire and its
boundaries. Jupiter’s prophecy covers not only the entirety of the Roman Empire, but even

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446 As Bessone (2013, 92) argues, contrary to those who see Lucan everywhere in Flavian epic, the Punica features
none of the “protest of the Pharsalia...the praise of libertas...[or] condemnation of the imperial system....On the
contrary, there is the explicit, insistent and coherent indication of continuity between Republic and Empire.”
beyond its borders to the unknown north and west (Thyle was Britain but also the far west), all
the way south to Africa, and to the Near East.\footnote{448} Although Silius is presenting them in
excessively flattering terms, these are historical achievements of Vespasian’s. Jupiter declares
that Vespasian will be a victor over unknown Thyle in the far north and will be the first to
campaign against the Caledonian forests (\textit{inque Caledonios primus trahet agmina lucos, Pun.
3.598}).\footnote{449} Thyle and \textit{Caledonios lucos} must be read as references to the invasion of Britain in 43
and Agricola’s campaigns, respectively.\footnote{450} In the context of Vespasian’s military career, Thyle
cannot possibly refer to anything but Britain and the adjective \textit{Caledonius}, used often of modern
Scotland, must here also be used of southern Britain or Britain as a whole and likely refers to
Agricola’s campaign from 77-83. While it refers to Britain, Thyle was often called \textit{ultima Thyle}
and was viewed as being at or beyond the edge of the world. This neatly parallels Scipio’s
acquisition of Gades, the \textit{fines terrarum}. Furthermore, the description of Judaea as \textit{palmifera}
(3.600) reflects the iconography of contemporary Flavian coinage, with a palm tree replacing the
traditional \textit{tropaeum} on coins depicting the subjugation of Judaea. \textit{Palmifera} characterizes
Judaea not as a Roman province but a distant, foreign place ripe for Roman domination. From
the north Silius turns east to the Rhine. \textit{Compescet ripis Rhenum} must refer to Vespasian’s time

\footnote{447} See Murphy (2004, 131-133) for the concept of the “survey on high,” also known as the cartographic view. As
Murphy (2004, 132) argues, “surveying a place from on high is logically prior to owning or conquering it.”

\footnote{448} See Wijsman (1998, 318) who argues that Roman authors often used Thyle to refer to Britain and notes that
Thyle was believed to be far to the west rather than the north; see Stat. \textit{Silu.} 3.5.20 \textit{Hesperiae...Thyles}.

\footnote{449} Cf. Hercules at Sil. 3.496 \textit{primus inexpertas adiit Tirynthius arces;} Hannibal at Sil. 3.516-517 \textit{rumpit inaccessos
aditus atque ardua primus / exsuperat summaque vocat de rupe cohortes.}

\footnote{450} The identity of Thyle has been a great source of interest and consternation for scholars since it is taken to refer to
Britain, the Shetland Islands, or even Iceland or Norway. However, here the context is clear and identifies Thyle as
Britain. Ruperti (1795, 243): “\textit{Pater, Vespasianus, vincet Caledonios} (in Britannia barbara, nunc Scotia) h. e.
Britannos...\textit{Thule} extremini septemtriones insula, veteribus \textit{ignota}, quorum alii Schetlandiam, alii Islandiam, alii
denique \textit{Scandinauiae penins. (Sueciam et Norwegiam) intellexisse putantur}.” Spaltenstein (1986, 249-250): “\textit{Thyle}
est une île mystérieuse, que l’on identifie aujourd’hui avec l’Islande ou la Norvège, ou encore avec les îles Shetland
(et ‘Thyles’ 17,416 peut même désigner toute l’Angleterre). En tout cas, on la situait au bout du monde, au nord
\textit{(Verg.georg.1,30 ‘ultima Thyle’)}.”
as legate stationed in Argentorate (modern Strasbourg) which is located on the Rhine. The meaning of *compescet Rhenum* is unclear but may refer to a project undertaken to control the flow of the Rhine, showing Vespasian as having the ability to control a river. *Reget impiger Afros* refers to Vespasian’s time as governor of *Africa Proconsularis* starting in 63 and *domitabit Idymen* certainly refers to his subjugation of Judaea beginning in 67 CE.

Pride of place goes to Domitian, the current emperor at the time of writing. For the encomium of Domitian, Silius mixes real with imagined, future accomplishments and conquests. Compared to his father’s and brother’s achievements, Domitian’s are modest but Silius does his best to praise his accomplishments and predict future successes (3.607-617):

\[
\text{at tu transcendes, Germanice, facta tuorum,} \\
\text{iam puer auricomo praeformidate Batauo.} \\
\text{nec te terruerint Tarpei culminis ignes:} \\
\text{sacrilegas inter flammass seruabere terriss.} \\
\text{nam te longa manent nostri consortia mundi.} \\
\text{huic laxos arcus olim Gangetica pubes} \\
\text{summittet, uacuasque ostendet Bactra pharetras.} \\
\text{hic et ab Arctoo currus aget axe per urbem,} \\
\text{ducet et Eoos, Baccho cedente, triumphos.} \\
\text{idem indignantem tramittere Dardana signa} \\
\text{Sarmaticis uictor compescet sedibus Histrum.} \\
\]

But you, Germanicus, will transcend the deeds of your family, who already as a boy will be feared by the golden-haired Batavi. Nor will the Tarpeian fires have frightened you: among sacrilegious flames you will be saved for the good of the earth. For a long partnership over our heavens waits for you. In the future, the youth of the Ganges will lower their loosened bows to him, and the Bactrians will reveal their empty quivers. And from the north he will drive a chariot through the city and will lead eastern triumphs while Bacchus yields. And when the Danube indignantly refuses passage to Roman standards, as a victor he will restrain the river against the Sarmatian homeland.

Silius compares implicitly Domitian with Scipio Africanus by addressing him with the geographic appellation Germanicus. Silius touches on Domitian’s very minor role in suppressing the revolt of the Batavi in Gaul (*auricomo...Batavo*), his defeat of the Chatti in 82/3 CE and

\[451\] Titus’ brief reign is summed up with *gentis bella Palestinae...delebit*, referring to his repression of the revolt in Judaea culminating in the sack of Jerusalem in 70 CE.
annexation of territory across the Rhine (Germanice), and fortification of the Limes Germanicus. Jupiter predicts that the Indians and Parthians will one day be conquered by Domitian and brought under Roman rule. Domitian’s triumph over the German tribes in the north (awarded to himself after his “conquest” of the Chatti) is paralleled with his expected triumph over the east, with even Bacchus yielding before him (Baccho cedente). With both Bacchus and Hercules having conquered the Far East in myth, this presents Domitian as a Herculean trailblazer. The phrase Gangetica pubes (3.612) further puts the laudes Domitiani in terms of geography and nature. As seen in chapter 3, rivers are closely connected to the local populations, which are often assimilated to rivers in literary references. By presenting the Gangetica pubes as submitting to Domitian, it is prophesied that the emperor will be victorious over both the Indians and the Ganges, that is over people and their lands. Yet, as ever, Silius cannot avoid historical reality, in this case the apparent difficulties on the Danube against the Sarmatians which he spins as Domitian victoriously controlling the Danube (compescet…Histrum). Silius compares father and son, for just as Vespasian will control the Rhine (compescet, 3.599), Domitian will control (compescet, 3.617) the Danube in 92.

Silius thus creates a sense of continuity from Vespasian to Domitian and portrays Domitian as also having power over nature, controlling the Danube like his father and like the

452 Jones (1992, 130-131). Although this may also be a reference to Domitian’s quelling of the revolt of Lucius Antonius Saturninus, the governor of Lower Germany, aided by the Chatti in 89 CE, or both.

453 Cf. Verg. Aen. 6.804-805 where Vergil similarly evokes Liber’s triumph over the east to praise Augustus. Moynihan (1985) argues that Roman conceptions of the geography of the world made it seem like world conquest was feasible: “For them, the Empire was not a vulnerable band of land circling the Mediterranean at one tip of the Eurasian land-mass. Rather, it was the larger portion of the habitable earth, poised on the verge of world rule” (151). He continues: “Again and again, the Romans sought to follow Alexander to the ends of the earth – Corbulo (under Nero), Trajan, Julian. We cannot understand why the old dream took so long to die unless we understand the ancient maps. And when Ptolemy showed his contemporaries a far vaster world, perhaps the old dream faded, and the Romans came to perceive themselves as many moderns perceive them: besieged by enemies on every front” (156).

elder Scipio fighting Eridanus. Unlike Hannibal who pollutes Italy’s waters with blood, the elder Scipio is never accused of the same crimes after fighting Eridanus. Thus he, the Flavians, and the Romans in general, are exonerated by Silius from any wrongdoing with respect to harming or polluting nature. In fact, just the opposite is true: the Romans are glorified and revel in the conquest of nature, as seen not only in Silius’ praise of the Flavians and Scipio’s battle with Eridanus, but also in Tacitus’ *Agricola*, as discussed above. Scipio and the Flavians positively expand the empire and Roman influence through conquest. By implicitly comparing Scipio with Domitian and Africanus with Germanicus, Silius encourages Domitian to look further afield to the east for a traditional Roman enemy that will challenge Rome like Carthage did.

### 6. *Thebaid*: Domitian’s Campaigns and the Rivers of the *Thebaid*

Statius also invites his readers to reflect on the actions and achievements of the Flavian dynasty but gives a traditional *recusatio* at the beginning of the *Thebaid*, declaring his inability to sing of Domitian’s triumphs (1.17-22):

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quando Itala nondum
signa nec Arctoos ausim spirare triumphos
bisque iugo Rhenum bis adactum legibus Histrum
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455 Silius is silent on Domitian’s retreat in Britain, moving the Roman frontier many miles to the south from where Agricola had established it, an apparent reversal of his father’s achievements in the area.

456 Cf. Lucan’s plea in the proem to the *Belum Ciuile* to make external war, as noted above. Ruperti (1795, 244-245): “Silius imitatur morem poetarum seculi Augustei, qui in Augusti gratiam de rebus eius *Parthicis Indicisque* magnifice loquuntur; quorum tamen adulatio honestior est, quoniam Augustus arma certe contra Parthos parauit, eoque tantum quasi rebus stantibus, vt signa militaria restituerent. De Domitiano ne hoc quidem constat.” Gibson (2013, 80-81) notes the combination of panegyric with protreptic, as in Evadne’s speech to Theseus in *Thebaid* 12; such a combination is similarly achieved by Silius here.

457 Galli (2013, 65) argues Statius’ “*recusatio* appears no different from a denial: Statius claims to be an epic poet, but he does not want to be Domitian’s epic poet. He is the Flavian epic poet who returns to *recusatio* in a more articulated manner to defend his choice in poetry, and this is probably evidence of Statius’ difficulties with complying with imperial ideology.” Furthermore, Penwill (2013, 41) observes, citing Henderson (1991, 34; 1993, 165-167) “the *Thebaid* becomes, as John Henderson suggests, a narrative of Thebes’ ‘year of four emperors’ (Eteocles, Polynices, Creon, Theseus), of civil strife whose atrocities clearly recall those of 69 CE.”
et coniurato deiectos uertice Dacos
aut defensa prius uix pubescentibus annis
bella Iouis

For I would not yet dare to speak of Italian standards or northern triumphs, the Rhine
twice under the yoke and the Danube twice subjugated by [Roman] rule, or, the treachery
on the mountain-top having been discovered, the defeated Dacians or the wars of Jupiter
defended against when scarcely an adult.

Statius singles out Domitian’s campaign against the Chatti in 82/3 and Saturninus’ revolt in 89
(bisque iugo Rhenum), victories against the Dacians in 84/5 and 88 and the attack of the Dacians
and Sarmatians in 92 (bis adactum legibus Histrum / et coniurato deiectos uertice Dacos), and
the Vitellians’ attack on the Capitoline in 69 from which Domitian barely escaped. The first four
victories, however, are put in clear natural/geographic terms: it is the Rhine and the Danube that
Domitian conquered, not the Chatti and the Dacians.\footnote{Mart. Ep. 10.7.1 calls the Rhine “father of nymphs and rivers,” \textit{Nympharum pater amniumque, Rhene}.}
As Campbell puts it, “emperors, as the
embodiment of the \textit{res Romana}, must overcome all obstacles of terrain and natural phenomena to
advance the empire,” and as a representation of the local peoples, to control a river was to
control the people near it.\footnote{Campbell (2012, 370).} In fact, “once it was within Roman power, the Rhine could represent
the defeat of the whole German nation.”\footnote{Campbell (2012, 372).} The same can be said of the Danube, which the Histri
revered and by which they swore before going into battle.\footnote{Campbell (2012, 371).}

The battle between Hippomedon and the Ismenos should be seen as Statius’ comment on
Domitian’s victories over the Rhine and Danube as presented in the proem to the \textit{Thebaid}.
Statius specifically chose to communicate Domitian’s successes as victories over two great
rivers, not the local populations, and Hippomedon’s battle with the Ismenos dramatizes just such
a conflict between humans and the natural world. Ismenos views Hippomedon as a sacrilegious

\footnote{Mart. Ep. 10.7.1 calls the Rhine “father of nymphs and rivers,” \textit{Nympharum pater amniumque, Rhene}.}
\footnote{Campbell (2012, 370).}
\footnote{Campbell (2012, 372).}
\footnote{Campbell (2012, 371).}
criminal for killing his grandson and polluting his river with blood and corpses. This reflects on Domitian’s conquest of the Rhine and Danube and suggests that his actions are similarly criminal and sacrilegious. Ismenos’ point of view, however, parallels that of the Germans and Dacians in that any attack on their rivers or territory would be criminal. It is impossible to conclude which point of view Statius’ sympathizes with, but the parallels between Hippomedon’s conflict with the Ismenos and Domitian’s conflict with the Rhine and Danube suggest that the emperor’s wars and campaigns should be analyzed with greater nuance and should not be considered simple victories over Roman enemies. Crenaeus and Ismenos explicitly identify Hippomedon as a foreign invader, one closely identified with his home waters of Lerna in Argolis, invading Theban waters that spring from Mt. Cithaeron. Hippomedon fails to defeat Ismenos but the implication is that if he had conquered the river, it would have become Argive rather than Theban. This parallels the battle between Scipio the Elder and Eridanus: the latter is an Italian river that sided with Carthage after Hannibal claimed its source in the Alps. Thus Scipio is attempting to punish the river and reclaim it for Italy and Rome.

Although the parallel between Hippomedon/Ismenos and Domitian/Rhine/Danube is clear, it is also inseparable from Statius’ other representations of Domitian’s interactions with and triumphs over rivers. In Siluae 1.1, Statius provides an ekphrasis of Domitian’s colossal equine statue and declares Domitian’s clemency greater than Julius Caesar’s with Domitian “not quick to attack the raging foreign enemies, granting fides to the Chatti and Dacians,” (qui nec in externos facilis saeuire furores / das Cattis Dacisque fidem, Stat. Silu. 1.1.26-27). He characterizes Domitian in this way, despite the fact that his horse’s “bronze hoof treads the hair of the captive Rhine,” (aerea captiui crinem terit ungula Rheni, Stat. Silu. 1.1.51). Statius certainly stretches the truth when he writes that Domitian showed clemency to the Chatti and
Dacians and approaches closer to reality with the description of the horse’s hoof on the head of the Rhine. This is, however, not to say that Statius does not communicate an appreciation for the security of the empire, but rather that he is less than sanguine about the prospect of authoritarian domination. Criticism of authoritarianism is at the core of the *Thebaid* and for a man of Greek descent, Statius seems to exhibit a degree of personal sympathy for peoples, and rivers, facing foreign invaders.\(^{462}\)

Statius’ depiction of human/river interactions indicates that there is a negotiation of identities when humans and nature meet, one that essentially represents the conflict between human identities in so far as a river acts as a symbol of the local human inhabitants. Thus Hippomedon threatens to turn Ismenos into an Argive river by conquering it, just as Domitian turns the Rhine and Danube into Roman rivers by conquering them, the Chatti, and the Dacians. For Statius, conquest does not erase but rather irrevocably alters the identity and character of rivers, an experience for which Statius has both sympathy and empathy.

**The Nemean Forest and the Sack of Jerusalem**

Statius further criticizes Flavian conquests through the depiction of the destruction of the Nemean forest, through which, I argue, Statius looks back to the Flavian siege and conquest of Jerusalem. Josephus’ account of the siege of Jerusalem provides important evidence for my theory that the Flavian epicists were reflecting on the campaigns of the Flavian emperors, including the conquest of Judaea, referenced explicitly in *Punica* 3 and *Argonautica* 1. In the *Bellum Iudaicum*, Josephus paints a pathetic picture of the state of the land around Jerusalem as a result of the Romans’ siege works (*BJ* 6.1.5-8):

\[ Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ καίτοι πολλὰ περὶ τὴν τῆς ὀλῆς συγκομιδῆς ταλαιπωροῦμενοι τὰ χῶματα διήγειραν μιᾶ καὶ εἶκοσιν ἡμέραις, κείραντες, ὡς προείρηται, τὴν περὶ τὸ ἄστυ χώραν ἐπ᾽ ἐνενήκοντα σταδίους ἐν κύκλῳ πᾶσαν. τὴν δ’ ἐλεεινή καὶ τῆς γῆς ἤθεα: τὰ γὰρ πάλαι\]

\(^{462}\) See Dominik (1989), Criado (2013), and Criado (2015).
The Romans, meanwhile, though sorely harassed in the collection of timber, had completed their earthworks in one and twenty days, having, as already stated, cleared the whole district around the town to a distance of ninety stades. Pitiful too was the aspect of the country, sites formerly beautified with trees and parks now reduced to an utter desert and stripped bare of timber; and no stranger who had seen the old Judaea and the entrancingly beautiful suburbs of her capital, and now beheld her present desolation, could have refrained from tears or suppressed a sigh at the magnitude of the change. For the war had ruined all the marks of beauty, and no one who knew it of old, coming suddenly upon it, would have recognized the place, but, though beside it, he would have looked for the city.

In a text that focuses mainly on the Jewish people, their factions, and their conflict with Rome, it is striking to have a passage such as this that focuses on the landscape around Jerusalem. The passage has two effects. First, it presents the Romans as destroyers of nature and, second, presents this destruction as something that is negative, not because it is inherently transgressive against nature, but because of how it affects the Jews and people familiar with Jerusalem. Josephus emphasizes the completeness of the destruction and its impact: the scene is pitiful (ἦν δὲ ἐλεεινή καὶ τῆς γῆς ἡ θέα) with the entire area around the city turned into a desert (πανταχόθεν ἡρήμωτο) and stripped of its trees (περικέκοπτο τὴν ὕλην). For Josephus, it is the magnitude of the change and the destruction of the place’s beauty that are the greatest crimes. It is noteworthy that he specifically singles out the trees, both individual trees (δένδρεσι) and groves in parks (παραδείσοις), as the reason for the area’s beauty.

The deforestation around Jerusalem, as attested by Josephus, parallels the deforestation of Nemea in an uncanny way. The sack of the Nemean forest in Thebaid 6, especially given its relationship with Vergil’s account of the fall of Troy in Aeneid 2, looks back to the Flavian siege

463 Adapted from Thackeray’s (1928) translation.
and sack of Jerusalem and may even have been influenced by Josephus’ account. With Josephus’ *Bellum Iudaicum* having been published around 75 CE, Statius had ample opportunity to read the work and perhaps to be influenced by Josephus’ depiction of the siege of Jerusalem. It is impossible to prove a connection between *Thebaid* 6, written some fifteen years after the sack of Jerusalem in 70 but, as I show in chapter 2, the Nemea episode provides a clear critique of the violent sacking of cities in general and of the Argives’ behavior in particular. By listing Domitian’s military accomplishments in his *recusatio*, Statius invites the reader to reflect not only on them but on other campaigns of the Flavian dynasty.

7. Conclusion

The *Argonautica*, *Punica*, and *Thebaid* reflect on contemporary concerns of the Roman Empire and its ruling dynasty and this is communicated both implicitly and explicitly, especially in the poems’ *proemia*. The role of nature in them is no exception to this and suggests a deep intertwining of interest in nature and the cultural and political relevance of encounters with nature. Tacitus’ *Agricola* clearly continues this trend by making conflict with nature a key aspect of Agricola’s campaigns in Britain. However, as I have shown with the Nemea episode in the *Thebaid* and the sack of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the correlation between texts and contemporary events need not be one-to-one, for example, the Argo’s journey being a parallel for Vespasian crossing the English Channel. The human/nature conflict of the Argives’ sacking of a forest “city” in Nemea reflects on the purely human conflict between the Romans and the Jews and acts as a metaphor for the sack of Jerusalem. While Statius criticizes the Flavian regime, Silius, through the example of Scipio, urges Domitian to look further afield for a great enemy against which to test Rome. Although some of these specific conclusions are necessarily speculative.
(e.g. about the sack of Jerusalem), the overwhelming impression is one of consistent engagement with contemporary events and critical interrogation of Flavian ideology and military campaigns.
CONCLUSION

Empire and the conquest of nature go hand-in-hand for the Romans. Thus it should come as no surprise that the same impulse to explore, expound, and catalogue nature and human encounters with nature that drives Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis* should appear in the epic poetry composed by Pliny’s contemporaries. Not only is nature a common interest of the Flavian epicists, but their depictions of human encounters with nature show their deeper reflection on the conquest of nature and the potential benefits of cooperation with nature. The striking parallels between the three Flavian epics’ depictions of human conflict with nature illustrate the particular appeal of the natural world for the Flavian poets’ audience. While the *Argonautica*, *Punica*, and *Thebaid* are not poems about nature, they show tremendous sensitivity to the natural world and intertwine nature with their central themes. In Flavian epic, human encounters with nature are a means to examine how humans and nature shape each other and to explore human morality as seen through the treatment of nature. Valerius, Silius, and Statius generally avoided composing epics on current events (Statius’ *De Bello Germanico* is a noteworthy exception) choosing instead Greek myth and distant Roman history for their subject matter. However, what emerges from these texts is an impression of three poets intensely concerned with the present and the political, cultural, and ethical implications of Roman imperial expansion who use naturescapes for the interrogation and approbation of the military achievements of the reigning dynasty.
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