

## *Crudelis Gloria: Casting the Nemean Serpent as the Genius Loci in Thebaid 5*

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### Passage 1: Statius' Description of the Nemean Serpent

Stat. *Theb.* 5.505-13.

505 Interea campis, **nemoris sacer horror** Achaei,  
terrigena exoritur serpens tractuque solute  
immanem sese vehit ac post terga relinquit.  
livida fax oculis, tumidi stat in ore veneni  
spuma virens, ter lingua vibrat, terna agmina adunci  
510 dentis, et **auratae crudelis gloria frontis**  
prominet. Inachio sanctum dixere Tonanti  
agricolae, **cui cura loci et silvestribus aris**  
**pauper honos; nunc ille dei circumdare templa**  
**orbe uago labens...**

Meanwhile in the fields, a **sacred horror** of the Achaean **grove**, the earth-born serpent rises and draws its immense body in a loose track, leaving behind its back. There is livid fire in its eyes and the green foam of swelling venom in its mouth. It flicks its three tongues across three rows of hooked teeth and a **cruel glory juts** out from his **golden brow**. The farmers said he was sacred to the Inachian Thunderer, for whom there was **care of the place and a poor offering upon woodland altars**. Now it **encircles** the shrines of the god, **gliding in a wandering circle...**

### Passage 2: Serpents in the Laocoön Episode in *Aeneid 2*

V. A. 2.203-7

ecce autem gemini a Tenedo tranquilla per alta  
(horresco referens) immensis orbibus angues  
205 incumbunt pelago pariterque ad litora tendunt;  
pectora quorum inter fluctus arrecta **iubaeque**  
**sanguineae** superant undas...

Behold twin serpents with immense coils (I shudder to speak of it) hastening over the tranquil deep from Tenedos and stretching towards the shore, side by side. Their chests raised high over the tide and their **bloody crests** top the waves...

### Passage 3: Vergil's Description of the *Genius Loci* or *Famulum Parentis*

V. A. 5.84-96.

dixerat haec, adytis cum lubricus anguis ab imis  
85 septem ingens gyros, septena volumina traxit  
amplexus placide tumulum lapsusque per aras,  
caeruleae cui terga notae maculosus et **auro**  
**squamam incendebat fulgor**, ceu nubibus arcus  
mille iacit varios adverso sole colores.  
90 obstipuit visu Aeneas. ille agmine longo  
tandem inter pateras et levia pocula serpens  
libavitque dapes rursusque innoxius imo  
successit tumulo et depasta altaria liquit.  
hoc magis inceptos genitori instaurat honores,  
95 **incertus geniumne loci famulumne parentis**  
**esse putet.**

He had spoken these words, when a giant slippery serpent drew seven circles in seven coils from the bottom of the tomb, peacefully surrounding the tomb and gliding through the altars, whose back was dappled with blue markings, and **his scales gleamed with gold**, just as a rainbow casts a thousand different colors among the clouds when hit by the sunlight. Aeneas was awestruck by the sight. Finally, slithering in a long line among the bowls and polished cups, it tasted the feast, and entirely harmless it returns to the depths of the tomb and leaves the altars where it fed. More eagerly, [Aeneas] renews his father's interrupted rites, **unsure whether to think [the serpent] was the genius of the place or the servant of his father.**

**Passage 4: Cicero's Description of the Campanian Serpent**

Cic. *de Div.* 1.72.

...ut in Sullae scriptum historia videmus, quod te inspectante factum est, ut, cum ille in agro Nolano immolaret ante praetorium, **ab infima ara subito anguis emergeret**, cum quidem C. Postumius haruspex oraret illum, ut in expeditionem exercitum educeret; id cum Sulla fecisset, tum ante oppidum Nolum florentissima Samnitium castra cepit.

...in Sulla's History we see an occurrence which you witnessed: while he was sacrificing in the territory of Nola in front of his headquarters, **a snake suddenly emerged from the bottom of the altar** and Gaius Postumius the haruspex begged him to lead out the army onto the offensive. When Sulla did this, he captured the strongly fortified Samnite camp which lay in front of Nola.

*Trans: Flower 2017*

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