

Tiresias and Domitian: a Study in Statian Necromancy  
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Stattius' necromancy as seen in *Thebaid 4* has a function separate from merely conforming to the epic tradition. While it does adhere in some ways to the ancient model first established by Homer, it also partakes of a post-Augustan epic tendency to become a vivid but subtle commentary on the mores, emperor, and philosophy of the time. I conjecture that Statius and other 1<sup>st</sup> c. C.E. Roman epicists revived the literary tradition of necromancy because it succinctly captured the decadence of their times. The classical idiom of necromancy provides the perfect framework in which to mask contempt for and derogate the administration. Thus Statius' elaborate necromancy is but cleverly worded criticism directed at Domitian and the Rome of his day. Likewise, Lucan's failed Erichtho perfectly embodies the excessiveness and monstrosity of Lucan's contemporary, Nero, as well as the horrors of Roman civil war.

This essay gives as backdrop an overview of Roman necromancy in its social setting by examining accounts of Tacitus, Pausanias, Plutarch and others. Primarily it explores how Statius uses Tiresias' failed necromancy in *Thebaid 4* to comment on several issues such as 1) the ambiguous nature of Roman views on magic, 2) the emperors, and 3) the conflicting philosophies of the Stoics and Neo-Pythagoreans. Statius enhances his necromancy with many innovations, creating his own model that effectively demonstrates the dual-natured view of magic. On one hand lies a superstitious, traditional dogma that endorses the effectiveness of the dark arts; on the other lies a more progressive, enlightened view that dismisses such ideas as nonsense and contradictory to state-ordained religion. The Emperors perpetuate this dichotomy, often only superficially: while they publicly deplore necromancy, they are in reality true advocates and practitioners. Statius compares Eteocles to Domitian on some levels to reveal his appraisal of Domitian's contradictory nature and to highlight the hypocrisy of the emperors. Finally, Statius uses necromancy to juxtapose conflicting philosophies, namely Statius' own veiled Stoicism with the popular Neo-Pythagoreanism of his day, to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of necromancy as a prophetic art. His own Stoicism is veiled in light of the emperor's anti-Stoic fervor. Meanwhile a Stoic *Ratio* in the guise of Jupiter supercedes traditional *fata* in the *Thebaid*, creating a new paradigm for the hierarchy of the universe. Statius found that by employing a unique necromancy he was able to assert both his own viewpoints on magic as well as sly criticisms of society, government, and two conflicting contemporary philosophies.