

Fraternal Friction on the Patriarch's *Patera*: the *ekphrasis* in Statius's *Thebaid* I.539-551

This paper aims to unpack Statius's mythological allusions in his *ekphrasis* of Adrastus's libation cup, tying the images of Perseus and Ganymede back to their cultural signification and thence to the plot structure of the poem as a whole. By comparison with other libation scenes from epic that lack comparable description, we argue that Statius made explicit choices not only to illustrate the cup but also in the selection of the figures thereon. The assumption that the intelligent reader is intended to actively gaze upon the object in their minds and grapple with the possible larger implications of the scene is based on ancient rhetorical theory on *ekphrasis*, supplemented by burgeoning literature from modern scholars. The figure of Perseus, one of Adrastus's forebears, on a *patera* that predates the ancient hero in the family line points to the fact that his non-familial associations outweigh mere historical interest. His inclusion as a symbol of the constant familial strife of Adrastus's line and the discord that follows wherever he travels foreshadows the ultimate failings of the seven due to the fraternal warfare at Thebes. Ganymede, through his associations as a foreigner joined in divinely instigated union with a ruler, represents the initially joyful union of the two heroes, Polynices and Tydeus, into the royal house of Argos in accordance with divine foretelling. The central themes of the *Thebaid* are those of civil war and fraternal strife, of armies of one's own kin coming to attack, themes that had realities for the Romans after the turmoil in the Year of Four Emperors. The Flavian brothers Domitian and Titus, the latter of whom was most likely still alive when Statius began writing, represented the alternative: brothers capable of sharing the rule peaceably and restoring the country. Statius depicts this thematic opposition of union and strife, present in the phrase *fraternas acies* written in the first line of the *Thebaid*, through the imagery of the *patera*.