

ATTIS AND THE 'PALESTINIAN' GODDESSES (OVID, *FAST.* 4.236)

When Ovid asks Erato why the Galli cut their *membra*, she responds with a story. Cybele became enamoured of Attis and chose him for her temple-attendant; he swore always to remain a 'boy' (i.e., a virgin) for her, and cursed himself should he prove false, but he soon had sexual relations with the nymph Sagaritis. The angry goddess then exacted her punishment: she eliminated Sagaritis by chopping down her tree, and Attis went mad. Imagining that the ceiling of his bedchamber is collapsing, he flees to the heights of Dindymus, convinced that he is pursued by goddesses:

235-6

et modo 'tolle faces', 'remoue' modo 'uerbera' clamat:
saepe Palaestinas iurat adesse deas.

and he shouts, now 'remove the torches', now 'away with the lashes':
often he swears that Palestinian goddesses are at hand.

Then he slashes his body, dragging his hair in the dirt, and confesses his guilt before removing all traces of manhood, thus setting the example for the Galli, who toss their hair and cut their limbs.

The identity of these 'Palestinian' goddesses is hardly self-evident, and modern scholarship displays all three possible responses: defense of the paradosis, emendation, and desperation.

The last characterizes Bömer's commentary ('Locus desperatus; das Wort ist nicht zu deuten'¹) and the Teubner text of Alton-Wormell-Courtney, which obelizes². It is worth adding that,

¹ Cf. F. Bömer, *Ovidi Nasonis Fastorum libri sex*, Heidelberg 1957-8, 228.

² Cf. E. H. Alton, D. E. W. Wormell, E. Courtney, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Fastorum libri sex*, Leipzig 1978, 90.

though modern editions tend to give the impression that the tradition is unanimous in the reading, this is perhaps illusory. Those editions give relatively little information about variants, in the *recentiores* especially, but both Bömer and Schilling³ note that the first hand of the eleventh-century ms G (Brussels, Bibl. Royale 5369-5373) read *sacra Palaestinis anteferenda iugis*. If a substantial number of such extreme variants could be found in the tradition, it might be a sign that an interpolator has been at work, whether composing the whole of 235-6 or only repairing the loss of a pentameter; but for reasons that will soon become clear, I believe that this couplet is so important to the themes of this passage that it cannot possibly be inauthentic.

Defenders of the *paradosis* have taken one of two approaches. Anonymous commentators mentioned by Frazer *ad loc.*⁴ took *Palaestinus* to mean here what it means at Lucan. 5.460, 'of or pertaining to Palaeste', a city on the coast of Epirus where Caesar landed during the war with Pompey (otherwise mentioned only at Caes. *Civ.* 3.6.3 in the whole of Greek and Latin literature). Those commentators presumably asserted as well that Palaeste had some connection to the Underworld and that *Palaestinus* could be used with infernal associations, though there is in fact no evidence whatsoever for such a claim. Whoever they were, their interpretation is perpetuated in both *L&S* and the *OLD*, though naturally with doubts expressed: *L&S* says that the epithet refers to Palaeste 'as the entrance to the Lower World' but nevertheless opines that 'Meletinas is a better reading' (this is Merkel's conjecture; see below), while the *OLD* undermines its own entry with both '(*dub.*)' and '(*s.v.l.; app. the Furies*)'. Bömer rejected this interpretation as 'unwahrscheinlich', but Boyle's translation⁵, which refers the reader to Bömer, nevertheless translates 'Palestine goddesses', identifying them as the Erinyes.

³ Cf. R. Schilling, *Ovide, Les Fastes*, II, Paris 1993.

⁴ Cf. J. G. Frazer, *The Fasti of Ovid. Text and Commentary*, 5 vols., London 1929.

⁵ Cf. A. J. Boyle, R. D. Woodard, *Ovid; Fasti translated and edited with an introduction, notes and glossary*, London 2000.

On the other hand, E. Fantham⁶ entertains Schilling's interpretation of *Palaestinus* as 'Palestinian'⁷ on the grounds that the goddesses are Derceto, Atargatis, and the Syrian Goddess, objects of an orgiastic cult centred at Hierapolis in Syria⁸. Two points can be made against this view. The first is that we have no indication that these were goddesses of conscience or of revenge, or that they pursued anyone with torches and whips. The second is that they were virtually unknown to the Romans. Ovid is aware of Derceto as 'Babylonian Dercetis', a figure of 'Palestinian' religion, but in the guise of a fish (*met.* 4.45–6: *quam uersa squamis uelantibus artus / stagna Palaestini credunt motasse figura*)—and hence unlikely to be wielding torches. Apart from this, moreover, she is known only as the mother of Samiramis (*Hyg.fab.* 223, 275; *Ampel.* 11.3). As to Atargatis, Pliny describes her only as *prodigiosa* on the sole occasion on which he (or any other Roman) mentions her, and says in fact that Dercetis is her Greek name (*nat.* 5.81). Given this general ignorance, there is little reason to think that most Romans could identify even one 'Palestinian goddess', much less three, or specifically these three.

As to emendations, Merkel's *Meletinas* presumably refers to Melitine, a city of Cappadocia, near the Euphrates, though I do not know which goddesses Merkel had in mind.

Hoffmann's conjecture *palamnaeas* was presumably intended as a reference to the Erinyes, but this is open to at least two insuperable objections, that the word is not used elsewhere in Latin, and that, as a term for avenging deities, it is applied only to gods, never to goddesses (*cf. LSJ s.v. παλαμναῖος*; a search of the *TLG* confirms the observation), and the conjecture therefore 'works' only if we read *palamnaeos ... deos*.

⁶ Cf. E. Fantham, *Ovid, Fasti Book IV*, Cambridge 1998, 140–1

⁷ Cf. R. Schilling, *Ovide, Les Fastes*, II, 113, n. 85.

⁸ For these deities, often conflated, see J. Lightfoot, *Lucian, On the Syrian Goddess*, Oxford 2003, 1–85.

But it ought to be clear in any case that we need a reference not just to ‘some kind of avenging Fury’, as Fantham suggests, but to the Furies themselves, as Frazer saw. Perhaps the apparent asyndeton in 236 has encouraged an assumption that the visits of the goddesses are distinct from the application of the torches and lashes, but the two must be aspects of the same phenomenon: Who, after all, is wielding these instruments if not these goddesses? And what goddesses are more likely to be wielding torches and lashes than the Furies? Their association with *faces* and/or either *uerbera* or *flagella* is so constant in Latin poetry that a reference to anyone but them seems impossible here (to cite only Roman tragedy, and only passages that mention both torches and lashes, see Sen. *Ag.* 759–61, *Her. F.* 87–8, 982–6, and *Med.* 958–66, and [Sen.] *Her. O.* 1002–5, 1013–14). Ovid has also left etymological clues to the Furies’ involvement. The attacks (which are a hallucination sent by Cybele, like the collapsing ceiling, not simply the result of ‘shock at [Sagaritis]’ death’, as Fantham suggests) come while Attis *furit* (233). His *furor* in cutting himself becomes the model for his followers (243–4). Ovid says that Erato has explained the origin of the *furor* about which he inquired (246). The river Gallus is subsequently identified as a source of *furor* in the Galli (365–6).

Among conjectures that introduce the Furies, Fantham deems Roeper’s *palam Stygias* ‘ingenious’; she does not mention Madvig’s *palam trinas*, approved by Frazer, while I mention Schwenk’s *palam uisas* only for the sake of completeness. Against Madvig’s conjecture stands the fact that *dea(e) trina(e)* is nowhere used of the Furies (or of anyone, for that matter). On the other hand, the *Stygiae ... deae* at Stat. *Theb.* 5.156–7 do indeed appear to be the Furies. But no conjecture that introduces the otiose *palam* is likely to be right. Attis alone (like the title character of Euripides’ *Orestes*) perceives the attack, and he swears to the goddesses’ presence to convince others that he is not insane. To say that they are ‘at hand’ is sufficient for this purpose; he does not need to swear that they are present ‘openly’, which is already implied in *adesse* and in his ability to see them.

I suggest that Ovid wrote *saepe et pallentes iurat adesse deas*, ‘and often he swears that paling goddesses are at hand’, where *pallentes* means not ‘pallid’ but ‘striking pallor’ through fear (the

verb 'to pale' can have both senses in English, though the active/transitive sense is rare and poetic). Etymologically, 'appalling' is appropriate as a translation, but in everyday usage this has drifted too far toward a bland synonym of 'bad', and 'palling' is not much better; 'ghastly', 'dread', or 'terrible' translates the effect but not the vivid image of terror-induced whiteness. Attis' inability to name precisely which goddesses are tormenting him reflects his inarticulate derangement; and it is a vivid touch of pathos that he can say of them only that they are 'terrible'.

The 'active' sense that I assign to *pallentes* here is acknowledged by Quintilian, who notes at *I.O.* 8.6.27 that poets and orators sometimes describe things in terms of their effect (*id quod efficit ex eo quod efficitur ostendimus*), citing Virgil's *pallentes Morbi* (*Aen.* 6.275). While the author of the entry *s.v. palleo* in the *ThLL* would evidently prefer to see all such cases as examples of enallage, *L&S* and the *OLD* acknowledge the usage and note that *palleo* is also applied in this sense to such things as *lupini* (*Ov. med.* 69), *philtrā* (*Ov. ars.* 2.105), and *curae* (*Mart.* 11.6.6). These lexica do not, however, extend this usage any further, apart from acknowledging Virgil's *Morbi*; hence the remainder of this note will attempt to strengthen the case for *pallentes* in *Fast.* 4.236 by arguing that this sense of the word is in fact relatively common in Silver Latin poetry.

By the way, it should be noted first that one positive result of the conjecture is that the restoration of *et* eliminates the asyndeton of the paradosis, making it clear that the shouting and the swearing are not distinct situations. Frazer obviously felt the need of it, since he began his translation of 236 with 'And'.

As to the Furies as *dae pallentes*, I start by observing, as Pease did on *Aen.* 4.26, that *pallens* (like *pallidus*) is regularly associated with the dead and with the Underworld in general. In the former category, we have *simulacra modis pallentia miris* (*Lucr.* 1.123; applied to ghosts at *Verg. georg.* 1.477), *animae pallentes* (*Verg. Aen.* 4.243), and *umbrae pallentes* (*Verg. Aen.* 4.26, *Stat. Theb.* 2.48, 3.303, 8.1; for the same phrase meaning simply 'pale shade', cf. *Verg. georg.* 3.357, *Sil.* 12.131). In the latter category, Orcus is thus described at *Lucan.* 6.714-5, and *Avernus* at *Stat. silv.* 5.1.27, while the region can be *pallens* in

whole ('the paling realm [of Dis]', *Aetna* 78, Sil. 3.483, 13.408; 'the paling *sedes*', Lucan. 6.800) or in part (*luci*, Stat. *silv.* 3.3.24; *lacus*, *Culex* 333; *undae*, [Tib.] 3.5.21). But I think that Pease was wrong to interpret *pallens* and *pallidus* as always meaning 'pale' when applied to infernal affairs. Certainly they mean 'pallid' in reference to the shades, humans who now lack both blood and light. I am not so certain that the references to the infernal region or any of its parts are meant to characterize them as 'pallid' rather than as 'terrible'. After all, the region and those who rule or occupy it are far more often characterized as dark, through such adjectives as *ater*, *caeruleus*, and *fuscus*, and the light implied by pallor seems positively inappropriate; indeed, the goddess described as *pallens* at Stat. *Theb.* 6.26 is Dawn herself, the bringer of light.

Moreover, I am quite certain that *pallens* does not mean 'pallid' when applied to natives of the Underworld. For one thing, the causes that make pallor appropriate to *umbrae* are irrelevant to the gods, who have no blood to miss and do not depend upon the sun for a glowing tan. For another, infernal deities are consistently represented as terrifying, but pallor is represented as the result of horror or fear, not its cause. Virgil's *Morbi*, as we have seen, were read by Quintilian as causing pallor rather than exhibiting it. Dis should therefore be *pallens* at Stat. *Theb.* 4.525 because as Lord of the Underworld he is a terrifying sight, not because he shares the complexion of his subjects. When the gods of the Underworld are described collectively as *pallentes* at Sen. *Oed.* 583, it is not to make the point that the opening up of the earth at last allows the sun to affect their complexion; it is because they are being mentioned as one element of a horrific spectacle (*subito dehiscit terra, et immenso sinu / laxata patuit—ipse pallentes deos / uidi inter umbras, ipse torpentes lacus / noctemque ueram*, 582-5; the speech, too long to quote in full, abounds in grisly detail).

I argue therefore that in these passages Dis and the gods of the Underworld are *pallentes* as terrifying figures, by a natural and perhaps even inevitable extension from Virgil's *pallentes Morbi*. I would further suggest, again contrary to the lexica, that the same sense of 'dread' may well apply in those passages cited above where *pallens* describes the Underworld or a part of it.

And it can be argued to have the same sense on other occasions as well when applied to figures with hellish associations. The *genae pallentes* of the Furies at Sen. *Ag.* 762 are more likely to be 'terrible eyes' (for *genae* as 'eyes', cf. *OLD* s.v. 2) than 'pale cheeks', which seem to lack any particular point (here, however, the interpretation is complicated by a division in the mss between *turgent* and *ardent* as the verb of which the *genae* are the subject; see Tarrant *ad loc.*). A similar ambiguity exists with regard to the *genae pallentes* that characterize the personified 'black Angers' at Val. Fl. 2.205 (*atraeque genis pallentibus Irae*), but again 'ghastly eyes' seem more likely than pallid cheeks, which yield only a weak contrast of colours (at Val. Fl. 3.287, on the other hand, the phrase clearly does mean 'pale cheeks'). At Lucan. 6.737, the presence of *tabida* (which also, by the way, has both 'active' and 'passive' senses) may be a pointer to the same 'appalling' sense in *Hecate pallenti tabida forma*, 'rotting Hecate of ghastly appearance'.

One way to confirm the case for the sense 'terrifying' is to find it used of the supernal world, where associations with deathly pallor are impossible. My colleague Robert Nau suggests plausibly that there is an example at Stat. *Theb.* 2.545, *huc ferus atque illuc animum pallentiaque ira / ora ferens*; a face pale with anger has no parallel in Latin literature, but 'terrible with wrath' fits well with the description of Tydeus as *ferus*. Another possible example is yet another occurrence of *genae pallentes*, in reference to the Sphinx at Stat. *Theb.* 2.506. These may well not be 'eyes' at all, since *lumina* are mentioned immediately after, but 'pallid cheeks'—as opposed to 'terrifying cheeks'—seem pretty tame beside her other attributes, which include those pus-dripping eyes, feathers matted with blood, and a brood of half-eaten corpses. Fortunately, no ambiguity can be imagined in the unique example in a prose work, the *Dialogus* of Tacitus: when Maternus says (13.5) *nec insanum ultra et lubricum forum famamque pallentem trepidus experiar*, commentators recognize the active sense, and Tacitus himself points to it with *trepidus*. Finally, *pallens* is applied to all the 'heaven-dwellers' at Stat. *Ach.* 1.483-90, in a simile that illustrates Achilles' admitted superiority to the other Greek leaders:

cedit turba ducum uincique haud maesta fatetur.
 sic cum pallentes Phlegraea in castra coirent
 caelicolae iamque Odrysiam Gradius in hastam 485
 surgeret et Libycos Tritonia tolleret angues
 ingentemque manu curuaret Delius arcum,
 stabat anhela metu solum Natura Tonantem
 respiciens quando ille hiemes tonitrusque uocaret
 nubibus, igniferam quot fulmina posceret Aetnen. 490

The host of leaders yields, joyfully admitting that they are surpassed.
 In the same way, when the heaven-dwellers came together *pallentes*
 for the battle at Phlegra, and Mars was already rising upon his Odrysian
 spear and Minerva taking up her Libyan snakes
 and Apollo bending the mighty bow with his hand,
 it was in looking at the Thunderer alone that Nature
 stood panting with fear when he summoned storms and thunderbolts
 to the clouds, all the lightning he demanded of fiery Etna.

Translators (including now Shackleton-Bailey) make the gods
 pale '[with fear]', but without warrant either in the simile or in
 the situation to which it applies (hence, perhaps, Wilamowitz'
 proposal to emend *pallentes* to *Pallenes*). Nature fears Jupiter
 alone, not because all the other gods are cowering in fear, but
 because his weapons are mightier than theirs, including the
 aegis. It is clearly implied that these other divinities and their
 mighty weapons are legitimate sources of fear to Nature, and
 to make them 'pale' rather than 'fearsome' or 'terrible' destroys
 the point of the comparison, which is that, while all the Greek
 leaders are formidable, Achilles stands foremost among them
 just as Jupiter was among the gods.

In addition to *pallens*, Quintilian also identifies *pallidus*
 as an example of a word that describes through effect, citing
 Horace's *pallida Mors* (*carm.* 1.4.13). But he might equally have
 cited Virgil's *pallida Tisiphone* at *Georg.* 3.552 and *Aen.* 10.761
 (later borrowed by 'Eumolpus' at Petron. 120, l. 121); she is not
 'pale Tisiphone' but 'Tisiphone who renders pale', as Servius
 noted on the *Aeneid* passage (*non dea ipsa sed effectus furiae*). In
 fact, Virgil's use of *pallidus* of this single Fury might well have
 served as Ovid's model for applying *pallentes* to the Furies as a
 group, while Virgil's application of *pallentes* to his Hell-dwelling

Morbi, acknowledged by the Flavian rhetorician Quintilian, is arguably the origin of its application to a host of infernal and supernal figures among the Flavian epic poets especially—in fact, it would surely be odd *not* to find them adopting and even extending the Virgilian model. In addition, this very passage of Ovid, as well as the likely Virgilian source of his epithet for the Furies, seem to have been on the mind of the author of the *Hercules Oetaeus* when he wrote *hic ecce pallens dira Tisiphone stetit* (1012); note especially the anaphora in Deianira's entreaties in the next two lines, *parce uerberibus, precor, / Megaera, parce, sustine Stygias faces*, perhaps echoing Ovid's repeated *modo* in the repeated *parce*.

The reading *Palaestinas* (and perhaps the original reading of G as well) can be explained best as an interpolation intended to heal some earlier corruption such as *saepe pallentes*, resulting from the accidental omission of *et* (*Palaestinus* has already occurred at *Fast.* 2.464).

J. L. P. BUTRICA
 St. John's
 Memorial University of Newfoundland
 jlbutrica@mun.ca

