

*Commentaries and exegeses***The *Thebaid***

Three commentaries on the *Thebaid* seem to have had wide distribution: that attributed to Lactantius Placidus and the so-called “in principio” and “Arundel-Burney” commentaries.

Lactantius Placidus

The only authorial commentary on the *Thebaid* is the commentary attributed to Lactantius Placidus,¹⁶³ which can be dated to before the fifth century.¹⁶⁴ As discussed above, this commentary is incomplete. In addition to lacunae at 10.96–147 and 12.512–615, there is no general preface to the work. In reconstructing the last of these, modern scholars have focused on a note at 1.61 that seems to refer to such a preface:

Responderat oraculum Laio quod a filio suo posset occidi. Unde natum Oedipum iussit proici transfixis cruribus. Harum omnium seriem fabularum <in argumento>¹⁶⁵ digessimus.

There have been two attempts at finding a text that could have been Lactantius’ preface. In the last century, M. Schmidt claimed that the scribe of the now lost manuscript Wrocław, R. 124 thought that the accessus in the manuscript was the lost argument to the first book.¹⁶⁶ Schmidt’s argument is based only on the position of the accessus in that manuscript, and is thus groundless. In 1933, M. Leroy claimed that a fourteenth-century marginal mythological note in Bruxelles, BR, 5337–8 was the lost text,¹⁶⁷ but this, too, is unlikely not only because the note is not at the beginning of the text, but also because there are no notes from Lactantius Placidus in the manuscript.¹⁶⁸

I doubt that the text described by the passage was part of the original commentary. The phrase “harum... digessimus” seems tacked on and does not follow the typical colometric scheme. Most importantly, Lactantius Placidus uses the first person plural only rarely.¹⁶⁹ When

¹⁶³ This attribution stems from a *sphragis* note by one of the interpolators at 6.364: “...libellum composui Caelius Firmianus Lactantius Placidus.”

¹⁶⁴ Until recently, a *terminus post quem* of the fourth century was often given because the commentary not mentioned in Jerome’s library. On stylistic grounds, Klotz placed the author in Gaul in the sixth century (1908c), and J. Breese (*De scholiis Statianis quae Lactantii Placidi nomine feruntur, quaestiones selectae*, Diss. Griefswald, 1919; see Lammert in *JAW* 231 [1931], 93–95), argued on the same information for a date in the beginning of the fifth century and a location in northern Africa. However, Klotz also discovered that the core commentary was written in Ciceronian, nonaccentual clausulae (1908c.504–508); on the basis of this, more recent scholars place the composition between the ages of Donatus and Servius (AD 350–400), although Reeve (1983.396) felt that a good critical edition might push back the date even further. The earliest extant manuscript, Valenciennes, BM, 394, dates to the end of the ninth or beginning of the tenth century. See van de Woestijne 1950, and Brugnoli 1988. For a fuller discussion of the commentary and its transmission, see Sweeney 1969 and 1997. The commentary to the *Achilleid* that circulates under his name in the Middle Ages was probably a later composition, as discussed below.

¹⁶⁵ The words *in argumento* are not found in the best manuscripts edited by Sweeney (and thus are inserted silently in his edition). The manuscripts edited by Jahnke do transmit the phrase.

¹⁶⁶ “Ein Scholion zum Statius,” *Philologus* 23 (1866), 541–47; cf. Sweeney 1969.20.

¹⁶⁷ Leroy 1933; see Sweeney 1969.32.

¹⁶⁸ The text is also similar to the fourteenth-century argument to Seneca by Folchinus de Borfonis. See C. DeSantis, *Folchinus De Borfonis: Opera omnia*, vol. 2 (Turnhout, forthcoming).

¹⁶⁹ The first person singular, however, occurs not infrequently. Cf. Klotz 1908c.504: “Daß ein individueller Verfasser unser Scholiencorpus geschrieben hat, geht aus den zahlreichen Anführungen in der ersten Person hervor, besonders aus denen in Singular.”