

NOTES ON THE TEXT OF JANUS PANNONIUS' EPIGRAMS

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Janus Pannonius was an individual of enormous talent, who played a highly significant role in the literary and political life of fifteenth-century Hungary. Born in Slavonia in 1434, he was, at the age of thirteen, sent by his uncle, Joannes Vitez, Bishop of Várad, to study under the great teacher Guarino Veronese in Ferrara. From Guarino Janus received a vigorous training in Latin grammar and literature; he also learned Greek, which, to judge from a comment made by Guarino's son, Guarino Battista, he absorbed in a single year. Janus never forgot his debt to his mentor whom he saw as occupying the central role in a world finally seeking enlightenment. He described him as a modern Camillus, who rescued Rome's language just as the general saved the Roman state: *quantum Roma suo debet reparata Camillo / tantum Guarino lingua latina suo* (Epig. 56).

As a student under Guarino Janus began his career as a poet. He also began to show an interest in politics, which proved useful after his return to Hungary in 1458. He was soon appointed Bishop of Pécs, but devoted most of his time and energy to work in the chancery of the brilliant young king of Hungary, Matthias Corvinus. Towards the end of his brief life Janus became disillusioned with Matthias, and was especially offended by his lack of vigour in dealing with the Turkish menace. He became involved, with his uncle, in an ill-conceived plot to replace the king. He was forced to flee Hungary,

and while trying to reach Venice died of ill-health in Zagreb in 1472.¹

It is as a poet, rather than a politician, that Janus' name is now revered in his own country. Deeply indebted to the writers of the Classical past, he composed in a variety of forms, but his Latin epigrams, with their polished charm and lively wit, probably appeal most to the modern reader. The major printed edition of Janus' epigrams (and other poems) was undertaken in 1784 by Samuel Teleki.² This is in many respects a very fine piece of work, but its very qualities have had the unfortunate effect of stifling any subsequent efforts to tackle Janus' text; later printed editions have been merely reprints of Teleki, including his misprints. The purpose of this brief article is to provide a small selection from among those epigrams where it can be shown that Teleki's readings are almost certainly wrong. Not all involve new emendations, since in some cases the original manuscript reading can be defended. When Janus died in 1472 Peter Várady was commissioned by King Matthias of Hungary to make a collection of his dispersed poems for inclusion in the famous Corvina Library. This collection was completed in the 1480's, but it had perished by 1496. It is more than likely that it was, before its destruction, the source of the most important surviving manuscript, the *Codex Vindobonensis (V)*, copied near the end of the fifteenth century and taken to Vienna in the seventeenth. The only other important manuscript of the epigrams,³ the *Codex Vaticanus* in Rome (*R*), seems to have been compiled in Italy, to judge from the problems encountered by the scribe with Hungarian names. *R* was neglected by Teleki, who relied almost entirely on *V*. Similarly, Teleki dismissed the 1569 edition of Sambuci (János Zsámboky). Sambuci's claim to have examined the poems in their original form should not be taken too seriously; also, it should be recognized that in his extensive travels in Italy he might have added spurious material into his text. All the same, he does seem to have had access to material independent of *V*, and Teleki's charge that the variants in Sambuci's text are the result of careless copying of *V* is not tenable. In the following passages, the absence of a recorded reading from *R* or Sambuci means that the poem in question is missing from that particular collection.

32.7-8 Quodsi contingat tanto me vate probari,
 Tunc ego vel Mevio Quintiliove legar.

Metio, *V*, *R*, *Samb.*; Vario, *Tel.*

Janus hesitates to send his poems to Perotti; he says, however, that should Perotti happen to approve them, he would be ready to face his critics. Quintilius is almost certainly Quintilius Varus of Cremona, friend of Vergil (Probus, *Vit. Verg.* 1, Servius *ad Ecl.* 5.20) and of Horace (*Ode* 1.24 and AP 438-9). In the *Ars Poetica* Horace says of him: *Quintilio si quid recitares, "corrige / sodes hoc," aiebat, "et hoc"* (if you read anything to Quintilius he used to say, "correct this, please, and this"). There is, however, no record of any Metius, as recorded in the MSS and in Sambuci, and the line loses its effect if both potential critics are not at least reasonably familiar. Teleki's Varius is the friend of Vergil, who after that poet's death was given by Augustus the task of editing the *Aeneid*. While Varius seems to fill the role perfectly, the change is difficult to explain palaeographically. Why should the unknown Metius have crept into the text in place of the famous Varius? Mevius, I suggest, is an ideal candidate. He was an enemy of both Vergil (*Ecl.* 3.90) and of Horace (*Ep.* 10.2), who calls him *olentem Mevium*. For Mevius' reputation as a sneering critic we have the testimony of Servius, who records in his *Commentary* Mevius' sarcastic jibe on Vergil's unusual plural form *hordea* (*Georg.* 1.210): *hoc versu hordea qui dixit superest ut tritica dicat*, very loosely, "in this line he said 'grains'; before we know it he'll be saying 'barleys'."

50.8-9 Quantum nunc tibi bilis et veneni
 Inflaret misero gulam tumentem?

inflaret, V, Samb.; instaret, Tel.

Janus describes the dramatic effect that his sarcasm would have on a fellow poet. It is not difficult to appreciate why Teleki should have wished to emend the transmitted *inflaret* to *instaret* "assault," since *inflare* means literally "to blow into" or "to inflate." But Teleki's emendation is colourless, and *inflare* is in fact not uncommon in quasi-medical contexts, when an irritant causes part of the body to swell up, as in Vergil *Ecl.* 6.15: (*Silanum*) *inflatum hesterno venas . . . Iaccho*. That this idea was intended by Janus is suggested by *tumentem*, used here proleptically. *Inflaret* conveys the effective image of the rival poet choking in his fury.

133.3-4 Sed delere iubes. Nemo est insanior; ecquem
Vidisti natos tu iugulare suos?

et quem, V, Tel.; equem, Samb.

Janus has been asked to destroy some epigrams that a friend finds objectionable. No one would be crazier, he objects. Have you seen anyone murder his own children? *Et quem*, the reading of V, maintained by Teleki, is impossibly awkward. The coordinating conjunction makes the question a clumsy afterthought instead of an illustration of the statement *nemo est insanior*. I suggest *ecquem* (Sambuci's *equem* seems to represent an earlier stage of corruption). *Ecquis* is defined by L&S as an "impassioned interrogation," and has the force of "Is there anyone anywhere who . . . ?" It thus serves to emphasize Janus' view of the absurdity of the suggestion made to him.

159.1-2 Quod fuit astuto pugnax Aetolus Ulixi,
Quod duro Telamon Amphitryoniadae

Amphitryoniade, V, R; Amphitryoniadi, Tel., Samb.

This poem illustrates the problems encountered by copyists and editors with Greek names transliterated into Latin. The bond between Marcello and René is compared to that between some of the famous pairs of mythology and antiquity. Among these are Telamon and Hercules, son of Amphitryon. The MSS read *Amphitryoniade*, which looks like an ablative and was accordingly emended by Teleki to produce a dative *Amphitryoniadi*. But this is not the correct form: the Greek dative of such names ends in an η , represented in Latin by *ae*. The correct form must then be *Amphitryoniadae* (see Ovid, *Met.* 15.49), concealed in the orthography of the MSS reading.

159.8 Trux Epaminondae quod Pelopidas suo

Pelopida, V, R, Tel., Samb.

A similar bond to those mentioned in the previous passage existed between Epaminondas and Pelopidas. The MSS and printed editions give Pelopidas a first declension nominative ending in *a*. This is not the correct

transliteration, which should be Pelopidas, but the corruption is not too difficult to understand. The final syllable of the name must scan short, but the correct spelling of the name results in a closed syllable before *suo* (i.e., a vowel followed by two consonants), which is regularly scanned long. But it is regular for an *s* followed by a word beginning with a second *s* to be ignored metrically in Plautus, and the practice continued until Catullus (116.8: *dabī's supplicium*), one of Janus' favourite models (see P.W. Harsh, "Final *s* after a Short Vowel in Early Latin," *TAPA* 83 [1952] 267-78).

197.3-5 Desit currere non tamen volucris,
 Cum deesset caput. Unde vis peremtae
 Cum sic curreret, unde mors eunti?

mors, *V*, *R*, *Samb.*; iners, *Tel.*

Janus marvels at the sight of a bird that continues to fly even though its head has been severed by an arrow. The poem involves a series of paradoxical antitheses, and Teleki's emendation seeks to maintain this antithetical paradox by contrasting motion with lack of motion. But Janus in fact at no point suggests that the bird is not moving, and the antithesis that he constructs is much more subtle than that envisaged by Teleki. The contrast is made chiasmatically with the preceding clause. How could vital power (*vis*) exist in a thing dead (since it was speeding along in the manner described) and how could death possess a thing that was moving? The received MSS reading is thus quite appropriate and is surely confirmed by the next line, *An pars mortua, pars erat superstes?*

198 Cum tua non ullus de te mendacia credat
 Mentiri soli te decet ipse tibi.

mentiris soli te decet, *V*; mentiris soli scilicet, *Tel.*; mentiri soli dedecet, *Samb.*

The second line of the epigram, as transmitted in *V*, is ungrammatical, since *decet* cannot govern a finite verb (*mentiris*). Teleki's emendation resolves the grammatical problem, but the corruption of *scilicet* to *te decet* is palaeographically awkward. Sambuci's suggestion is more convincing

palaeographically, but makes little sense. If no one believes you, why should it be "unfitting that you should lie to yourself?" I suggest that the simple emendation of *V*'s *mentiris* to *mentiri* will resolve the difficulty. The initial *s* of *soli* explains the corruption, and the emended line makes excellent sense: "since no one believes your lies, you should lie to yourself only."

263.8-9 (puellae) collo pendula vela gestitantes,
Nec pressae teretes sinu mamillas.

mamillas, *V*, *R*; mamillae, *Samb.*: manillas, *Tel.*

Janus describes the whores in a brothel to which his friends are dragging him. Both Teleki and Sambuci had difficulty in construing the line as transmitted. Teleki's reading would suggest something to the effect that they "do not have their smooth little hands pressed in their laps (or the folds of their garments)." If this means that they are waving to Janus, then the poet must be judged to have expressed himself obscurely indeed. The line is difficult, but a clue is provided by the preceding description of the girls. They are apparently wearing stoles or scarves that hang down from their necks. One can interpret the consequence of this without recourse to emendation, literally, "they are not pressed as to their smooth breasts by the folds of the garments." The flowing robes, in other words, leave the breasts exposed. It might be noted that *teres* "smooth and round" is commonly used in Latin poets of parts of the body that are erotically arousing and is an appropriate epithet for the whores' breasts.

283 Brigida Belinis, sive haec tibi nomina regum
Bela parens, cete sive dedere fera.

certae . . . ferae, *V*, *Tel.*

As transmitted in *V* (followed by Teleki) the second line of this epigram makes little sense. Janus is poking fun at Brigida Belinis, whose "royal" name could have come to her from her father or from particular wild beasts. The association of the name Bela with Hungarian royalty is clear enough. But what of the *certae ferae*? To understand the point of this joke we must

remember that Janus loves to play on proper names, especially if those names resemble words for animals. Thus in Epigram 105 he tells Basinus that his name would suit him if one letter dropped out (*asinus* = "ass"). In Epigram 225 he says that whoever called Vitus *vitulus* ("little Vitus") should have called him *bos* (*vitulus* = "steer", *bos* = "ox"). The only animal word that resembles Belinis is *balena*, "whale" (we must assume that Brigida was amply built). But the second line is weak, and corruption must be suspected. *Certae* is specially lame, and my reading presumes that *certae* is a corruption of *cete*. This form may not have been too familiar to the scribe, although it is not uncommon in Classical Latin as an alternative plural to *ceti* and means "whales" or other large sea-creatures (eg. Vergil, *Aen.* 5.822: *immania cete*). *Cete* is in fact neuter plural, the equivalent of the Greek κήτη, and any adjective modifying it must be neuter also. Once the corruption to *certae* had occurred, the corruption of *fera* to *ferae* would follow naturally.

294.3 *Quid dubitas? Dedi ego olim tres tibi nempe libellos*

dubitas ego tres (tris, V, R) olim tibi, V, R, Tel.; ego tres olim dedi, Samb.

Janus insists that the moneylender return his books, and asserts that he did in fact give him three. As transmitted in the MSS and retained by Teleki, the second half of the line is impossible, since it lacks a main verb. Sambuci's version makes sense, but is metrically very awkward (*dedi*). Absolute certainty is impossible, but sense and scansion can be preserved by a simple rearrangement of Sambuci's version and a double elision *ded(i) eg(o) olim*.

309 *Plus me te perdis, data quod duo reddere non vis;*
 Si duo reddisses mille daturus eram.

plus me tu, V, Tel.: plus te nunc, Samb.

Line 1 as given in the MS and Teleki seems to have little point, since the message of the epigram is that the debtor has damaged himself more than Janus by not paying what was owed. Sambuci's *plus te nunc* is possible but weak, and the lack of an explicit object of comparison (after *plus*) is awkward. My suggested reading involves an ablative of comparison followed by an accusative direct object. Since *me* and *te* are ambiguous in form (though not by

position) it can be seen why the scribe might have been confused.

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NOTES

¹ For an excellent study of Janus' life and career, with a detailed account of his relations with Guarino, see M. Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius, Poet and Politician* (Zabreb 1981).

² *Jani Pannonii . . . poemata quae uspiam reperiri potuerunt omnia* (Utrecht 1784).

³ With very few exceptions, the epigrams contained in manuscripts other than V and R did not form part of the original Várady collection, as represented by V. For a complete list, see M. Juhász, *Quaestiones Criticae de Epigrammatibus Iani Pannonii* (Rome 1929); the recently discovered *Capitular Colombina* 7-1-15 (Seville) must be added.