Attending to the Past: Translating the *Romans d'antiquité*

by

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Dedication

For Quentin

Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus,
rumoresque senum severiorum
omnes unius aestimemus assis.
Soles occidere et redire possunt:
nobis, cum semel occidit brevis lux,
nox est perpetua una dormienda.
Da mi basia mille, deinde centum,
dein mille altera, dein secunda centum,
deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum,
dein, cum milia multa fecerimus,
conturbabimus illa, ne sciamus,
aut nequis malus invidere possit,
cum tantum sciat esse basiorum.

And For Octavian and Livia

Oh, isn't it a shame?
I can neither sew nor cook
nor read nor write my name.
But I'm happy
merely being lovely
for it's one thing I can give to you.

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Abstract

Attending to the Past reveals that the *romans d'antiquité* are not monuments to triumphant appropriation, but archives of negotiation. They are, I argue, sites where the authority of Latin pasts and vernacular presents is continually put in play, questioned, and transformed.

Composed in the mid-12th century, the *romans d'antiquité* were a series of translations that sought to transpose into Old French the wisdom gleaned from writers of Latin antiquity, adapting Vergil's *Aeneid*, Statius's *Thebaid*, and the stories of Troy attributed to the eyewitnesses Dares and Dictys into new forms. My dissertation shows that, in a break with reading and writing practices visible in contemporary Latin manuscripts, the translators deployed novel strategies to pay attention to their sources, and that their translations crafted spaces for newly attentive readers. I demonstrate that the *romans d'antiquité* represent marked breaks with the prescribed forms of knowledge-making dominant in monastic and scholastic settings of the 12th century, they trouble the possibility for unambiguous recuperations of the past as a legitimizing cultural inheritance, and they undermine their own claims for a totalizing appropriation of foreign texts.

I deploy attention as a mode of analysis, whereby attention is understood in light of recent work both in cognitive sciences as well as in literary criticism as not just the capacity for the mind to remain fixed on a particular site of reflection, but as a space for failure as well. In my first chapter, "The Vernacular as a Site of Attention: Prophecy in the *Roman de Thèbes*," I analyze how attention is paid to prophecy by the text, the narrator and manuscript pages, arguing that the text attended to prophecy in novel ways from Latin commentaries and glosses, and that while it attempted to smooth over culture differences with pagan antiquity, it fundamentally failed to do so in a way that demonstrates an unsettled, and unresolvable, relationship to Greco-Roman antiquity.

In my second chapter, "Diffracted Knowledge in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*," I approach Benoît de Sainte-Maure's translation of the *De Excidio Troiae* and the *Ephemeris Belli Troiani* attributed to Dares and Dictys respectively by deploying attention at the microlevel of language. That is, I show that the process of translation involves the negotiation of

language and meaning at the granular level of words and syntax and bring in manuscript evidence to argue for particular medieval interests in reading these Latin texts within such a constellation of grammatical and lexical concerns. While the narratives of Benoît's sources are built on a (fanciful) rhetoric of unproblematic translations of newly-discovered texts providing direct access to the past, I argue that his *Troie* engaged in novel ways with those discourses by pushing the possibility for veracity in history writing into the linguistic fabric of the text.

Finally, in my third chapter, "Folding in the Outside: On (Not) Paying Attention to the Past in the *Roman d'Eneas*," I look at how the anonymous translator of Virgil's *Aeneid* stages attention within the narrative. I argue that the attentive stance towards history in Virgil's epic, in which the subject was formed by visual remains of the past and clues to the future, is suppressed in the Old French translation. Instead, the *Eneas* denies the possibility for history to exist chronologically, and crafts the historical subject as one always already knowing their trajectory.

Introduction, Romancing the Past

Between 1150 and 1170, a series of vernacular translations of epic texts from Latin antiquity and late antiquity appeared in French, several of which made similar claims to set out, once and for all, the truth of the texts they transmitted in a new form (vernacular romance), sifting out the truth from the falsehoods of the original texts. My dissertation examines three in particular: the *Roman de Thèbes*, the *Roman de Troie*, and the *Roman d'Eneas*.

The first, the *Roman de Thèbes*, composed of approximately 10,000 lines of octosyllabic verse, is widely considered the first of the *romans d'antiquité*, composed around 1150 or shortly after. Its author remains unknown--readings of the text have led scholars to hypothesize that the writer was a particularly learned clerk associated with the court of the Plantagenets and like the other writers of the *romans d'antiquité* worked under their patronage, but neither the text nor the manuscript history provide a name or other identifying material.[1] The *Thèbes* survives in complete form in five manuscripts, with fragments preserved in the earliest codex (1180-1220), and complete texts packaged along with different combinations of the *Eneas* and the *Troie* in manuscripts from the 13th to 14th centuries.

Scholarship places the *Roman d'Eneas* next, most likely written by an unknown clerk around 1160. About the same length as the *Roman de Thèbes*, that is, between 10,000 and 10,400 lines of octosyllabic verse depending on the edition, it survives in nine manuscripts, all dating from the 13th and 14th centuries.

The *Roman de Troie,* written around 1165, is the first of the *romans d'antiquité* whose author is identified in the text: "This story is not well-known, nor found in many places: it wouldn't have been developed [*retraite*] yet, but Benoît de Sainte-Maure invented, composed and related it, and he wrote the words with his own hand …"[2] Compared to the other *romans d'antiquité*, and

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[1] I will go into this claim further below; for an overview of the argument in the case of the *Thèbes*, see Aimé Petit, ed., *Le roman de Thèbes* (Honoré Champion, 2008), 20-26.

[2] "Ceste estoire n'est pas usee, / N'en guaires lieus nen est trovee: / Ja retraite ne fust ancore, Mais Beneeiz de Sainte More / L'a contrové e fait e dit / E o sa main les moz escrit …" Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Roman de Troie*, ed.

most vernacular romances, it is absolutely massive, measuring over 30,000 lines of octosyllabic verse.[3] Conserved in 58 manuscripts, of which thirty contain a complete text, it is often copied alone, and only occasionally accompanied by other romances. Benoît is one of the few named 12th-century French authors, although little is known about him – he may have been the same Benoît de Sainte-Maure who wrote the *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie*, though this identity cannot be claimed with certainty.[4]

These three romances were composed during a period in which the grounds of literary creation were openly interrogated by writers eager to justify, and theorize, their act of composition. A 12th-century commentary on Vergil's *Aeneid*, perhaps attributable to Bernard Silvester, begins by justifying its own existence. As the commentator writes, "[Vergil] intended to narrate the misfortunes that befell Eneas and the labors of the other wandering Trojans," yet the uninitiated reader, much like the medieval Christian subject, cannot stop at the visible layer of the text; another key is necessary to peer at what lies below. That key is Vergil's hidden motivations, which the commentator is more than delighted to share: "…he did not do so [narrate the story] by following exactly the truth of the story, which [Dares the] Phrygian had set out; instead, he embellishes what Aeneas accomplished and how he fled, in order to win the favor of Augustus."[5] This commentary overlays power on top of poetry, explaining the text's meaning through an interpretive grid of socio-political reality; however, that mode of reading quickly falls out as a hermeneutic device, and it essentially serves as an entryway for allegoresis into poetic interpretation. That is, the commentary does not carefully lay out how Augustus was praised throughout the text, as a means of separating hyperbole from historical truth; instead it unwinds how the *Aenead* "teaches philosophical truth without passing over poetic fiction."[6] Augustus is a MacGuffin, his supposed extratextual control of the text, an exterior discourse controlling internal meaning, is nowhere;

Léopold Constans, vol. 1, (Paris: Firmin Didot et Compagnie, 1904), vv. 129-134. English translation mine; cf. *The* Roman de Troie *by Benoît de Sainte-Maure*, trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Douglas Kelly (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), 44.

[3] For comparison, the *Roman de la rose*, possibly the most intensely-studied lyrical composition in Old French, and known for its length, is around 21,500 lines.

[4] See *The Roman de Troie*, 4-6; *Le roman de Troie*, ed. Emmanuèle Baumgartner (UGE, 1987), 25-26.

[5] "Intendit itaque casus Enee aliorumque Troianorum errantium labores evolvere atque hoc non usque secundum historie veritatem, quod Frigius describit; sed ubique ut Augusti Cesaris gratiam lucraretur, Enee facta fugamque ficmentis extollit." *The Commentary on the First Six Books of the* Aeneid *of Vergil Commonly Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris*, eds. Julian Ward Jones and Elizabeth Frances Jones (University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 1.

[6] "…et vertitatem philosophie docuit et ficmentum poeticum non pretermisit." *Commentary*, 1.

instead the commentator's reading takes its place. In fact, the device of setting up the *Aeneid* as a product bound in a compositional straitjacket limiting Vergil's margin of poetic expression is the entry for the commentator to play the role he assigned to Augustus, making the text speak to his own needs. His interpretation of Book 2, an impressively concise reading around 150 words, presents it as an allegory for childhood (*pueritia*). This is because, for the commentary, Aeneas' recounting of the fall of Troy and the Trojans' escape is an allegory for the child's desire to speak; Aeneas accordingly "bursts out in words," unveiling speech. The text describes Aeneas as propulsed towards speech, and that speech in turn requires more speech to explain it: it is part lie and part truth, needing analysis and explanation, just as the images on the walls of Dido's temple, illustrating Trojan history, required Aeneas's speech to be understood. Those images recede to the background over Books 2 and 3 of the *Aeneid* as Aeneas recounts the story himself, and accordingly so does the *Aeneid* give way to the commentator's exploration of philosophical truths. The explanation displaces the explained. The text from antiquity, through allegoresis, is the genesis for something new, rather than the monument restored to its original splendor that the commentary would have the reader believe.

Another writer of the 12th century, this time translating Statius' *Thebaid* into French, drew the connection between textual exegesis and subjective expression much more explicitly, writing that "Anyone who is wise should not conceal it, rather they should display their intelligence for this very reason, so that once they have departed from this world they may be remembered for all time."[7] The text opens on the display of wisdom, and connects that display with the guarantee of immortality through fame. That immortality, crucially, is made possible by the translator's discursive intervention: going beyond the anonymous commentator on the *Aeneid*, this text will *add to* rather than simply *emphasize what is*. That is, the *Thèbes* is clearly the product of the translator's mind, it is his own intelligence and wisdom that it contains, rather than Statius's: so as to dispense with any possible ambiguity as to *whose* wisdom will be revealed in this French translation, he sets out the project for the reader: "For this reason, I do not wish to keep my intelligence hidden or to suppress my knowledge, rather does it please me to recount something

[7] "Qui sages est nel doit celer, / ainz doit por ce son sens moutrer / que quant il ert du siecle alez / touz jors en soit mes ramenbrez."Petit, *Le Roman de Thèbes*, lines 1-4.

worthy to be remembered."[8] His translation is not Statius' speech, but rather his own; compared to the commentary on the *Aeneid*, the *Thèbes* sets out to displace the *Thebaid*.

I begin with these two examples, not so much opposing as one building off of the other, as this gap between the two characterizes the terrain on which the first French romances took shape in the 12th century. Compared to critical studies of the better known and celebrated 12th-century Old French romances by Chrétien de Troyes, less work has focused on the *romans d'antiquité*. Both the *Thèbes* and the *Eneas* survive in a small number of manuscripts, suggesting (although not proving) little interest in copying or conserving them over time, although part of the *Thèbes* was inserted into the 13th-century *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*.[9] As mentioned above, the *Troie* is the only one of the three romances to exist in a significant number of manuscripts (30 complete texts), and its author was referenced by the anonymous author of the 14th-century *Ovide moralisé*. From the very first *roman d'antiquité*, the *Roman de Thèbes*, medieval readers were somewhat confused by the *Thèbes*'s content, form, and goals as well, with a particular manuscript evincing "ambivalence" towards the work's place amongst other romances.[10] There has been a marked shift in academic perspectives since the 1970s before which they received little interest,[11] and indeed, sustained research only began after Aimé Petit's 1985 *L'anachronisme dans les romans antiques du XIIe siècle*, particularly tuned towards the *Roman de Thèbes*. This monograph on the *romans d'antiquité* focused in particular on those penetrations into the text made by the contemporary experiences of the clerk, anachronisms that are best perceived visually in miniature images that display Roman soldiers as medieval knights in front of Norman castles, and which arise textually as curious portrayals of pagan rituals mixed with chivalric expectations of hosting and combat. For example, at the end of a battle depicted in the *Thèbes*, the Argive "bishop" (*arcevesque*) Amphiaraus is killed and his death is interpreted by the Argives as evidence of

[8] "Pour ce n'en veul mon senz tesir, / ma sapience retenir, / ainz me delite a raconteur / chose digne por ramembrer." (lines 9-12); Glyn S. Burgess and Douglas Kelly, trans., *The Roman de Thèbes and the Roman* d'Eneas (Liverpool University Press, 2021), 28.

[9] Aimé Petit, "Transtextualité: Le *Roman de Thèbes*, de l'*Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César* à la redaction imprimée par Pierre Sergent," in *Raconter en prose. XIVe-XVIe siècle*, eds. Paola Cifarelli, Maria Colombo Timelli, Matteo Milani and Anne Schoysman (Paris: Garnier, 2017), 243-258.

[10] Isabelle Delage-Béland, "Une conquête problématique: Le statut ambigu de la fiction dans le manuscrit Paris, BNF, fr. 37, un recueil de *romans*," *Études françaises* 48.3 (2012), 95-113.

[11] For example, see Rosemarie Jones, *The Theme of Love in the "Romans d'antiquité"* (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1972), Guy Raynaud de Lage, *Les premiers romans français et autres études littéraires et linguistiques* (Genève: Droz, 1976).

retribution for sin. Petit established that Statius drew no connection between Amphiaraus's death and group punishment, instead conjecturing that the presence of this recognition of "sin" in the medieval translation was drawn from the crusader notion of immanent justice.[12] Petit identified critical reactions to these elements so present in the *romans d'antiquité* as located on a sliding multi-dimensional scale, moving from a humanizing/modernizing trend of the 12th-century that pictured a universal "human" experience, to political and socio-cultural ends, as well as the basic task of translation and adaptation. The medieval authors behind these translations, for Petit, were well aware of the space opened between antiquity and their medieval contemporaneity, and exploited it to question socio-political social structures of the time.

Following from this work, a sustained line of research, particularly in French scholarship, inscribes the *romans d'antiquité* within a framework of literary reception that views rhetorical, lexical and editorial choices made by the authors as fundamentally introducing "updates" to the text, rendering them more intelligible to contemporary audiences. Petit considered these changes and additions to be "necessary anachronisms, with a didactic function ….," while Dominique Boutet found that anachronisms create "a dialectical consciousness for which the present and the past only have meaning, and only create meaning, insofar as they are brought into resonance."[13] Francine Mora-Lebrun has referred to the world created by these elements a "hybrid, composite world, one that is willfully syncretic, situated halfway between Antiquity and the Middle Ages."[14] While the romance does serve as an invaluable repository of material and readings that were introduced by medieval writers, along with reflections on what those interventions could have meant to a medieval audience,[15] the analytic of "anachronism" risks placing us outside of the *romans d'antiquité* as knowing arbiters of truth. As Petit himself remarks, "anachronism exists

[12] Aimé Petit, *L'anachronisme dans les romans antiques du XIIe* siècle (Honoré Champion, 2002), 278-280.

[13] "une conscience dialectique pour laquelle le présent et le passé n'ont de sens et ne font de sens que pour autant ils sont mis en résonance." Dominique Boutet, "Réflexions sur la cohérence du *Roman de Thèbes*," in *Furent les merveilles pruvees et les aventures truvees: Hommage à François Dubost,* ed. Francis Gingras et al. (Honnoré Champion, 2005), 67-81, and *Formes littéraires et conscience historique: Aux origines de la littérature française* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1999), 22.

[14] "Cela [la création d'anachronisms "nécessaires"] afin de rendre les textes antiques accessibles au public médiéval, bien sûr, et éviter de sa part un mouvement de rejet, mais aussi sans doute pour créer un monde hybride, composite, volontairement syncrétique, qui se situe à mi-chemin entre l'Antiquité et le Moyen Âge." Mora-Lebrun, *"Metre en romanz*," 237.

[15] See Petit, L'*anachronisme*, 74, whether the conflict between Argives and Thebans would have evoked east-west schisms at the time.

only from the moment it becomes obvious ... it immediately jars, it scandalizes."[16] Who is shocked? The modern critic, rather than the medieval reader. Anachronism requires an acute awareness of the "base" culture, on which the untimely (*a-chronos*) contemporary is perceived as inappropriately intruding. The extent to which the medieval audience would have found the *Thèbes* anachronistic is difficult to assess, given medieval knowledge about, and imaginings of, antiquity, a question that requires a nuanced response, according to Petit: perhaps the knights recognized themselves, and clerks could see the work as an adaptation.[17] The notion of anachronism crucially elevates the modern reader above *both* the medieval writer and the ancient texts, able to distinguish right from wrong, archeological preservation from anachronistic pollution, informed reading from ignorant reading. Much like the 12th-century commentator of the *Aeneid*, the anachronism-sniffing reader becomes the master of making the text say even more by shoehorning modern discourse into the past writers' work: this is really what he meant.

Since the 2000s, attention to the *romans* has slowly grown among American researchers. In 2004, Dominique Battles could only identify "a handful of articles or chapters in books and a few doctoral dissertations" on the *Thèbes*, which, as she rightly observed, "tended to fragment the poem, isolating particular features of the work that invite comparison with other contemporary genres" (the *roman* and *chanson de geste* in particular) or explored only particular episodes within the narrative, "while avoiding the episode's larger implications for the work."[18] Such was also the case of the *Troie* and the *Eneas*; since then, however, the same can no longer be said. Theoretical engagements, such as Sarah Kay's 2001 *Courtly Contradictions* and Zrinka Stahuljak's 2005 *Bloodless Genealogies* as well as Maud Burnett McInerney's 2022 *Translation and Temporality in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's* Roman de Troie, have demonstrated clear theoretical engagements with these early romances.[19] Moreover, the publications into English over the past ten years of

[16] "... l'anachronisme n'existe qu'à partir du moment où il est patent ... il choque immédiatement, il scandalise." Petit, *L'anachronisme*, 191

[17] Petit, *L'anachronisme*, 281.

[18] As she concedes, this trend is in part due to the work's manuscript history, which discourages "global readings." Dominique Battles, *The Medieval Tradition of Thebes: History and Narrative in the OF Roman de Thèbes, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate* (Routledge, 2004), 20.

[19] Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions: The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford University Press, 2001); Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kingship, and Metaphor* (University Press of Florida, 2005); Maud Burnett McInerney, *Translation and Temporality in Benoît de Sainte Maure's* Roman de Troie (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

translations of all three romances has significantly widened their availability to non-medievalists.[20] There is still nevertheless considerably less scholarship focusing on the *romans d'antiquité* than on Chrétien de Troyes or the later *Roman de la Rose*, perhaps because they do not so easily lend themselves to scholarly interest in romance as literary form, and the novel investigations and displays of the self that it allows. Christopher Canon's work represents this perspective of romance as an aggregate: there is not so much one romance as there is simply *romance*, each text of which is "not really 'about' a person … but, rather, the *extent* to which that person exceeds the bounds of personhood, that which is in him or her which exceeds what any person *could* be."[21] The *Thèbes*, *Troie* and *Eneas* do not neatly fit into this categorization as they are effectively *about someone* and *about something*. Mathilda Bruckner in 1993 relegated the *romans d'antiquité* to a category of an "initial form" of romance, as though not yet realizing the vernacular's potential,[22] and same assumption through periodization can be seen elsewhere, and quite recently when they are still sometimes left out of the picture, as in Emma Dillons characterization of "Old French romance, from its early incarnation in the 1170s, in the works of Chrétien de Troyes to the early decades of the thirteenth century...."[23] If 1170 is the starting point, then the *romans d'antiquité* do not even figure as "early" romance. There has been, indeed, longstanding ambivalence towards their importance in scholarship on the romance genre, although Sarah Kay has argued that the *romans d'antiquité* "prepare the way for the enigmatic marvels of adventure in later romance."[24]

Kay's situating of the *romans d'antiquité* in relation to enigma not only connects them with the stakes of the romance genre more broadly, but also characterizes the nature of the texts themselves, which offer themselves up as enigmas. For the medieval translators of the *romans d'antiquité*, locating the truth, not just of the text, but of the transmitted object itself, becomes central. Is *this* text telling the truth—not just the Old French translation, but the original as well? As Benoît de Sainte-Maure writes of the story of Troy, "it has been told with many interpretations

[20] Glyn S. Burgess and Douglas Kelly eds., *The* Roman de Thèbes *and the* Roman d'Eneas (Liverpool University Press, 2021), and Glyn S. Burgess and Douglas Kelly eds., *The* Roman de Troie *by Benoît de Sainte-Maure* (D.S. Brewer, 2017).

[21] Christopher Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 175.

[22] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 1.

[23] Emma Dillon, "Song and the Soundscape of Old French Romance," in *Thinking Medieval Romance*, ed. Katherine C. Little and Nicola McDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 155.

[24] Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*, 143.

("maint sen"), that is, how Troy was destroyed, but the truth ("verté") is little heard."[25] The stakes are measured in terms of control, David Rollo suggests: the translated text's fixation on the translator's ability to unmask falsehood allows the latter to inhabit "a cognitive hinterland in which truth and falsehoods escape the judgment of others."[26] That is, the translator's inhabitation of this "hinterland" locates him in a space set apart where he has particular and unchallengeable authority, thus problematizing the credibility not just of history as transmission over time, but translation in general. While Benoît, more than the other authors of the *romans*, continually argues for his own superiority, all of the *romans d'antiquité* nevertheless continually remind their audience that they occupy a space of contested truth. They are, in a way, governing their episteme, attempting to exercise power over discourse, and this notion of *romance as power* has constituted a second pole of interest that I wish to develop. Two main orientations have directed readings of the *romans*, one grounding them in a command economy in which the Angevin court sought out writers to produce works legitimizing the authority of their emerging, novel power center in Western Europe, and another considering the translations as primarily serving the purpose of increasing readership among audiences unable to read Latin.

1.1 Discourses of Power

The *Aeneid* famously ends in silence on the future of Aeneas and his (expected) bride Lavinia, without the consummation provided by a wedding or even the hint of a physical relationship. Anxiety about this absence is apparent in the *Roman d'Eneas*, which envisions the stakes of the union in starkly personal terms. Once Lavinia admits to her mother, the queen, the name of the man she loves—spelled out letter-by-letter as if unable to say whole—her mother explodes in anger. Eneas is a sodomite, a "cuivers" (line 8621) ("wretch") who "n'a de femmes gaire cure" (line 8622) ("does not care about women at all") and "prisera miex son garçon / que toy ne autre acoler." (lines 8626-8627) ("will be happier embracing a boy than you or any other woman.") Eneas is not alone, as "En ce sont Troïen nourri" (line 8631) ("The Trojans are raised in this.") Scholars since Edmond Faral have long connected this passage with medieval anxiety

[25] "En maint sen avra l'om retrait, / Saveir com Troie fu perie, / Mais la verté est poi oïe." *Roman de Troie*, vv. 42-44.

[26] David Rollo, "Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*: Historiography, Forgery and Fiction," *Comparative Literature Studies* 32, no. 2(1995): 196.

over, and rejection of, homosexual relationships.[27] Yet, as Simon Gaunt observed, while this may be the case, "its main effect is to mark Enéas's conformity to a prescribed norm."[28] That is, Enéas *does indeed* go onto marry and love Lavinia, and the distance between that narrative reality and the mother's charges of perversity only emphasize his normative masculinity and proper behavior in kinghood. The text, it has been argued, emphasizes virility and procreation so as to reinforce the importance of the primary need of the time: reliable dynastic succession. William Burgwinkle has argued that the charge of sodomy against Eneas was a medieval commonplace for criticism of the Trojans, and connected it as an issue threatening a growing historiographic trend of the time linking the emerging Plantagenets to the Trojans through the metaphor of *translatio imperii*. Thus, "were the *Eneas* author to exculpate the Trojans" of this vice-ridden association, "he would also be serving the Norman cause without having to dissociate them from their claim to legitimacy through Trojan descent."[29] Going further, Judith Haas has explored the function of love and improper sexuality in the text, to argue that "the poem imagines a shift to dynastic power, legitimized by unbroken genealogy," rather than "horizontal ties between aristocratic men."[30] What the *Eneas* engages in, then, is power: the exertion of power by an intellectual class, clerks, over the secular power structures of the time by attempting to rearrange and redefine the hierarchy of social values that subtend them.

The *Troie* and the *Thèbes*, whose famed opening cuts out audiences too far from seats of power,[31] also gesture towards tensions in readership, social structures in a court society, and power dynamics in the rapidly evolving economic and political structures of 12th-century western Europe.[32] The extent to which they are invested in shaping conceptions of state power has been a

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[27] Edmond Faral, *Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et romans courtois du moyen âge* (Champion, 1913), 131-132.

[28] Simon Gaunt, "From Epic to Romance: Gender and Sexuality in the *Roman d'Enéas*," *Romanic Review* 83, no. 1 (1992): 23.

[29] William Burgwinkle, "Knighting the Classical Hero: Homo/Hetero Affectivity in Eneas," *Exemplaria* 5, no. 1 (1993): 11.

[30] Judith Haas, "Trojan Sodomy and the Politics of Marriage in the *Roman d'Enéas*," *Exemplaria* 20, no. 1 (2008): 67.

[31] "Or s'en tesent de cest mestier, / se ne sont clerc ou chevalier, / car aussi pueent escouter / comme li asnes a harper" (lines 13-14). ("Let those who are neither clerks nor knights take the time to listen to this, because they can listen just as well as asses can harp.")

[32] This derision in the *Thèbes* is not an isolated invective, as Jean Batany has shown in an exploration of possible anticlerical projections onto the priestly characters of Dares's archetype throughout the *Roman de Troie*. Jean Batany, "Benoît, auteur anticlérical? De Troïlus à Guillaume Longue-Epée," in *Le roman antique au Moyen Âge*, 7.

continued source of inquiry. As many researchers have observed, there are points of similarity between the feudal conflicts portrayed in the *Thèbes,* and the contemporary political restructuring taking place throughout the Plantagenet sphere of domination, inviting historicizing and teleological readings that see the text as concerted political propaganda, at least in part.[33] The "choice" of Statius as the first text to translate into French, for example, has been seen as particularly meaningful, Statius being seen as an author who could "validate radical changes" in the "pursuit of an inheritance during the emergence of the Norman-Angevin dynasty."[34] According to Gabrielle M. Spiegel, the French aristocracy in the 13th century "sought to embed its ideology in history and thereby endow that ideology with the prestige and imprescriptible character that the past was able to confer in medieval society."[35] The romance's place on that scale, from fiction to history, has been negotiated differently by scholars intrigued by the question -- Emmanuèle Baumgartner concluded that the works did not "go all the way" on the path towards realizing fictionality as literary invention, and were weighted down by their relationship with history.[36] The hypothesis that the Benoît de Sainte-Maure of the *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie* corresponds to the Benoît de Sainte-Maure author of the *Roman de Troie* has been an alluring connection to centers of power,[37] along with references internal to the romances themselves. Two lines from the

[33] Raymond Cormier, review of *The Romance of Thebes (Roman de Thèbes)*, by Joan M. Ferrante and Robert W. Hanning, *Speculum* 96, no. 4 (2021): 1174-75.The historicizing trend continues, although some scholars have sought to move away from it. Dominique Boutet states his goal to "mesurer" and "décrire" the works, "non de chercher à établir des chaînes de causalité et de rendre compte de la littérature au moyen d'un système qui en ferait le produit de déterminations historiques ..." Dominique Boutet, *Formes littéraires et conscience historique aux origines de la littérature française, 1100-1250* (Presses universitaires de France, 1999), 1. Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Federico provide a useful review in their 2009 edited volume on historicizing trends in medieval literary research, cf. Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Federico, eds., *The Post-Historical Middle Ages* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

[34] Paul M. Clogan, "Visions of Thebes in Medieval Literature," in *The Force of Vision: Proceedings of the XIIIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, ed. Gerald Gillespie, Margaret R. Higgonet, and Sumi Jones, vol. 2 (Tokyo: International Comparative Literature Association, 1995), 147.

[35] Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 2.

[36] Emmanuèle Baumgartner, "Vers, prose et fiction narrative (1150-1240)," in *Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative: A Festschrift for Dr Elspeth Kennedy*, ed. Elspeth Kennedy, Karen Pratt, and Penny Eley (D.S. Brewer, 1994), 2. This framework assumes that there is a path from the *romans d'antiquité* to the works of Chrétien de Troyes, the former not yet freed from the yoke of the *chanson de geste*, and the latter discovering and realizing the possibility of fictionality. As Baumgartner claims, "Tout change avec Chrétien de Troyes," in particular through rejecting antiquity as a source of invention and moving outside of historical space.

[37] See Emmanuelle Baumgartner ed., *Le roman de Troie*, 19 for an argument for : ".. le projet qui sous-tend [the *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie*], sa langue, la variété et la richesse de son style, les procédés utilisés, la présence insistante du narrateur sont autant d'éléments—il en est d'autres—qui permettent de penser que Benoît de Sainte-Maure auteur du *Roman de Troie* et Benoît auteur de la Chronique ne font qu'un, et que le clerc a su, d'une œuvre à

Roman de Thèbes, "Mieus vaut lor ris et lor baisiers / Que ne fait Londres ne Peitiers" (lines 971-972) ("Their laughter and smiles were worth more than London and Poitiers"), have been long considered a wink towards Plantagenet sponsorship. Benoît de Sainte-Maure's flattering comment on Briséis's beauty in the *Troie* has also been understood as a possible homage to Eleanor of Aquitaine.[38] Overall, the assumption that these three *romans d'antiquité* are not just associated with the Plantagenet dynasty but in fact with a political project of legitimization, even a purposefully-commanded project by Henry or Eleanor of Aquitaine, continues to circulate in descriptions of the texts.[39]

These can be self-fulfilling readings, however, where the relationship to Plantagenet power apparatuses or crusader history is assumed and traces of it are sought elsewhere in the text to confirm that supposition.[40] The romances lack explicit claims to patronage, unlike the work of Chrétien de Troyes, who opened *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* with:

> Puis que ma dame de Chanpaigne
> Vialt que romans a feire anpraigne,
> Je l'anprendrai molt volentiers
> Come cil qui est suens antiers
> De quanqu'il puet el monde feire

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l'autre, mener à bien l'ambitieuse tâche de souder, par-delà l'espace et le temps, le mythe troyen au mythe d'origine de l'Angleterre normande."

[38] Amaury Charuou, *L'idéologie Plantagenêt. Royauté arthurienne et monarchie politique dans l'espace Plantagenêt (XIIe-XIIIe siècles)* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2001), 91.

[39] In his 2008 edition of the *Roman de Thèbes*, Aimé Petit relies not just on the manuscript tradition, that often associates the *Thèbes, Troie* and *Eneas* with the *Brut* and sometimes the *Roman de Rou*, but also thematic elements that receive particular amplification to associate the works with the inheritors of the English throne after William the Conqueror, bringing out that association in an indirect way that does not quite claim veracity, but hints at it in the background: "The court of Eleanor and Henry II Plantagenet saw and gave birth to the *romans antiques* … it has been considered that this triad, along with Wace's *Brut*, constituted a whole dedicated to the Plantagenet's prehistory …" As Glynn Burgess and Douglas Kelly characterized in the introduction to their English translation of the *Troie*, the text has been "linked" to the Plantagenet court, and Catherine Croizy-Naquet has qualified the romances as issued from the same "cultural center" (*foyer culturel*), namely, the Plantagenet court. In fact, one of Croizy-Naquet's proposals is that the three works are concerted efforts to strengthen the intellectual and thus political legitimacy of the Plantagenet dynasty by idealizing the city as a privileged "crucible" for advanced ideas. See *Le Roman de Thèbes*, ed. Aimé Petit (Honoré Champion: 2008), 25; Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *The* Roman de Troie, trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Douglas Kelly (D.S. Brewer, 2017), 5; Catherine Croizy-Naquet, *Thèbes, Troie, et Carthage: Poétique de la ville dans le roman antique au XIIe siècle* (Honoré Champion, 1994), 14; 18.

[40] See Battles, *The Medieval Tradition of Thebes*, 34-37.

Sanz rien de losange avant treire.

…

Del *Chevalier de la charrete*

Comance Crestïens son livre,

Matiere et san li done et livre

La contesse et il s'antremet

De panser, que gueres n'i met

Fors sa painne et s'antancïon… (lines 1-29)[41]

Since my lady of Champagne wants me to undertake a romance, I will do so with pleasure, as someone who is entirely hers to do whatever he can in the world, without engaging in the slightest bit of flattery … Christian now begins the *Chevalier de la Charrette*: the material and the meaning have been given to him by the countess, and he contributes his thoughts, without adding anything else besides his work and effort.

None of the *romans d'antiquité* employ such a dedication. If Henry and Eleanor sponsored these works, what exactly should that message be? Given the historical context, it is difficult to tell: Henry II acceded to the throne in 1151; the *Thèbes* in particular would have been composed around the same time which could identify the romance as a general commentary on mid-12th-century socio-political realities. Yet such a conclusion has been called into question in the past twenty years. In 2003 Elizabeth A.R. Brown revised and expanded her original 1976 study that cast doubt on many modern assumptions about Eleanor of Aquitaine as a literary sponsor, affirming that, based on the historical record and explicit textual evidence, Eleanor associated herself more with the activities and symbols of lordship, rather than traditional pastimes of women in the aristocracy such as literary sponsorship, and Brown finds a marked lack of evidence for the latter from her.[42] Claims to legitimization or promotion of the Plantagenet court and its developing state apparatus which were indeed novel for the twelfth century rely upon assumptions of patronage that are

[41] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le chevalier de la charrette*, ed. Charles Méla (Livre de Poche, 1992); English translation my own.

[42] See Elizabeth A.R. Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine Reconsidered: The Woman and her Seasons," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and* Lady, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parson (Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 1-54.

simply unattested in the texts themselves.[43]As Francine Mora-Lebrun set out the state of affairs, "... neither *Thèbes*, nor *Eneas*, nor *Troie*, nor even the *Brut*, which is often associated with them, can be classified as confirmed instances of patronage."[44] The issues of patronage, or the identity of a possible sponsor, are far from settled.

To be clear, my intent is not to reject historicizing readings only as modes of historical recovery. The *romans* appeared during a period in which interest in the past and the lineage of ruling dynasties inspired both Latin and vernacular productions: Wace finished his *Roman de Brut* around 1155, adapted from the *Historia regum Brittaniae* written by Geoffrey of Monmouth about twenty years earlier, and began his *Roman de Rou*, the history of the dukes of Normandy, in the 1160s. While this context is important, it is important to avoid simplifying and then projecting Wace's design onto the *romans d'antiquité*, and to counter the simplification of notions of power in the context of literary production (e.g. the political power to command works and therefore predetermine meaning). Zrinka Stahuljak has taken a much more nuanced historicizing perspective, noting that both the *Thèbes* and the *Eneas* were written "following the forced and violent ascension of the first Plantagenet king, Henry II, to the Anglo-Norman throne," placing them, in part, as works in *dialogue* with this time, of which they "propose a version of history that is itself 'unnatural,' violent and teeming with reversals.…"[45] Instead of considering how these medieval translations project the conceptions their writers had of the world–an inevitably unverifiable hypothesis on our part–I am interested in the agency of the translations themselves, that is, in what operative effects the texts have on the material they constitute in a particular

[43] While evidence exists for Henry II's sponsoring of a great deal of production in Latin, and Eleanor's direct intervention as a commander of vernacular production is entirely possible given the evidence of noblewomen's interest in the production of literature during this time, there is almost no explicit mentioning of any royal sponsorship for the *romans d'antiquité*. Karen Broadhurt's definition of patronage – "for there to be a true patronage relationship, there must be a commission" – rules out any definitive proof of a command-and-control relationship between the writers of the *romans d'antiquité* and an outside authority. Given the paucity of administrative documents from the era, literary clues become the grounds of "wishful thinking" that "grows into confidence assertion on the part of the medievalist," and her survey of the *romans d'antiquité* rejected assertions that even associate them with the Plantagenets, as well as calling into question the identity of the Benoît who wrote the *Troie* with the Benoît who wrote the *Ducs de Normandie*, one text that is definitively known to be a product of royal patronage. See Susan M. Johns, "Patronage and Power," in *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Normand Realm* (Manchester University Press, 2003); Karen M. Broadhurst, "Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine: Patrons of Literature in French?" in *Viator* 27 (1995): 54; 73-74.

[44] "On le voit, ni *Thèbes*, ni *Eneas*, ni *Troie*, ni même le *Brut*, qui leur est souvent associé, ne peuvent être classés dans la catégorie des patronages avérés …" Francine Mora-Lebrun, "*Metre en romanz": Les Romans d'Antiquité du XIIe siècle et leur postérité, XIIIe-XIVe siècle* (Honoré Champion: 2008), 57-58; 69.

[45] Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 12.

medium (romance), on a particular medium (parchment and codices) and in language. They interfered with their translator's attempt to impose order in the process of *translatio* – certain texts, through translation, "increase the radical heterogeneity [inherent to any text] by submitting the major language to constant variation, forcing it to be minor, delegitimizing, deterritorializing, alienating it."[46] In other words, through negotiating an encounter with the other, the myth of integrity of one's own culture is interrogated and destabilized, and its own inherent mobility rises to the surface.

1.2 Translation and Vulgarization

Two of the five manuscripts of the *Thèbes* amend the prologue slightly to introduce a crucial claim underlying its genesis, as if compelled by a task that had to be done in face of a text that was far too silent. The narrator states that "I want to tell you an ancient story that clerks remember" ("Conter vos voel d'antive estoire / Que li clerc tienent en memoire"),[47] de-emphasizing the authority of the ancients figuring in the first lines of the romance in favor of the (Latin-reading) clerk writing this one: the text is right because of who is writing it. This framing then moves from self-legitimation to benevolence, as the writer shifts into third person to give a hint at his motives for translating:

> Il le fist tout selonc la letre,
> Dont lai ne sevent entremetre,
> Et pour chou fu li romans fais,
> Que nel saroit hom ki fust lais.[48]

> He [the writer of this text] followed the [Latin] letter, which the lay public would not be able to do, and this is why the *romans* was made, which any layman would be unable to do himself.

[46] Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation* (Routledge, 1998), 9.

[47] Luca Di Sabatino, ed., *Le Roma, de Thèbes. Édition critique d'après le manuscript A (BnF, fr. 375)* (Classiques Garnier, 2016), lines 17-18.

[48] Di Sabatino, *Le Roman de Thèbes*, lines 27-30.

The *Thèbes* had to be translated by a member of an elite group in particular, a clerk for the lay population (*lai*) that was unable to read the original Latin. Benoît de Sainte-Maure echoes this motivation more explicitly when he starts his *Roman de Troie* by writing that "La [estoire] voudrai si en romanz metre / Que cil qui n'entendent la letre / Se puissant deduire el romanz," (lines 40-42). ("I would like to put the story into French/romance, so that those who cannot understand the Latin text may enjoy it in French/romance.") The manuscript tradition itself suggests, although far from unanimously, that translation was the impetus behind the *romans d'antiquité*. Their meaning and function, then, rise from this expression of intent: as their authors *say* that they translated them for educational purpose, then the text can internally be interpreted following those lines. As Paul Zumthor concluded, the creation of the *roman d'antiquité* was rooted in access: "carried out by an individual steeped in book culture, the *mise en roman* [rendering into romance] was intended for someone from the knightly or noble milieu"; romancing the history was meant to "convey meaning by adapting it to the circumstances."[49] This "*laïcisation* of knowledge" signaled an "openness of clerics to the lay world."[50] Zumthor's reading further cements the *romans* as tools for dissemination that operate not with simply new readings, but with pedagogical motivations seeking to spread knowledge.

This perspective risks orienting readings of the *romans d'antiquité* around motivations and inspirations, that is, in teleological approaches to the text that serve as backdoor entrances for authorial intent to re-emerge into literary analysis. This explains interest in Petit's hunt for anachronisms, introducing "intelligible equivalences" that serve to "soften the strangeness of Antiquity and avoid disorienting the audience too much."[51] Of course, translation studies have largely moved away from the bipartite general framework so succinctly qualified by Jerome at the end of the 4th century CE: "not word for word, but sense for sense" ("non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu"), and the idea of romance-as-didactic-manual appreciates these texts as original works, not owing their source text fidelity, either in sense or in word. Yet taking the texts at their word as fundamentally pedagogical objects, *shaped by the desires of their authors*,

[49] "… opérée par un individu frotté de culture livresque, la *mise en roman* a pour destinataire quelqu'un du milieu chevaleresque et noble ..."; "... faire comprendre, en adaptant aux circonstances." Paul Zumthor, *La lettre et la voix. De la 'littérature' médiévale* (Éditions du Seuil, 1987), 300-301.

[50] Francine Mora-Lebrun, *"Metre en romanz,"* 173.

[51] "... atténuer l'étrangeté de l'Antiquité et ne pas trop dépayser le public." Mora-Lebrun, *"Metre en roman,"* 237.

ignores not just how the texts can escape those motivations (which we are unable to be certain of, despite what is said in the prologue), but also that translation can be subjected to an array of analyses that engage with cognition itself. Translation is such a common practice that it intersects with and essentially overlaps any theory of language, allowing scholars to import critical approaches from across the humanities and then, in turn, understand processes outside of the immediate activity of translation as metaphors or figures of translation.[52] Indeed, one of Jacques Derrida's concerns in understanding translation was the necessity of admitting *simultaneous* multiplicities, structures present in language just as in symbolic thought, given the fact that representation–a messy indeterminate activity–underlies both.[53] Focus on meaning and fidelity deceptively transforms texts into stable coherent units, of course, but even the well-minded modern critic aware of these differences and keen to skirt them can easily slip into the desire to exhaust the meaning within a text.

Linguistically, the concept of translations as literature was a relative novelty in the 12th century. Roger Wright has questioned whether differences between Latin and Romance vernaculars were an *invention* of the twelfth century, rather than a solution proposed by clerks of that time for a growing lay audience only then interested in direct access to a Latin literary culture that had been divorced from non-clerical audiences for centuries. [54] Assumptions of an expanded audience are in fact just that, and while our medieval translators have things to say about their audience, they do not necessarily say that their intended audience is unaware of the texts written in Latin through other means.[55] For some, the rub really is what terms to use. Why settle on translation, why not vulgarization, as Alison Cornish proposes, or to borrow from our medieval

[52] One of the most radical reassessments is perhaps found George Steiner's 1975 *After Babel*, where he collapsed the distinction between translation and textual (or even any linguistic) interpretation, writing, "When we read or hear any language-statement from the past, be it Leviticus or last-year's best seller, we translate." George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 28.

[53] Jacques Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," in *Psyché: Inventions de l'autre*, rev. ed. (Paris: Galilée, 1998), 203-204.

[54] Roger Wright, "Translation between Latin and Romance in the Early Middle Ages," in *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 27.

[55] Concerning literacy, scholars such as Martin Aurell have considered to what extent the twelfth century may have seen groups of knights and nobles that were already sufficiently competent in Latin to have the general ability to function without translations, as evidenced in written testimonies such as the children of Robert de Beaumont – a friend of Henry I – who were able to converse with Italian cardinals in Latin on their trip to Rome. Martin Aurell, *The Lettered Knight: Knowledge and Aristocratic Behaviour in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Central European Press: 2017), 69-70.

writers, *mise en roman*?[56] Zumthor proposed a more apt term in modern English that, in my view, corresponds with how the *romans d'antiquité* functioned in their literary culture: "*Mettre en roman* is, properly speaking, to 'gloss' in the vernacular."[57] In short, the *romans d'antiquité* afford privileged points of contact with modern theories of translation. They allow us to rethink notions such as "periphery" and "center" in a society that was structured very differently from the one that gave rise to modern translation theory, and in return, we are invited to ponder the role of translation within a literary culture that considered itself as partially constituted by *translatio.* As Michelle Warren and Simon Gaunt have both pointed out, it is particularly telling that Benjamin ended his *Task of the Translator* on his own ideal for translation – a medieval one, the interlinear gloss.[58]

1.3 The *romans d'antiquité* as novel forms of attention

My contribution to the field of medieval translation in this dissertation is to bring in *attention* as an analytic, both to access the *romans d'antiquité* from a new perspective and as a way to open dialogue with contemporary scholars and theorists interested in how recent trends in digital media shape our own postures towards reading. I am principally concerned with exploring the consequences of translation from Latin to Old French, Roman antiquity to medieval Western Europe: this process of carrying over the texts (*translatio*) highlights how translation not only challenges the transparency of language and thought, but brings along with it ethical implications and perturbs the internal structure of a given literary order by reshaping how texts are read, written and interpreted. I consider vernacular translation as an *attentive* process, one that focuses on the text and the language as the translator seeks ways to express a narrative in a new linguistic (French) and codicological (uncommented columns of verse) medium. Through theorists such as D. Graham Burnett and Bernard Stiegler I emphasize the concepts of cognitive load and failure in attentive processes, as minds seek identified material while trying to filter out unnecessary data, and as all *attending to* is necessarily partial; that is, attention is not to be perfectly immersed, but to be constantly struggling to stay inside. This dissertationis an analysis of how three different vernacular writers engaged textually, narratively, and linguistically with Latin and vernacular

[56] Alison Cornish, *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[57] "*Mettre en roman*, c'est proprement 'gloser' en langue vernaculaire." Zumthor, *La lettre*, 301.

[58] Michelle R. Warren, "Modern Theoretical Approaches to Medieval Translation," in *A Companion to Medieval Translation* (Arc Humanities Press: 2019), 166; Simon Gaunt, "Untranslatable: A Response," in *Rethinking Medieval Translation: Ethics, Politics, Theory*, ed. Emma Campbell and Robert Mills (D.S. Brewer: 2012), 254.

literary cultures, and navigated their compositional task in the creation of the *romans d'antiquité* as an attentive practice.

I am largely inspired and informed, then, by recent work on the impact of digital tools on an individual's practice of attention, which has broadened and deepened the inquiry into what, precisely, attention is. As we shall see, attention is distinguished from neighboring notions such as "focus," "emphasis," or "care" insofar as it is a cognitive process that takes place over time, encountering failure in its success, variation in its intensity, and shifting goals in the objects it identifies. Recent interest in attention has often emphasized the extent to which attention, far from serving the idealized, optimist goal of focusing on a specific topic or object, is fundamentally diffuse and unfixed. Patricia Clare Ingham, in her recent re-reading of discourses denouncing "symptomatic" reading in favor of "openness" to a text, situates that perspective in an erroneous positioning towards the text that fails to account for the metacognition of attention, that is, the terms by which attention is theorized. In her reading of the ways medieval writers from Augustine to Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas discussed curiosity and boredom, she notes that they themselves often considered too much curiosity, too much receptiveness to other influences as a vice, an "excessive interest in too many things."[59] Attention often operates outside of a goal-driven logic; it is constituted as much by failure, distraction, and shifting focus as by the drive towards understanding: we are often "failing to attend."[60] Cognitive models suggest attention is a negotiation between top-down goals and bottom-up stimuli. That is, attention is not necessarily, and very rarely, a perfect focus on one object; it "allows for the selection of preferred neural signals by increasing their strength through neural feedback, thus diminishing the relative strength of other neural signals."[61] These different levels of signals are in competition, and it is that competition that is at the heart of attention.

This debt to contemporary concerns over digital tools can introduce a tricky false equivalency: I do not wish to claim that vernacular translation, or Latin textual forms in the 12th century, function *analogously* to digital media in the field of attention. Yet our current ways of

[59] Patricia Clare Ingham, "The Ways We Pay Attention," *New Literary History* 56, no.1 (2025): 53.

[60] D. Graham Burnett and Justin E. H. Smith, "Thinking Attention," in *Scenes of Attention: Essays on Mind, Time, and the Senses*, ed. D. Graham Burnett and Justin E. H. Smith (Columbia University Press, 2023), 7.

[61] Carolyn Dicey Jennings and Shadab Tabatabaeian, "Attention, Technology, and Creativity," in *Scenes of Attention: Essays on Mind, Time, and the Senses*, ed. D. Graham Burnett and Justin E. H. Smith (Columbia University Press, 2023), 125-126.

talking about the deleterious effects of digital tools on attention highlight features of vernacular and Latin literature that have, I think, not been sufficiently discussed or properly named. Thus, I have spoken of the way attention to the past is broken up in the *Eneas*, how the translation of Dares and Dictys by Benoît de Sainte-Maure afforded renewed attention to the syntax and grammar of Old French and Latin, how Latin and vernacular narrative and textual structures encode specific kinds of attention to the *Thebaid* and the *Roman de Thèbes*. I think this work can go in the opposite direction as well, and cause contemporary scholars working on the function of attention in the digital age to pause at certain qualifications which they afford to the literary and the written. For example, Antón Barba-Kay's recent work has provided a fascinating critique of the digital manipulation of data and digital information processing by exploring the extent to which platforms and interfaces—on the internet at large, but within social media and smartphones in particular—collapse the classic distinction between *media*, "an environment, an atmosphere of resonances" of meaning,[62] and *tool*, something that requires training and mastery in order to be used. For Barba-Kay, that collapse has occurred principally through "undermining claims to specialized expertise," since "To be online is to be both passive witness (as one takes in a book) and as effective agent (as one takes up a hammer)."[63] The digital eschews specialization and mastery, as an interface's goal is to bring in and absorb the user, guiding them along to certain predefined uses and experiences, becoming so enveloping as to be the primary way by which the individual defines and conceptualizes their existence in the world: an online user. This mode of being, for Barba-Lay, is wildly divorced from that of a literary culture:

> Books speak at length, furthermore. A reader must put in the time to know them and to be in the position to criticize them with authority. They are wholes—they self-contain their contexts. If someone misconstrues a sentence, you can correct him by pointing, chapter and verse, to a different passage, or by clarifying the frame of reference. The presumption is that authors ought to sustain a coherent, sequential argument throughout, and that the reader has an obligation to pin down all parts within that whole.[64]

[62] Antón Barba-Kay, *A Web of Our Own Making: The Nature of Digital Formation* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 24.

[63] Barba-Kay, *A Web of Our Own Making*, 36-37.

[64] Barba-Kay, *A Web of Our Own Making*, 32.

Here, I think that contemporary work on the dangers for attention and cognitive abilities at large posed by digital tools—which, by the way, I wholeheartedly agree with—simplify and even misrepresent textuality. It fails to see the extent to which the structure and format of a page (or folio) can destabilize the meaning of a text, how a narrative can threaten the ability to attend, as I have argued in the preceding chapters. Attention to attention in the *romans d'antiquité* is a reminder that textuality is not a fixed semantic vector—this is nothing new, of course, going back at least to deconstructionism 60 years ago. However, it is a reminder that, if not revolutions, at least whole *shifts* in attention within other, textual forms of communication and representation have occurred. The *romans d'antiquité*, then, afford us the opportunity to consider how such shifts function for a culture foreign to us, unaware of our own ways of inhabiting the world and defining ourselves. They also question the terms by which we articulate our own transition from a written to a visual, digital society; pitfalls, crises and all.

In my first chapter on the *Roman de Thèbes*, I introduce recent work on attention theory in cognitive science as well as literary scholarship in order to reconsider the extent to which the anonymous translator's inclusion of material outside of his source text, Statius's *Thebaid*, should be considered pedagogical in nature. The text's new opening on the story of Oedipus, for example, which had been omitted by Statius, has been seen as a form of exegetical support for a vernacular audience uniquely unaware, unlike trained Latin readers, of the incestuous tragedy that struck down the ruling family of Thebes. Instead, I argue that the Old French text reasserts narrative control into a streamlined form that shapes the audience's attention in novel ways unavailable to Latin textual forms that had become standardized in the 12th century as means to provide interpretive guidance for texts from antiquity, and show how those "erudite" forms instead hindered attention in ways evocative of, although not parallel to, modern concerns around digital media.

In my second chapter, I move my focus on attention to the linguistic in the *Roman de Troie*. Here, I argue that Benoît's translation intersects with claims to truth that are incompatible with his interpretation of modality in Latin and Old French. That is, while his prologue claims to lay out, once and for all, the *truth* of the history of Troy otherwise unavailable, I demonstrate how his manipulation of epistemic modality, clauses and scenes communicating who knows what and how, render an unequivocal image of truth impossible. This chapter models attending to language, both

for the medieval translator and for the text's reader, as a mode of access to understand the *romans d'antiquité*, ultimately demonstrating how claims to the transmission of knowledge across time and space are belied by the very linguistic structures within Benoît's history project.

My third and final chapter explores how attention is deployed *within* the narrative, this time in the case of the *Roman d'Eneas*. I first establish, by way of Deleuze's theory of the fold (*pli*), that Vergil's Aeneas had a particular habit of attending to images encountered on his journey, which set up in the subject a deep-seated phenomenological relationship towards time and history. I then investigate corresponding scenes in the *Eneas*, arguing that medieval Eneas is an already-formed subject, existing outside of time and moving through the narrative as an arrow shot with a pre-determined path, uninterested in events around him. Through this work, I call into question the *Eneas*'s similarity to the other *romans d'antiquité*, as it seems almost to deny its relationship to antiquity. Not only does it lack a prologue and the engagement with transmission that characterize the *Thèbes* and the *Troie*, but the *Eneas* strips the hero Eneas of attention to images of history and instead bathes him, and the reader, in the richness of the *now*. The *Eneas*, as I argue, is more properly considered an *anti-roman d'antiquité*, denying inheritance and posterity as operative sources of legitimacy.

Benoît's formulation of translating for "cil [qui] n'entendent la letre" ("those who cannot understand Latin") has traditionally been interpreted as a question of a language encoding information in a way that is inaccessible, that is, the material is there, it just needs to be deciphered. And that deciphering is a matter of interlinguistic translation, that the information just needed to be put into Old French. Yet, that is not the whole story, as my dissertation shows. The *romans d'antiquité* work against normative forms of filiation for the 12th-century, despite the prologues of the *Thèbes* and the *Troie* assuring accurate transmission: as Stahuljak has emphasized, the *Thèbes* and the *Troie* instead perhaps legitimize "unnatural inheritances," exposing the extent to which genealogy is a "dream of similitude" that works through "semblanz," resemblance.[65] Vernacular translation is a question of medium, one that implicates form, genre, gloss, commentary, which seeks to claim similitude through the metaphor of *translatio*—bringing an object from one place to another without change—and erudition, ensuring that falsehood does not become attached to it during this journey. What I argue here is that the step in "understanding" is not necessarily "for

[65] Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor* (University Press of Florida, 2005), 12.

those who do not read Latin," that is, vernacular audiences ignorant of the Latin texts, but rather that understanding proceeds from a vernacular text's novelty in form and intertextual positioning. That is, that vernacular translation is an attentive technology, allowing for new forms of readership and textual engagement that attend to the texts in ways other than the subject positions allowed by Latin manuscripts of the 12th century.

Chapter 1 The Text as a Site of Attention: Prophecy in the *Roman de Thèbes*

Nearly halfway into the *Roman de Thèbes*, an anonymous translation of Statius' *Thebaid* composed around 1150, the rival armies led by brothers Eteocles and Polynices finally clash in a bitter civil war fought over the city of Thebes. Supported by Adrastus, king of Argos, Polynices has just arrived at the gates of Thebes to reclaim the city from his brother, who refused to hand over the city according to their power-sharing agreement. Among the combatants figure a wide array of classical heroes who had already been depicted by Statius over a millennium earlier: Tydeus, Thenelaus, Hippomedon, Itys, Peripgas, Pathenopaeus. In a passage that seeks to project onto the page the dread and the chaos of battle, the anonymous translator of the *Thèbes* contextualizes the combat within the history of war as he knew it. The mass of soldiers rushing towards each other is even greater than in Statius, as the translator draws in a medieval perspective, stating that ("Onques en l'ost de Romenie / ne jousta tel chevalerie, / ne tant n'ot Karles en Espaingne / quant il conquest cex de Sessoingne." (lines 4549-4552), "There was never such a corps of knights, not even for Charlemagne when he conquered the Saxons in Spain.")[1] This scene juxtaposes vastly separated temporalities: the Argive armies assembled around Thebes are greater than those of the Roman and Carolingian empires that would follow them. The medieval translator interpolates references from the thousand-year interval that separates him from the original audience, making the impending clash more immediate, more vivid, more meaningful for a medieval audience. The battlefield itself is transformed into a medieval mêlée, as it becomes dominated by the command and authority of knights on horseback. This stance towards the *Thebaid* brings the text in contact with the mesh of history that came after it, inviting succeeding

[1] Unless otherwise stated, quotes from the *Roman de Thèbes* are taken from the edition established by Aimé Petit; *Le Roman de Thèbes*, trans. Aimé Petit (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008.) See further in this chapter for a more detailed layout of the field of *Thèbes* translations. Unless otherwise noted, English translations are my own. Two recent English translations have been undertaken. Joan M. Ferrante and Robert W. Hanning published a translation based on manuscript *S* in 2018, while Glyn S. Burgess and Douglas Kelly published theirs on manuscript *C* in 2021. I have reviewed these translations and consulted them in order to inform my own choices, but have occasionally modified them. See *The Romance of Thebes (Roman de Thèbes)*, trans. Joan M. Ferrante and Robert W. Hanning (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018) and *The* Roman de Thèbes *and the* Roman d'Eneas, trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Douglas Kelly. (Liverpool University Press, 2021).

wars, social structures, and experiences into its fabric, enriching the encounter between Thebes and Argos.

This crossover between the ancient past and medieval present actualizes the scenes. Yet the text does not operate on the level of comparison—that is, presupposing a clear separation between past and present, "this was *like* our time." Figures that are unequivocally medieval take part: Capaneus, one of the Statian heroes from Argos, slays "Alexander of Moncenis, who was the son of the Marquis of Boniface at Verceil and Saint-Agathe, from Lombardy,"[2] and at his side fights "Garsy de Marre, sat on his grey-haired horse from Navarre."[3] A curiously medieval set of characters for a battle that took place in early antiquity. The translator has transposed individuals from the medieval present into the text. These intruders in time populate the *Thèbes*, which folds the narrative into a medieval background. It is not that the narrator is unaware of the nature of the course of history or heavy-handedly warping texts uncritically to fit a medieval mold. In fact, he creates distance between himself and the text, assuring the reader that he is acting as a sage intermediary. After the death of Amphiaraus, the sooth-sayer of the Greek army, the narrator remarks that, while the source text specifies that a thousand other soldiers were swallowed up with him, "de mil nel tieng pas a voir" (line 5098), ("I don't consider this thousand to be true.") The narrator participates in a crafty melding of the past to the present, one that is complicated by this kind of explicit narrative intervention, assuring the reader of historiographic rigor. This stance towards the past, one that hazily folds in the present while simultaneously registering critical distance, invites us to consider the author's stance towards time. What kind of model of history allows these objects and people that exist across time to coexist in a narrative, while simultaneously admitting historiographic criticism? The largest difference between the *Thebaid* and the *Thèbes* is perhaps here, in their stance towards their audience: while for Statius "the representation of events unknown to the audience is not the main goal of the narrative" the *Thèbes* does indeed present events of which most 12th-century readers would have been unaware.[4] The Old French translator

[2] "En la porte leur a ocis / Alixandre de Moncenis. / Filz ert au marchis Boniface / qui tint Verziaux et Seinte Agace, / venus estoit de Lombardie / tout pour faire chevalerie." (lines 4811-4816). See *Le Roman de Thèbes*, 325 for a footnote on possible identifications of this medieval character.

[3] "Apoingnant vint Garsy de Marre / et sist sor ferrant de Navarre." (lines 4661-4662). See *Le Roman de Thèbes*, 317 for a tentative identification based on the County of Marash. As noted in the Godefroy, *ferrant* is a common epithet from the *chanson de geste* tradition to qualify a horse of war.

[4] Randall Toth Ganiban, *Statius and Virgil: The Thebaid and The Reinterpretation of the Aeneid* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 48.

latches onto that very distance, albeit in a way that differs fundamentally from the philological, historical or other critical modes of inquiry that underlie modern scholarship.

In this chapter, I read the *Thèbes* in tandem with Statius's *Thebaid* not for the latter to hold a determining position as a foundation which the anonymous translator either built on or deviated from, but rather something that he thought with and through. That is, while keeping my eye on models of "adaptation" versus "rewriting," and of "anachronism," versus "faithfulness" that have measured the distance and differences between the *Thèbes* and the *Thebaid*, and provided critical insights into the romance,[5] I suspend the anonymous writer's claim that his translation is a didactic operation, that is, transmitting knowledge to vernacular readers untrained in Latin. To take him at his word is to engage in complicity with the rhetoric of medieval translators, who often claimed that their intended audiences were uneducated. Claims of opening up erudite Latin sources for ill-informed vulgar audiences are often tropes for packaging literary invention in medieval romance, and while this goal may very well be sincere, it does not nullify the text's debt to 12th-century literary culture, nor does it determine the text's reception. I will focus, then, on how the *Thèbes* navigates this literary culture, by investigating points of concern, and resistance within the narrative, when the clerk-translator encounters tension with the truth claims surrounding prophecy in Statius's *Thebaid*. As I will show in this chapter, the past exerts a fundamental hold over the future in the story of Thebes, and coincidentally in the process of medieval translation. Navigating and negotiating that space becomes the task of the romance's translator.

To be more precise, in the *Thèbes* prophecy reveals a conception of history that allows that history be "seen" directly, through a collapsing of time which marks out the *Thèbes* as a unique work within 12th-century historiographic endeavors.[6] Prophecy serves as the motor of the tale,

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[5] As a cogent example of this work, see Aimé Petit, "Transtextualité: Le *Roman de Thèbes*, de l'Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César à la rédaction imprimée par Pierre Sergent," in *Raconter en prose: XIVe-XVIe sècle*, ed. Paola Cifarelli et al. (Garnier, 2017), 243-58.

[6] I focus on prophecy in line with an observation made by Noah Guynn and Zrinka Stahuljak, who remarked that "little attempt is made to understand medieval historiographical methods and styles on their own terms or to situate texts within a set of rhetorical interpretive, and cultural practices ..." History is, for them, a suspect field in and of itself: "... what kind of faith should we have in a discipline that claims to access the truth of the past by discrediting the means by which the past was remembered *in the past*?" Noah D. Guynn and Zrinka Stahuljak, "Introduction—Historicity, Violence, and the Medieval Francophon World: Mémoire Hystérisée," in *Violence and the Writing of History in the Medieval Francophone World*, ed. Noah D. Guynn and Zrinka Stahuljak (D.S. Brewer, 2013), 3-4. Much French scholarship works along the lines of "anachronism" set off in the framework provided by Aimé Petit in his text on *Anachronismes*, evident in Bernard Ribémont's introduction to his 2002 compilation intended for students preparing the *agrégation de lettres modernes* and *classiques* in France, "En réexploitant son hypotexte,

setting off Laius' fear of his children, Oedipus' treasonous and incestuous ascension to the throne of Thebes, the choice for Argos and Thebes to go to war, and the never-ending conflict between Eteocles and Polynices. It continually reappears in the text, albeit problematically, providing clear guidance at certain moments, deceitful counsel at others, but often in a context where the truth-value of the prophetic statement is questioned. The key point of access is the expanded Oedipus tale that opens the medieval romance. The *Thèbes* does more than to provide a refresher course for its audience on mythology. It focuses on the rippling effects of prophecy, the effects that it can have on the very people it purported to free from ignorance, and those rippling effects move into the narrative structuring of the *Thèbes.* In short, the *Thèbes* highlights how the promise of foreknowledge can be deceptive and how revelation can be damaging.

In other words, I argue that the unruly treatment of prophecy is intimately tied to attention, a concept that moves beyond simple readerly focus to include the ways that material forms, cultural practices, and compositional choices shape how stories are told and received. This dynamic functions precisely because of the attention to a text afforded by vernacular translation itself. Through both linguistic transformation and material form, the *Thèbes* releases the narrative from the interpretive scaffolding of Latin glosses and commentaries, instead inviting an open-ended attentional engagement by translator and audiences alike. The translation of Statius's *Thebaid* into French was not simply a linguistic or cultural adaptation, but also an act that fundamentally alters how readers and audiences attend to the text, especially to the depiction and reception of prophecy. While the *Thèbes* foregrounds prophecy as a recurring, disruptive force, the text never resolves its ambiguities or delivers a coherent interpretive framework.

In the medieval French context I am addressing, I ask to what extent the *Thèbes* can be considered, as vernacular translation, a novel site of attention. In other words, what can attention as an analytic reveal about the construction of meaning within the *Thèbes* through the romance's engagement with its surrounding intertext and readers? How does attention, with all of its pitfalls, come to inhabit the text's structuring and internal logic? The answer will be provided by bring prophecy to the fore: prophecy was a problem to which the translator paid particular *attention*, an

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l'auteur médiéval a donc trouvé une matière première qu'il lui était relativement aisé d'interpréter à la façon de la chanson de geste ... les changements effectués s'expliquent par une influence générique..." Generic "updates" are there to make a text conform to contemporary literary and cultural expectations (most importantly literary, since the *chanson de geste* is given a prized place as *the* literary ur-text to emulate.) See Bernard Ribémont, "Introduction," in *Qui Des Sept Arz Set Rien Entendre*, ed. Bernard Ribémont (Paradigme, 2002), 25.

attention which the structure of vernacular romance in medieval codicology privileged, without that attention leading to a satisfactory, coherent resolution.

I locate attention at two points in time, both in composition and in reading, a duality of attention identified by Lucy Alford in the ways that poetic compositions instantiate the world within textuality.[7] Attention to the *Thèbes* considers the attention paid by the translator working on the Latin *Thebaid*, and the attention of the vernacular audience in front of a page of the Old French *Roman de Thèbes*. I will consider, then, both a reader of the medieval editions of Statius to theorize the work of the translator, and a reader of the translated *Thèbes* to argue that the Old French form controls readerly attention in novel ways.

I will first review medieval traditions of reading prophetic texts and link the hermeneutic practices that grew out of those readings with the historiography of the *Thèbes*. I will then provide a contextualization of the romance within 12th-century vernacular romance and Latin literature on Thebes, both ancient and medieval, in order to evaluate the importance of the romance's expansion of the Oedipus tale and demonstrate that the life of Oedipus, directed at key moments by prophetic revelation, reverberates throughout the text. Through these reverberations, we will see prophecy underpins the structure of the *Thèbes*, not as a form of Christian recuperation as the narrator's interventions seem to recall, but instead as representative of a mode of historical reading that constitutes the logic of the text. Finally, I will offer a reflection on how this innovation within the *Thèbes*—waves created by place of pagan prophecy in a text addressing Christian audiences—is less a touch of creative genius by the translator than a materialization of contemporary, possible readings hiding in the Latin tradition, brought to the surface by the attentive gaze of a vernacular translator on the Latin text. I do so by arguing for an attentive stance to the source text as a fundamental quality of vernacular translation.

1.1 Prophecy in the 12th Century

The *Roman de Thèbes* is not a unique example of prophetic thinking in the 12th century—prophecy as a social, historical, political, and religious phenomenon had resonances throughout texts from this time, including, as we shall see, a marked increase in the interest in the Oedipus myth. Scholarship on medieval prophecy has focused largely on the great monumental texts and writers of prophetic material—besides the omnipresence of the Bible and its visions and

[7] Lucy Alford, *Forms of Poetic Attention* (Colombia University Press, 2020), 9.

predictions, the Sibylline books, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Hildegard of Bingen's visionary works such as the *Scivias* stand out. If we approach prophecy from the perspective offered by the *Thèbes,* then the most salient and evident prophetic moments intersect with political realities by exploring the concept of kingship: who will rule (Oedipus), how to maintain rule ("kill your son, Laius"), and the legitimacy of that rule ("you will win, Adrastus, but your army will suffer.") The 12th century in fact saw a great deal of interest in exploring the political scope of prophecy, most famously in the different manifestations of Merlin around the English throne through Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De Gestis Britonum* and the later prose *Brut* and Merlin romances. Completed at some point before 1135, the *De Gestis Britonum*, also known as the *Historia Regum Brittaniae*, quickly became a wildly popular text. It survives in around 225 manuscripts and recounts the mythical/historical past of British rulers that had been left untreated by the mainly ecclesiastical histories of the British Isles available at the point, such as Bede's 8th-century *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Partway through the work, a series of prophecies by Merlin (most likely composed by Geoffrey) break through into the narrative and give a snapshot of two futures. One is Merlin's future, although as a literary invention by Geoffrey, this future is really a retroactive history running up to and through the reign of Henry I. It also moves forward in time by providing predictions that will take place following the work's publication, and thus this *second* future constitutes the future of contemporary readers. While the former category of prophecies did not promise revelation of what was to come for readers of the *De Gestis*, but only what already happened, through Geoffrey's "retelling" they became confirmed and therefore strengthen the credibility of the remaining, unfulfilled predictions, which just happen to legitimize shifts in political authority. In this way, for example, Merlin "foresaw" the Norman invasion, as Geoffrey writes, "The German dragon [Anglo-Saxons] will be hard put to keep possession of its caves, since retribution will be visited on its treason. Then it will prosper for a short time, but Normandy's tithe will injure it. A people will come clad in wood and tunics of iron to take vengeance on its wickedness."[8] Their often-moralizing tone also provided a rationale for history's developments: the Anglo-Saxons *deserved* to be defeated by the Normans. Commentaries that appeared later continued reading into the prophecies to project them into events that happened after the text's

[8] *De Gestis Britonum* 113.69-73, "Vix obtinebit cavernas suas Germanicus draco, quia ultio prodicionis eius superveniet. Vigebit tandum paulisper, sed decimatio Neustriae nocebit. Populus namque in ligno et rerreis tunicis superveniet, qui vindictam de nequitia ipsius sumet." English translation from Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. and trans. Michael D. Reeve and Neil Wright (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), 146.

completion—Henry II's arrival on the throne, which happened nearly 20 years after Geoffrey completed the text, was thus "demonstrated" by a 13th-century commentary to be correctly foretold.[9]

These prophecies, in fact, were so popular that they were circulated before the final text of the *De Gestis* was finished, before the death of Henry I. In his *Historia Ecclesiastica* Orderic of Vitalis acknowledged that he was able to consult them before they were more publicly available, and used his text to circulate "a very small sample of it for scholars to whom it has not been divulged."[10] Orderic saw this sampling that he provided as beneficial for the public, as the material it contained had "already been fulfilled in past events, and unless I am mistaken more will be proved true with sorrow or joy by future generations."[11] The prophecies in Geoffrey's *De Gestis* were nevertheless not universally accepted as reliable or useful in history writing. In Wace's *Roman de Brut*, the young Merlin is consulted by the usurper Vortigern to divine why the tower he is building continues to collapse into the earth. Merlin reveals the presence of two dragons underground, one white and the other red, whose fighting disturbs the ground. The symbolism here is alluring, but Wace skirts the kind of exposition that the 13th-century commentary by Geoffrey readily embraces:

> Li reis juste l'estanc s'assist ;
> Merlin preia qu'il li desist
> Que li dragun senefioent

[9] *De Gestis Britonum* 114.89-90, "Nocebit possidenti ex impiis pietas donec sese genitore induerit." ("The possessor will be harmed by the goodness of the wicked until he dresses himself as his father.") A 13th-century commentary viewed this as a thinly-clothed reference to the agreement of succession made between Stephen and Henry II in 1153, "… et sic plene concordati sese mutuo dilexerunt. Unde bene dicit Merlinus: *Nocebit* et cetera, quia quamvis rex S[tephanus] piisimius regni diadema possederat, tum semper in tribulatione fuit, *donec* ad instar patris in pretaxata concordia ducem Henricum heredem suum *induisset*, dum ipsum, quem non genuit, adoptavit in filium et heredem." ("… and thus in total agreement they showed affection for each other. Thus why Merlin says, 'will be harmed' etc, because while king Stephen in all piety held the kingdom's crown, he was always tormented, until, just like his father, he *dressed* the duke Henry as his successor with a sealed agreement, adopting him, who was not his child, as his son and heir.") *Prophetiae Ambrosii Merlini Expositio: Commentaire latin des prophétiqes de Merlin d'après le ms. Dublin, Trinity College 496*, trans. C. Lukas Bohny and Emmanuèle Métry-Perone (Paris: Garnier, 2011), 90; English translation my own.

[10] "Hanc lectiunculam de Merlini libello excerpsi et studiosis quibus ipse propalatus non est quantulamcumque stillam propinavi." Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol 6. trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford University Press, 1978), 386.

[11] "… cuius aliquam partem in rebus gestis intellexi, plura vero ni fallor cum merore seu gaudio experientur adhuc nascitur." 386.

Ki par tel ire s'assembloent.
Dunc dist Merlin les prophecies
Que vus avez, ço crei, oïes,
Des reis ki a venir esteient,
Ki la terre tenir deveient.
Ne vuil sun livre translater
Quant jo nel sai interpreter;
Nule rien dire ne vuldreie
Que si ne fust cum jo dirreie. (lines 7531-7542)[12]

The king sat next to the lake, and asked Merlin to tell him what the dragons meant, as they were fighting with such anger. So Merlin told him the prophecies that you have, I believe, heard—those about kings yet to come, who were to rule. I do not want to translate his book since I don't know how to explain [*interpreter*] it—I don't want to say anything that isn't just as what I would say.

Wace here presents his decision to leave out Merlin's prophecies as a result of his own weaknesses as a reader and, perhaps, as translator. The verb *interpreter* covers the intellectual reception of the work just as it refers to the act of rendering it intelligible for others: he cannot properly play the exegete, as he may not be properly reading. However, the last two lines complicate that picture somewhat, in a kind of circular logic that I have endeavored to maintain in my English translation. While clearly engaging with the lexical field of truth that typifies the way that many vernacular translators of the 12th century spoke of their work in their texts, he also nods to the possibility that the prophecies are, in fact, not true. Is it his interpretation that he might present facts that did not happen "just as I would say it did," because of his misreading, or is the foundational material itself untrustworthy, and nothing that he would say, by transmitting it, would be true? [13] In any case, reception of the *De Gestis* in the 12th century was not characterized by universal acclamation of

[12] Wace, *Le roman de Brut*, 2 vols, ed. Ivor Arnold (Société des anciens textes français, 1938-1940.)

[13] As Arnold observes, at least one manuscript (D) brings in 670 verses of Merlin's prophecies translated into decasyllable from Geoffrey's Latin original, thus giving a glimpse into the varying positions taken in he 12th century on the status to accord these predictions; *Le Roman de Brut*, 389.

the prophecies it contained such as by Orderic, and vernacular texts such as this appear to have treated Geoffrey's work with greater mistrust.[14] It remains nevertheless true that prophetic writing in the 12th century presented possible readings of the political past, present and future that remained particularly salient for some readers. In fact, the political ends of recuperating prophecy by medieval scribes (and by proxy, the power structures behind them) has remained of primary concern, even if the *meaning* of those prophecies is fractured among medieval audiences.[15] Testifying not just to the strength in prophecy but to its participation in wider cultural shifts, these works fed in to other political trends of the 12th century.[16]

This function of prophecy legitimizes the political present by rooting it in the past, as an always-expected, always-awaited, and much needed realization of a wise divine guidance baked into the course of history itself. It was not a medieval invention, of course, and medieval writers inherited models that they had read in texts from antiquity. Virgil's *Aeneid*, one of the most celebrated works in Latin from the 1st century BCE to today, rests upon a pre-ordained Roman future announced by Aeneas's divine mother. Peter Struck has referred to this trend as the recognition of a "weird knowingness" that separates humans from animals and allows them to transcend, partially, into the celestial world of the gods. Yet, to bracket off prophecy, even when it is presented as a purely socio-political affair, is to miss the epistemological effects this discursive move can have on the surrounding culture. In other words, "…we may be left wondering why (on

[14] Maud Burnett McInerney, *"Riddling Words: The Prophetiae Merlini. In A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth,* ed. Joshua Byron Smith and Georgia Henley (Brill, 2020), 145 ; Simon Meecham-Jones, "Early Reactions to Geoffrey's Work," in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, eds. Joshua Byron Smith and Georgia Henley (Brill, 2020), 188-206. For more examples of medieval readers ready to appropriate the Merlin prophecis in the 12th century, see Julia Crick, "Geoffrey and the Prophetic Tradition," in *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature: The Development and Dissemination of the Arthurian Legend in Medieval Latin*, ed. Siân Echard (University of Wales Press, 2011).

[15] What those prophecies meant for medieval audiences is even sometimes contested. Victoria Flood has argued that Geoffrey's "identity" and the community to which he was speaking, as well as the perspectives of the text (is it pro-Welsh? Pro-English?) are murky and unclear. Nevertheless, as Flood shows, the text fundamentally allows "a Norman, and Normanised, political elite to anticipate the terms of Welsh prophetic opposition during a period of heightened border threats." See Victoria Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place in Medieval England: From Geoffrey of Monmouth to Thomas of Erceldoune* (D.S. Brewer, 2016), 35.

[16] See John Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values* (The Boydell Press, 2000). Jacques Verger, while admitting the importance of cultural and literary production, through the reappropriation of mythical and historical material, in "arousing the population's affective attachment to the national ideal and the dynasty that embodied it," ("bien propres à susciter l'adhésion affective des populations à l'idée nationale et à la dynastie qui l'incarnait"), nevertheless drew stronger connections between the growth of Plantagenet power structures and legal and political treatises, rather than prophecy romances, such as John of Salisbury's 1159 text *Policraticus*. Jacques Verger, *Les gens de savoir dans l'Europe de la fin du Moyen Âge* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1997),145.

earth) the ancients would have chosen these peculiar methods of doing politics."[17] Perspectives that focus on prophecy as political legitimization, be it from a cynical or purely utilitarian point of view, have missed or even misread medieval texts, projecting the informed modern reading into the text as authorial intention. Historicizing approaches to literature can unwittingly turn medieval authors into prophets as modern scholars put criticism of social/power structures into dialogue with our modern knowledge of history. In such a way, we can fall into the error of inscribing medieval author's writings in either historical events that had not yet happened, or contemporary trends that would only become more obvious later, "mistaking [our] hindsight for insight."[18] To return to the medieval Merlin tradition, Laura Chuhan Campbell has contextualized it within medieval semiotics which emphasized the unknowability of God's will. Seen in this light, these prophecies participate in the anxiety of interpreting divine omniscience and attempts to translate it into human language. Merlin thus speaks to medieval inheritances of the past just as much as he does to the relationship between mortal knowledge and divine omniscience.[19] Prophecy as a tool to which writers could resort for a variety of purposes cannot be isolated from the cultural and epistemological foundations that give rise to its perceived affordances as a vector of truth. In short, medieval culture prepared a fertile ground for prophetic thought to flourish and bracketing it within the realm of the political is to misunderstand its place and function in medieval thought.

Certain features inherent to medieval Christianity encouraged readings drawing connections between past and present, the absent and the present. At the heart of Christian hermeneutics was the desire to overlay both halves of corresponding dualities, the past and the present, the visible and the invisible, the divine and the worldly, as together they reveal the meaning, put in place by God, that structured creation. From the historical perspective (and thus the political mode of reading that grew out of it) literal prophecy was viewed as one of the clearest

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[17] Peter T. Struck *Divination and Human Nature: A Cognitive History of Intuition in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 1-36.

[18] Kimberly Fonzo, *Retrospective Prophecy and Medieval English Authorship* (University of Toronto Press, 2022), 8. As another example, in the case of the *Sibylla Tiburtina*, modern historians have focused in particular on the emendations that were gradually made over time, through which medieval kings and leaders were slowly inserted into the list of rulers preceding the end times; this has led to the sidelining of manuscript evidence suggesting meanings that were perhaps more salient to medieval readers, such as the fate of the individual's soul and their place in the end times. Anke Holdenried, *The Sibyl and Her Scribes: Manuscripts and Interpretation of the Latin Sibylla Tiburtina c. 1050-1500* (Ashgate, 2006.)

[19] Laura Chuhan Campbell, *The Medieval Merlin Tradition in France and Italy: Prophecy, Paradox, and Translatio* (Boydell and Brewer, 2017), 20-23.

proofs of Christian truth for Saint Augustine. In *The City of God* he quotes Isaiah in his discussion of the veracity of Christian revelation made through the prophets, even those that predated the coming of Christ. Augustine states that Isaiah's prophecies were so accurate and insightful that he saw the future coming of Christ more clearly than others, and that this marvelous ability makes him a precursor in time to the future apostles of Christ—that is, for some, he ought to be called an evangelist, rather than a prophet, bringing him forward in time.[20] One of the principal corollaries of the integration of prophetic thought into Christianity is the strong bond it establishes between past and present, as seen here with Isaiah. Within literature, the most evident example of this mode of thought is in one of the main four modes of reading scripture, which medieval exegesis referred to as *allegoria* and which is now typically classified as typology—that is, establishing correspondences between the Old and New Testaments. According to medieval hermeneutic practices, the New Testament was superior to the Old as it held within it God's *final* revelation and moreover bore the means to prove its own veracity. As Thomas Aquinas wrote, it held greater probative value for humanity than the Hebrew bible: "the New Testament is superior to the Old, because it was confirmed by the death of Christ, through whom sins are forgiven, and because he shows [God's] promise."[21] Going further, the Old could be "finally" understood through the lens supplied by the New, which Origen succinctly stated as "Each Testament has been made New for us, not by the passage of time but by the newness of our understanding."[22] Typology had such an influence on medieval Christianity that it provided a model for one form of vernacular translations of the Bible beginning in the 13th century, termed the *Biblés moralisées* or *historialisées* (Fig 1.1)

[20] "Isaiah, then, condemned iniquity and gave instruction in righteousness; and, among his predictions of the future ills that were to befall the sinful people, he also included many more prophecies than the others did of Christ and the Church: that is, of the King and the City which He founded. So true is this that some commentators have called Isaiah an evangelist rather than a prophet." Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, XVIII.29. English translation from Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 858. As evidence of that exceptional veracity, Augustine cites Isaiah's foretelling of the suffering of Christ: "He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth." ("Sicut ovis ad occisionem ducetur et quasi agnus coram tondente obmutescet, et non aperiet os suum." Isaiah 53:7)

[21] "Sic ergo Novum Testamentum est excellentius quam Vetus, quia confirmatum est morte Christi, per quam remittuntur peccata, et quia exhibit promissionem." Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam Beati Pauli ad Hebraeos Lectura,* ed. R. Cai (Taurini-Romae, 1953), 449.

[22] "Sic ergo inuenitur et Evangelii uirtus in lege et fundamento legis subnixa intelleguntur Euangelia … et utrumque nobis Nouum Testamentum est, non temporis aetate sed intellegentiae nouitate." Origen, Num. 4.1-4.2, in Origen, *Homélies sur les Nombres*, trans. Louis Doutreleau, vol 1 (Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996), 240.

which employed, beyond translation into the vernacular like the *Thèbes*, spectacular illustrations to explore new ways of linking the past to the present.

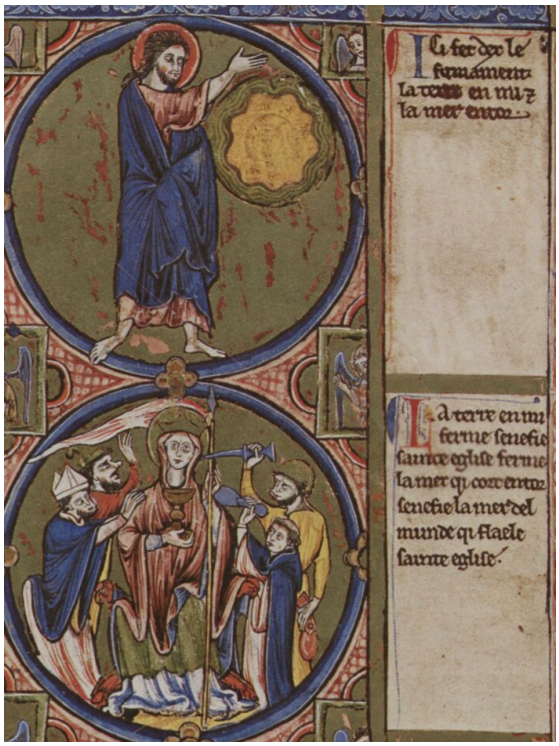


Figure 1.1 Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Cod. 2554 1r[23]

Here in the celebrated *Bible moralisée de Vienne*, the scene of God's creation of the Earth where he separates the land from the water ("Here God creates the firmament with the land in the center and the water around") is juxtaposed with the Church's place in the world ("Dry [*ferme*] land in the middle represents the Holy Church fortified [*ferme*], the sea that flows around it represents the sea of the world that besieges it.") Reading the past is akin to reading an alternative form of the present—it is not a cyclical form of history where models repeat, but a kind of suspended time-out-of-time, constantly in dialogue with other moments. This is particularly true with regards to the Bible, as God's act of creation and the revelation made through the prophets of the Old Testament and the course of history necessarily served as a vector for his will to be perceived. The *Bible moralisée* illustrates, through its spatial placement of concordance between the Old and New Testament, biblical time and medieval present, the rapprochement effected within history that shapes history within the *Thèbes* as well.

[23] Photography from Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

Throughout the Middle Ages, typology was fleshed out more generally in readings of Antiquity, outside of Biblical material, in the form of a rhetorical practice we now call allegoresis. Through this practice, pagan texts were received as imbued with divine revelation that only a period in time in which Christian truth was finally revealed could access, bringing a teleological progress to history as the truth slowly becomes revealed.[24] Celebrated works such as Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* among others were thus integrated into the field of material that not just confirms revelation, but provides variations on its truths in order to teach it. The same logic that allowed the Old Testament to prefigure the New and prove the superiority of Christian revelation equally allowed the recuperation of material from antiquity, demonstrating, for example, how Apollo's pursuit of Daphne in Ovid in fact announces Christ's entry into the world through the Virgin Mary.[25] Yet, prophecy ends up spilling over into larger reading practices, seeping outside of its immediate application and having larger rhetorical and hermeneutic effects. Rita Copeland has remarked how translation and prophetic speech are inextricably intertwined in the medieval rhetorical models that thought about interpreting speech: *interpretatio* covered both the translation and exegetical work that facilitated communication between different languages, different speakers and the gap between the human and the divine.[26] In short, it is difficult, in the medieval framework, to think of one (translation) without thinking of the other (prophecy), as both are tackled with the same toolkit arising from the exegetical practices of textual explanation (*enarratio*.)

Prophetic reading, then, has attracted the interest of scholars and that trend has continued in the last few years. Little work has been done, however, to consider how prophecy delivered in pre-Christian, pagan antiquity could be understood in vernacular writing *outside* of the lens of purely religious recuperation. That is, how could prophetic statements from the past be understood

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[24] R.W. Southern, "Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 4. The Sense of the Past," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (1973): 243-63.

[25] See Jean-Yves Tilliette, "Y a-t-il une esthétique littéraire victorine?" in *Les écoles de pensée du XIIe siècle et la littérature romane (oc et oïl)*, ed. Valérie Fasseur and Jean-René Valette (Brepols, 2016),134 on how readings of the Bible in the 12th-century can lead to new literary creations that dramatize biblical truths through scenes of prophecy. This practice—allegoresis—was not invented in the Middle Ages. That poets had foreknowledge of what they wrote goes back to Plato, where Socrates, in his *Apology*, refers to divine signs as "a bit like a twitch … a nagging feeling" and that the proper quality of a poet is to have "a disposition that results in a cognitive capacity" for divine intuition; *Divination and Human Nature,* 71-72.

[26] Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 90.

outside of religious compositions in the vernacular, like the Seven Sages of Rome, or the *Ovide moralisé*, that allowed Christian truths to be read within them? There was not one set perspective on prophecy, and its value—historical, anagogical, eschatological—was not universally agreed upon by medieval writers. Thomas Aquinas dedicated four questions in particular to elucidate the nature of prophecy—what it is, who can proclaim it, where it comes from.[27] In his defense of the possibility of revelation from less-than-ideal speakers, the "prophets of the demons" ("utrum prophetae daemonum umquam vera pradicunt," i.e. pagans) he provides a condensed version of why the medieval stance towards pagan prophecy was so ambiguous. No statement is wholly false, writes Thomas, and a part of the revelation provided to pagans, even if by "demons," nevertheless "contains some truth whereby it is rendered acceptable."[28] Moreover, sometimes the pagans received true divine speech, "This was evidently the case of Balaam, of whom we read that the Lord spoke to him (Num 22:12) though he was a prophet of the demons …."[29] Writers connected with ecclesiastical power centers associated suspicion with contemporary attempts to divine the future—through astrology, for example—not just because any answers given may be associated with the devil's toying with humanity, but also because revelation was locked in the past, the prophetic age had passed, and the Bible contained everything necessary to understand God's plan.[30]

The *Thèbes* is a kind of microhistory of prophecy, it illustrates what is happening on the margins. It contains quick encounters with prophecy, swerves into the world of prediction, and the way it navigates these moments is novel. It affords a unique opportunity to expand our understanding of how medieval encounters with prophecy were negotiated, as it represents a foray into new material, recent interest in Oedipus, encouraged by renewed engagement with Statius,

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[27] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II.2, paragraphs171-174.

[28] "… aliqua vera continent, per quae receptibilis redditur…" II.172.6. English translation from Thomas Aquinas, *The "summa Theologica" of St. Thomas Aquinas,* Second part of the Second Part (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1922), 31.

[29] "… sicut manifeste legitur de Balaam, cui dicitur dominus esse locutus, Num. XXII, licet esset propheta Daemonum." II.2, paragraph 172.6.

[30] See Michael A. Ryan, *A Kingdom of Stargazers: Astrology and Authority in the Late Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2011), 21-54 for a more nuanced analysis of the differing medieval perspectives on contemporary divination practices. While some writers saw divination through practices such as astrology and the casting of lots the simple analysis of causes, others saw demonic work behind them. Even revelation considered to have been made through the Bible could be doubted: Augustine viewed with great suspicion the figure of the Antichrist, who was absent from the Book of Revelation but nevertheless read in it.

outside of a purely religious mode of reading. It certainly places antiquity as a fore-announcer of the medieval present and future and offers lessons in Christian truth, but it remains rooted in a historical reading of Statius. Moreover, it offers the opportunity to explore the way that models of prophecy could be adapted—or instead, how they broke down—to understand secular history of the past, as in Statius' *Thebaid*.

In essence, where is the text to go with such a novel kind of prophetic revelation, one that does not easily lend itself to absorption by these already available modes of historical reading? In the *Roman de Thèbes*, Laius and Oedipus's encounter with Apollo through the oracle at Delphi is not assimilated into Christological or other modes of Christian reception, unlike the allegorical readings of Ovid that become available later in the 14th-century clerical tradition of *Ovide moralisé*. Their experiences are not mapped onto deeper Christian truths through an extended narrative allegorization. Nor do the predictions in the *Thèbes* clearly anticipate contemporary socio-political issues at stake in 12th-century courts. Yet they are key to the text, they are necessary for the narrative to function, and they cannot be ignored: it is not just that Laius and Oedipus believed their respective prophecies, it is that those prophecies turned out to be true within the text.

1.2 An Overview of the Thèbes and the Thebaid

The *Roman de Thèbes* is grouped by modern scholars with a set of texts written over a period of twenty to thirty years in the mid-to-late 12th century, during which adaptations of works from classical antiquity became an active area of literary invention in Old French. Of these *romans d'antiquité*, the *Thèbes* is considered to have been the first, written around 1150 at the earliest.[31] Based on the Roman poet Statius's *Thebaid,* composed in the late first century CE, the *Thèbes* (re)tells the story of Polynices and Eteocles, the two sons of Oedipus, who grapple with the shameful inheritance from their father, as well as the curse he wished up them, as they drive the region of Thebes and Argos to civil war through their competing claims to legitimate rule.

[31] Two lines from the text had been read to date the *roman* to 1154, from the manuscript labelled *S*: "Their laughter and kisses were worth more than London and Poitiers" ("Mieus vaut lor ris et lor baisiers / que ne fait Londres ne Peitiers.") However, as Aimé Petit showed, these lines only exist in one out of five manuscripts, and most likely came from a "reworking" (remaniement) of the oldest tradition, the *chanson de geste* version of the *Thèbes*; cf. Aimé Petit, "Mieux vaut lor ris et lor baisiers que ne fait Londres ne Poitiers. Tradition manuscrite et critique littéraire: notes sur le *Roman de Thèbes* et *Cligès*," *Bien Dire et Bien Aprandre*, no. 5 (1987): 123–28. The most complete overview and comparison of the manuscript tradition that I have come across remains Aimé Petit's *Naissance du roman: Les techniques littéraires dans les romans antiques du XIIe* siècle (Éditions Slatkine, 1985), 1085-1187. A more recent review of the dating is provided by Francine Mora-Lebrun, "Metre en romanz*": les romans d'Antiquité du XIIe siècle et leur postérité, XIIIe-XIVe siècle* (Honoré Champion, 2008), 75-78 and 86-91.

At the outset of the romance, the story of Laius and Jocasta is retold, emphasizing their torment at learning their fate: for Laius it is born from the future, when he will be killed by his son Oedipus, while for Jocasta it is the past, as she has married her son.[32] Oedipus renounces the throne, mutilates his body and condemns his sons, Polynices and Eteocles, for having dishonorably repudiated him. Polynices and Eteocles then work out an uneasy arrangement according to which each will reign for a year, alternating between the two—the catch being that the brother not on the throne must leave Thebes. Eteocles ascends first, and Polynices sets out on his self-imposed exile, finally winding up in Argos where he meets his companion Tydeus, also exiled from his kingdom for breaking the natural order of the world, since he killed his brother as well as Adrastus, king of Argos. Polynices and Tydeus marry the king's two daughters Argia and Deipyle, marriages that are essentially Adrastus's idea and which ultimately serve as a catalyst for war: Adrastus makes clear that he intends to share his kingdom with his new sons-in-law. This move potentially gives Polynices greater power than his brother, who would only ever reign over Thebes. Eteocles hears of the marriage and convokes a counsel of barons. Together they develop the argument that Polynices, having acquired lands and marriage elsewhere, is attempting to abuse the agreement between the two brothers by outmatching him in power, anticipating that Eteocles would be crushed by Polynices reigning with greater wealth and force than his brother. After Polynices's year in Argos has ended, a botched attempt by Tydeus to act as emissary and ask Eteocles to respect the original agreement results in his near-assassination, provoking war between Thebes and Argos, each supporting one of the brothers. Much of the remaining story involves the trials of the Argives as they approach Thebes, with a number of original encounters developed by the translator of the *Thèbes* slowing down narrative progression toward the final encounter between the two armies. The two armies finally meet approximately 4500 lines into the romance, and for approximately 5000 lines the text recounts the tribulations of both sides as the defenses of Thebes are slowly worn down and finally breached and the near entirety of the Greek army from Argos is destroyed (as earlier predicted by the Argive "priest" Amphiaraus). The brothers end the war through a single-handed combat that ends in their deaths. Theseus, king of Athens, burns Thebes, and the narrator offers the moral of the story with the final lines: "Pour dieu, seignor, prenez i cure / Ne faites rien contre Nature / Que n'en veingniez a itel fin / Com firent cil dont ci defin." (lines

[32] This summary follows the edition of manuscript *C* in Aimé Petit's 2008 edition.

10560-10562), ("For the sake of God, my lords, take care to do nothing against nature, so that you can avoid coming to the same end as did those whose end is here.")

Despite my summary, which projects a clear, stable narrative, it is a bit of a misnomer to talk of "a" *Roman de Thèbes*, and it may be more appropriate to think of the story as constituting a textual tradition, built on a significant amount of shared material. The *Thèbes* survives in its entirety in five manuscripts, with two additional manuscripts transmitting only extracts, along with extracts cited in a number of other Old French histories, including the 13th-century *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*.[33] The manuscript tradition paints a complex picture that traces less the path of one text through successive stages of copying, and more the explosion of a theme into a larger intertext, with a dense and large core of shared sections. Of the five manuscripts containing the romance in its entirety, each projects a different version of the intertext. Leopold Constans established the first edition in 1890, grouping the manuscripts into three branches that testified to varying evolutions of the *Thèbes* with regards to style and theme, and which have continued to serve modern scholarship: a "chanson de geste" branch (manuscript *S*), a "savant" branch (manuscripts *B* and *C*), and finally the longest "courtly" branch (manuscripts *A* and *P*), the last group characterized by the addition of extended love scenes evocative of 12th-century romance—all branches varying by several thousand lines.[34] Constans's edition followed the Lachmannian tradition of textual criticism, seeking to rebuild a "lost" original through comparative study of surviving manuscripts. Constans prefigured the instinct of later scholars editing the *Thèbes* who were working under the philological training provided in France in the 20th century, which encouraged the "best earliest witness" strategy promoted by philologist Joseph Bédier. That is to say, editors chose one of the most recent manuscripts, but one that preserved the most likely earliest *version* of the text it contained. This manuscript, labelled *S*, constitutes Constans's "chanson de geste" branch given its similarity in composition to this genre, and was edited in 1995 by Francine Mora-Lebrun.[35] Another manuscript labeled *A*, representative of the "courtly" branch, received its

[33] Cf. Petit, "Transtextualité."

[34] Cf. Léopold Constans, ed., *Le Roman de Thèbes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1890). Luca Di Sabatino has a more recent overview of the manuscript tradition in his 2016 edition; cf. Luca Di Sabatino, ed., *Le Roman de Thèbes: Édition critique d'après le manuscrit A (BnF, Fr. 375)* (Garnier, 2016).

[35] Mora, *Le Roman de Thèbes*.

own edition in 2016 by Luca Di Sabatino.[36] Along with Aimé Petit's new edition of manuscript *C*, already edited by Guy Raynaud de Lage in 1966 and 1978, and partially translated by Dana Phelps Ripley into English in 1960, a representative of the "savant" branch, modern researchers have access to reliable editions of the three variants of the *Thèbes*. [37]

Medieval copyists and writers took up the original text and adapted it to their tastes and needs. This intense variety of one text, present in only a few manuscripts that each transmit a different version, has frustrated more than one medievalist, and has required modern scholars to be clear which edition(s) or manuscript(s) their work is founded on.[38] Since recent scholarship engages most often with editions of what Constans labeled *Manuscript C* (BNF fr. 784), I have restricted my reading for this chapter to Aimé Petit's 2008 edition. There is also, I believe, the conservative advantage of C not presenting *unique* material that will not exist in other manuscripts**.**[39] Nevertheless, the fundamental instability of the textual tradition cannot be passed over in silence.[40] It is thus critical to keep in mind that medieval readers were exposed to the *Thèbes* story in a variety of forms[41]—and this is without taking into account their possible

[36] Di Sabatino, *Le Roman de Thèbes*. For more information on the manuscript, see Aimé Petit, "Remarques sur certaines singularités du manuscrit A (BnF 375) du *Roman de Thèbes*," *Le Moyen Âge* 119.3 (2013): 597–620.

[37] Guy Raynaud de Lage, ed., *Le Roman de Thèbes*, 2 vols. (Honoré Champion, 1966) and Dana Phelps Ripley, *A Critical Edition of the "Roman de Thèbes" (Lines 1-5394), with an Introduction, Notes, and Glossary* (University of North Carolina, 1960).

[38] Paul Meyer, writing a review on Léopold Constans's 1880 study on the story of Oedipus in the *Thèbes*, considered that, "These five manuscripts present such stark differences that are not encountered, as far as I know, in the copying of any other work from the Middle Ages." ("Ces cinq manuscrits présentent de si grandes différences qu'on n'en rencontre de pareilles, à ma connaissance, dans la transcription d'aucune autre œuvre du moyen âge.") Paul Meyer, "La Légende d'Œdipe," *Romania*, 37–38 (1881): 270–77.

[39] For an analysis of differences between C and S, see Aimé Petit, "La reine Jocaste dans le *Roman de Thèbes*," *Bien Dire et Bien Aprandre* 16 (1998): 229–36.

[40] As an example, the earliest version, *S*, contains unique material that would render a general study of the *Thèbes* less robust—Amphiaraus's descent into hell, for example, is absent in C, and other episodes that constitute unique additions by the author of the *Thèbes*, such as the Old Woman who re-poses the sphynx riddle are longer. It is suspected that the version I have chosen here was written *after* the completion of the *Roman d'Eneas*, and intertextual influences have been invoked. This latter argument is not very convincing: whether the author was aware of the *Eneas* is less than certain. See Mora-Lebrun, *"Metre en romanz,"* 103-105.

[41] As an example, the writer of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, composed between 1208 and 1213, has been shown to be working off of a manuscript from the longer, "courtoisie" version of the *Thèbes*. See Marijke De Visser-Van Terwisga, *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César (Estoires Rogier)*, vol. 2 (Paradigme, 1999), 223-224.

knowledge of Statius's *Thebaid* and the myriad commentaries it received during the 12th and 13th centuries.[42]

This result is somewhat ironic, given the way the writer of the *Thèbes* injected his voice into the text. He lays out for the reader a fairly straightforward program, compelled to work by a kind of natural, ethical obligation that weighs upon any particularly instructed individual. This obligation places him among the most famed writers from antiquity in the very first lines: "Whoever is wise must not hide it, rather, he must show his understanding so that when he leaves this world, he will always be remembered for it. If Homer and Plato and Virgil and Cicero had hidden their wisdom within their work, they never would have been spoken of since."[43] The author opens on the link between writing, wisdom and fame, the kind of fame that accompanied the preserved wisdom written down by the authorities from antiquity named here, Homer, Plato, Virgil, and Cicero. This call to preserve wisdom through writing is not seated in a benevolent teaching mission, however, as if endeavoring to simply transmit that knowledge to just any future audience. The translator brackets off a specific audience, clerks and knights, as the rest are plainly unsuited to learning—they could understand this text just as well as an ass could appreciate the harp.[44] Homer, Plato and the like are not just symbols of past intellectual greatness, they are

[42] For a quick overview of tha Latin sources of the *Thèbes*, see Donovan, *Recherches sur le Roman de Thèbes* (Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1975), 33-69; concerning Oedipus in particular, pages 33-35.

[43] "Qui sages est nel doit celer, / ainz doit por ce son sens moutrer / que quant il ert du siecle alez / touz jors en soit mes ramenbrez. / Se danz Omers et danz Platons / et Virgiles et Quicerons / leur sapïence celissant, / ja n'en fust mes parlé avant." (lines 1-8.) I have chosen to translate *sens* in line 2 as "understanding," to convey both the agency understood in *senz*, an intellectual faculty, and its connection to an external element, which is the material that intellectual faculty confronts. This choice, which I recognize is not anodine, nevertheless allows me to distinguish *sens* from *sapience* ("wisdom") which comes up 5 lines further. The 2018 edition translates both as "wisdom." See Ferrante and Hanning, *The Romance of Thebes*. For a review of different scholarly approaches to understanding the key terms on knowledge in the prologue—*sen/sages/sapïence*—see Aimé Petit, "Prologues du *Roman de Thèbes*," *Bien Dire et Bien Aprandre* 19 (2001): 201–11. Karen Pratt has observed that *sens* is also a term associated with Jocasta, as a just ruler; Pratt, "Reading Epic through Romance: The *Roland* and the *Roman de Thèbes*," in *Reading Around the Epic: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Wolfgang van Emden*, ed. Marianne Ailes, Philip E. Bennet, Karen Pratt, and Wolfgang van Emden (King's College London Centre for Late and Antique Medieval Studies, 1998), 123-124.

[44] "Or s'en tesent de cest mestier, / se ne sont clerc ou chevalier, / car aussi pueent escouter / conme li asnes a harper. / Ne parlerai de peletiers / ne de vilains ne de bouchiers, / mes des deus freres parleré / et leur geste raconteré." (lines 13-20), "But be silent in this field anyone but clerks and knights, since the rest can listen as well as asses can play the harp. I won't speak about tanners, peasants, or butchers, but I will tell you about the two brothers and relate their story." Francine Mora-Lebrun qualified this discriminatory comment on the audience as "one of the great innovative ideas of the time," namely, the alliance of knights and clerks (which she connected to contemporary social tensions.) Mora-Lebrun, *"Metre en romanz*," 32 and 174-178. In the 12th century, it was not uncommon to emphasize a historical text's function as a learning tool, as opposed to a form of entertainment, cf. Peter Damian-Grint, *The New Historians of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance: Inventing Vernacular Authority* (Boydell, 1999), 19.

cultural superstars whose names are in the mouths of every medieval schoolboy. The translator makes it clear that, in his perspective, writing is not just a pedagogical vector pointing towards enlightenment: rather, it seems to be particularly suited for keeping his identity preserved in the text forever. This is, in fact, an authorial prophecy, albeit one legible in between the lines: if his work measures up to that of the *auctores*, he will one day be elevated among their numbers.

That prophecy is only partially fulfilled: while this text has survived, the *Thèbes* took on a variety of forms, as we have seen, and no individual name was attached to any version. Beyond the principal of *mouvance* in medieval literary, this variety is perhaps due to the sheer difficulty of grappling with a text such as Statius's *Thebaid*, the number of readings made possible by it, and the medieval modes of reading and writing that challenged the notion of a self-contained text. In short, the prophecy fell short, the text displaced the writer. As a way of considering why this prophecy failed, we can examine how a particular medieval manuscript of the *Thebaid* tackled the mission of transmitting knowledge and consider one of the perspectives on understanding translating and writing in the 12th century available to the *Thèbes*'s translator. Written in the 13th century, BNF Latin 16694 provides an animated materialization of medieval readers' lively interactions with this text, bringing to the surface their real and anticipated needs when tackling Statius.[45]

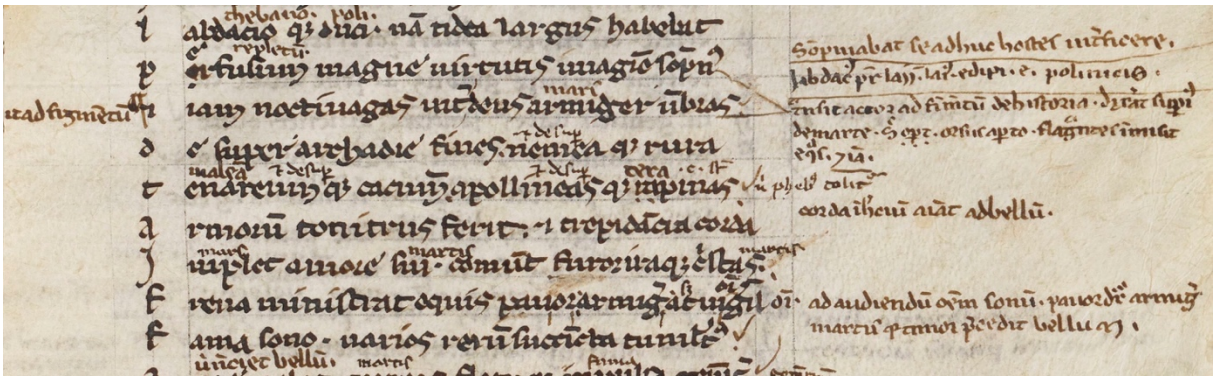


Figure 1.2 BNF Lat 16694 22r[46]

Here we see a few lines from Book 3, where Eteocles, the brother who has overstayed his reign in Thebes, has just laid a treacherous ambush for Tydeus. Learning of the attempt on Tydeus's life, Polynices deliberates with King Adrastus on which course to take in order to reassert his authority

[45] I will return to this manuscript throughout this chapter in order to consider the exegetical practices that medieval readers would have found useful in order to understand and follow the *Thebaid*.

[46] Photograph by Adam Grant.

over Thebes. Adrastus calls for augurs to assess the disposition of the gods towards war with Thebes. As Tydeus falls asleep, Statius switches perspectives to a removed, omniscient mixture of mythology and psychology, as the people of Argos prepare for war. This scene is accompanied by a number of glosses in this manuscript, beginning at "Et iam noctivagas … umbras" ("And now nightwandering shadows …") on the third line. On the left, the marginal notes indicate that here "he returns to myth" ("[redd]it ad figmentum"), helping the reader to follow along with Statius as he takes a step back from the immediate narrative concerning Tydeus's wounds and places his audience within a removed, figurative framework to discuss the experience of looming war. The outer column provides insight on this move—at the beginning of this transition we read, "The author moves onto mythology from the story. He had earlier spoken about Mars, 'So saying, he drove his flaming horses into the open.'" ("Transit actor ad figmentum de historia. Dixerat superius de Marte. Sic orsus aperto flagrantes immisit equos"), reminding the reader of the framing device used on the previous page to link Tydeus's return with the entry of war onto the horizon. The nuts and bolts of the symbolism behind Mars are explained as well further down on the right, "Mars's squire is called Panic, since fear comes before war." ("Pavor dicitur armiger Martius, quod timor precedit bellum.") We can imagine the liveliness of medieval reading, as our eyes dart back and forth from the main narrative to the surrounding exegetical apparatus which provides place holders, contextual anchors and cultural insights. What this juxtaposition of texts demonstrates as well is a keen awareness of the extratextual apparatuses which push in and weaken any individual author's place as the sole determining element of meaning.

The *Roman de Thèbes* has a decidedly innovative and complex response to this episode from Statius. The mythographic context, as is the case in general in the *Roman de Thèbes*, is suppressed, as a euhemerist reading eliminates the participation of Mars and attributes the intensifying preparations for war to the underlying anxiety and panic caused by Eteocles's and Adrastus's actions: Polynices "a grant deul" (line 1999), ("is greatly affected") by his decision to arrange an ambush for Tydeus, since he now realizes that his choices will make it so that his "sa terre ert essillie," (line 2002), ("his land will be devastated.")[47] In fact, while many of the

[47] The translator was perhaps inspired by the mournful words of Jupiter, reacting to the strife below: "'Now, by an unjust king's crime, we've lost these many pillars of our land—citizens, blameless men. Argos has not yet heard tell of the treaty rejected—yet we already lament war's worst outcome.'" ("Nunc regis iniqui / ob noxam immeritos patriae tot culmina cives / exuimus, nec adhuc calcati foederis Argos / fama subit, et iam bellorum extrema dolemus." III.206-209.)

mythographic interventions are excised, the translator has retained a key connection between the events in Greece and the divinities above: prophetic speech. War preparations are undertaken by Eteocles, spurred on by unequivocal prophecies, while the Greeks in Argos are divided over the use of divination. There, Amphiaraus the augur ("devin") reports that "se vous a Thebes les menez, se je onc rien d'argure soir, mou ten retornera ça poi," (lines 2072-2074), ("if I had any ability in augury, of those that you send to Thebes, very few will return.") War is coming, that is made quite clear in the narrative, but what exactly the results will be is questioned, as doubtful voices are raised in Argos contesting prophetic speech and oracles. In other words, the *Thèbes* and this Latin manuscript disagree over the value and applicability of prophecy. How could an author, then, claim to deliver such unequivocal wisdom and thus become a renowned authority when the literary tradition and the text itself are founded on such uncertain readings?

1.3 Oedipus and Prophecy

This questioning of prophecy appears in both Statius and the *Thèbes* and it is telling that the conflicting portrayal of prophecy is in the *Thèbes*. In the *Thèbes,* the first sticking point—the first moment where the translator's grappling with his source material becomes a palpable struggle for him—is the story of Oedipus. Background details on the life of Oedipus and the encounters with Apollo that he shared with his father were added in significant expansions to the beginning of the *Thèbes*, with the greatest share of those 600 lines highlighting the alarm felt by Laius and then Jocasta as the Oedipus tale unfolds. This affective amplification has been connected to a didactic function, exposing the nuts and bolts of the Oedipus backstory that provide it with meaning for a 12th-century lay, vernacular readership that may have not have been able to access it as clearly as Statius's 1st-century audience.[48] In the context of the *romans d'antiquité*, it is perhaps even more justified to consider the Oedipus extract here a product of the audience's (possible) ignorance, given the frankness with which the vernacular translators qualified their audience as particularly ill-informed.

Benoit de Sainte-Maure expressed this sentiment clearly in a well-known excerpt from the introduction to the *Roman de Troie*, where he wrote that "La voudrai si en romanz metre / Que cil qui n'entendent la letre / Se puissent deduire el romanz" (lines 37-39), ("I'll indeed translate into

[48] Such a reading connects with the very foundation of the translational project that Alison Cornish has labeled *vulgarization*; Alison Cornish, *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy: Illiterate Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

romanz, so that those who don't understand Latin, can take delight in the romance.[49] Here the form of translation is double. It is linguistic, the vernacular ("romanz") into which he intends to translate a Latin original, as well as literary, the genre ("romanz") that he has chosen for his presentation of the material. It is through this double imposition that his final goal can be realized—leading vernacular audiences out of ignorance. Language, genre, and teaching are all linked together in a specific literary project. Mora-Lebrun has argued that one of the most salient common points between the *romans d'antiquité* is how they respond to "didactic demands" outlined in their prologues, that is, that the necessary communication of knowledge to a larger—and particularly courtly or knightly—audience requires adaptations to the cultural knowledge of the latter.[50] Catherine Croizy-Naquet sees the *Thèbes* in particular as an object created to instruct the more educated, lettered officials in the Angevin court and claims that its engagement in urban description—an innovation on the *Thebaid*—turns the text into a cultural "stained-glass window" (*vitrail*), where, like a city, different cultures and social groups coexist.[51] There is, however, a common *topos* of "bringing texts within the grasp of 'lay' or 'unlettered' audiences" in much medieval literature.[52] Its frequency tracks other authorial tropes employed by vernacular writers, such as presenting their work as mere variations on material transmitted to them by greater

[49] Benoît de Sainte-More and Léopold Constans, *Le Roman de Troie*, vol. 1 (Firmin-Didot, 1904), 3. English translation my own.

[50] Mora-Lebrun, *"Metre en romanz,"* 196. There is tension within that theory, however, and it tends to lead to an overall pastiche of a roman—one that is both expanding knowledge of antiquity and trying to find connections with its audience. The double-edged nature of the text has led some researchers to place the writer more on the side of the lay audience, making him an institutional outsider who only knew of the *Thebaid* from a third party, see Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (D.S. Brewer, 1999), 58-61. As Mora has noted elsewhere, the way that combats are described in the *Thèbes* shows that the author addresses "an audience of connaisseurs," that is, knights. Since many clerks came from outside of the church, often from more typical rural and knightly circles, their familiarity with that milieu is hardly surprising. For Mora, they instead used this knowledge to impose lay values onto those of the intellectual class of clerks. See Francine Mora, "Les combats dans le Roman de Thèbes: Le clerc et les chevaliers," *L'Information littéraire* 55, no. 1 (2003): 42–52.

[51] Catherine Croizy-Naquet, "Thèbes, ville maudite," in *Méthode! N° 3, Automne 2002: Agrégation de Lettres 2003* (Vallongues, 2002), 25. In her longer monograph on literary representations of Thebes, Troy and Carthage and the *romans d'antiquité*, she equally attributes descriptions of cities to the goal of teaching that underlies the texts, even if certain "maladresses d'écrivain ... des difficultés de traduction .. une volonté de plaire et conquérir un certain public ... un manque de sens historique" can often interrupt and hinder that goal. See Catherine Croizy-Naquet, *Thèbes, Troie et Carthage: Poétique de la ville dans le roman antique au XIIe siècle* (Honoré Champion, 1994), 11-12 and 231.

[52] Peter Damian-Grint, *The New Historians of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance: Inventing Vernacular Authority* (Boydell, 1999),17.

auctores, and therefore invites us to delve further within this section to understand how the Oedipus expansion can function within the text as a whole.

Oedipus was a rather new myth for 12th-century audiences and recent work has tracked knowledge of the Oedipus story in this period, none of which would have come from Sophocles' Oedipus cycle.[53] Statius, in fact, was a principal source of material, and the number of copies of and glosses on the *Thebaid* exploded in the 12th century. This was supplemented with a commentary assembled from late antiquity and attributed to a Lactantius Placidus, the Second Vatican Mythographer, and several shorter 12th-century works, including the poem *Diri patris*, lives of Oedipus, and a little-studied psychomachia entitled the *Super Thebaiden*.[54] Growing interest in the *Thebaid* at the time has also been linked back to interest in Oedipus—in other words, they are a phenomenon that go hand in hand, feeding into each other. Yet that also means that Oedipus was attracting great interest throughout the 12th century.

Statius is, then, a main source of information on the Oedipus story in the 12th century—it seems that this was new material for everyone, in fact. There is clear evidence in Latin manuscripts of the *Thebaid* from the 12th and 13th centuries indicating that even the clerks reading Statius—those who, as the manuscript A stated above, "keep the story in memory"—could need a summary on Oedipus's trials in order to understand the *Thebaid*. Returning to BNF Lat 16694, we see clear evidence of this need in the margins:

[53] Messerli's *Œdipe enténébré* marked the first book-length study of the Oedipus tale in the 12th century, with a particular focus on the *Roman de Thèbes* and Oedipus as a contemporary intertext. Sylvian Messerli, *Œdipe enténébré. Légendes d'Œdipe au XIIe siècle* (Champion, 2002.)

[54] Lactantius Placidus's commentary came in a variety of forms—sometimes as a running gloss with the text, sometimes as a work circulating independently. It seems possible that it was assembled from a variety of late antique marginal comments and attributed to one (fictional) individual. See James E. G. Zetzel, *Critics, Compilers, and Commentators: An Introduction to Roman Philology, 200 BCE-800 CE* (Oxford University Press, 2018). On the *Super Thebaiden* see Brian Stock, "A Note on Thebaid Commentaries: Paris, B.N., Lat. 3012," *Traditio* 27 (1971): 468–71 and Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 81.

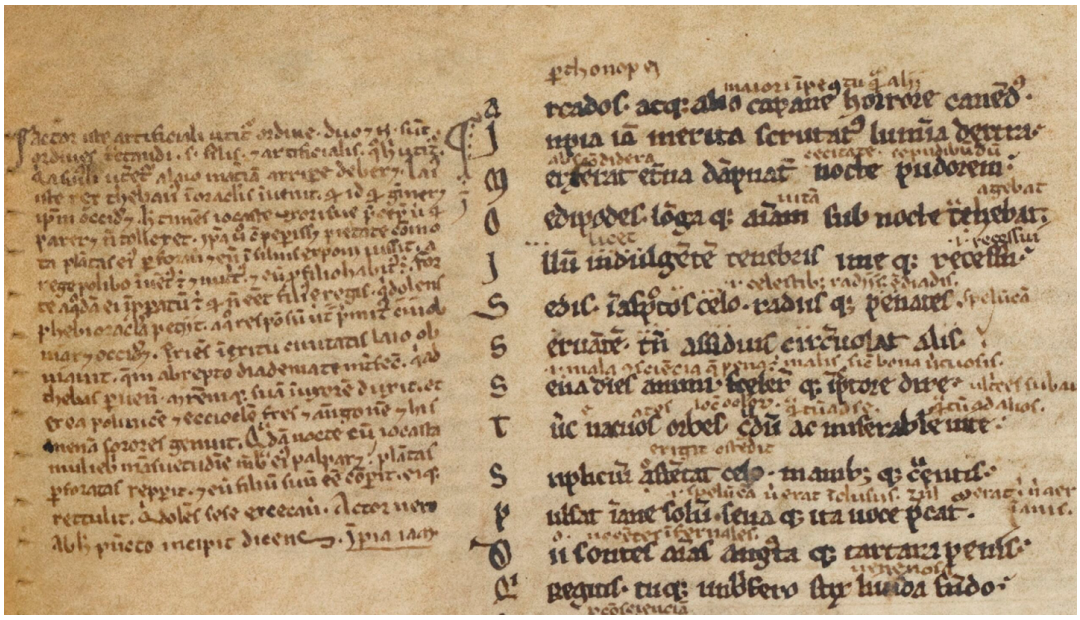


Figure 1.3 BNF Lat 16694 1v[55]

Near the opening of the *Thebaid*, at the very first line on the folio following the end of the poet's invocation of the muse, the *Thebaid* catches up with Oedipus in medias res, "His impious eyes already searched out by hands that made amends …" ("Impia iam merita scrutatus lumina dextra…") In the margin, a second hand has provided a gloss indicated by what looks like a *quod est* on the left margin, "that is." This note gives background to this section and ends on a repetition of the line from Statius that it glosses, "Impia iam," helping the reader to understand that this large note glosses this part of the text. This line from Statius is catching up with Oedipus, which ancient readers would most likely have found obvious, but, as the note suggests, medieval readers may have been lost. The marginal note does a lot of heavy lifting here. It provides a quick review of the Oedipus story: "Laius, king of Thebes, discovered from oracles that whatever he would beget, would kill him."[56] He forbid Jocasta to "raise" ("pareret") whatever child she would give birth to,

[55] Photograph by Adam Grant.

[56] "Actor iste artificiali utitur ordine. Duo [etiam?] sunt ordines rectandi. S[cilicet] [felis?] et artificialis. Quo hic utitur … Laius iste rex Thebanus in oraculis invenit, quod id quod gigneret ipsum occideret. Hic timens Iocaste uxori sue preceperuit quod pareret non tolleret. Ipsa vero cum peperisset pietate commota plantas eius perforavit et eum in silvis exponi iussit. A rege Polibo inventus est et nutritus et eum pro filio habitus est. Forte a quodam ei improperatum est quod non esset filius regis. Qui dolens Phebi oracula petiit. A quo responsum ut primitus cui obviaret occideret. Exiens in exitu civitatis Laio obviavit. Quem abrepto diademate interfecit. Qui ad Thebas pervenit matremque suam in uxorem duxit et ex ea Polinicem et Eccioclem fratres et Antigonem et Hismenam sorores genuit. Quadam nocte eum [sic] Iocasta muliebri mansuetudine membra eius palparet. Plantas perforates repperit et eum filium suum esse comperit eique rettulit. Qui dolens sese excecavit."

and as a response, she was "forced" ("pietate commota") to have Oedipus' heels pierced so that he could be strung up and abandoned in the forest, which signs later exposed his identity to Jocasta. The intervening prophecies given by Phoebus Apollo find a place as well, so that the clerkly reader can situate chains of causality in the narrative. Interestingly, the note also clarifies for the reader the structure of the *Thebaid*, employing typical language for a 12th-century commentary. It points out that the poet has not followed a chronological ordering of the story, that is, the *Thebaid* does not start off with the story of Oedipus. It is constructed "artificially," that is, achronologically, and jumps back and forth, requiring specific knowledge in the reader to follow the poet's construction of meaning. That material is not included in the *Thebaid*, so the necessary background has been written in the margins. Even clerks who had been well-trained in literature from antiquity beginning in childhood may have needed a refresher.

The inclusion of the Oedipus tale in the *Thèbes*, then, opens other possibilities for its place within the text, beyond a necessary pedagogical support for an uninitiated, vernacular audience with specific needs that Latin-educated readers would not have had. Oedipus cements the importance of prophetic experience in the opening of *Thèbes*, at first in a way that parallels Statius' emphasis on the affective dimension of prophecy's impact on the individual. Statius places the reader in the immediacy of the birth of the conflict that will consume the two brothers. The narrative begins with Oedipus's rage against his sons and the curse that he pleads for from the gods as punishment. The Fury Tisiphone responds to his prayer, flying down into Thebes to sow disunity. Tisiphone sweeps headfirst ("praeceps" 1.123)[57] into Thebes, that is with great speed and strength, casting a shadow of strife over the city. *Praeceps* also connotes danger, as Livy wrote that the consul Marcus Marcellus' death in battle with Hannibal occurred after he "put himself, his comrade, and nearly the whole republic in danger ("in praeceps")." (Livy 27.36, 11.) The emotions are clear as the wrath of war descends in a cloud, dissolving social bonds built on affection ("attoniti fratrum sub pectore motus, / gentilisque animos subiit furor" 1.125-6). Yet the overall issue is the extent to which the emotional disarray is indicative of instability within the body politic: Thebes will soon be brought down by civil war. Within the first 150 lines of the poem, Statius puts into motion the narrative engine, placing the brothers on their meandering path to the mutual destruction that terminates in Book 12.

[57] English translations of the *Thebaid* adapted from Statius, *Thebaid: A Song of Thebes*, trans. Jane Wilson Joyce (Cornell University Press, 2008).

By contrast, the *Roman de Thèbes* backtracks, revisiting the roots of Oedipus's torments, which had been passed over by Statius. The laudatory dedication to Domitian in the opening of the *Thebaid*– known of and commented on by medieval readers—is excised, and the introductory reflection on wisdom and transmission, seen above, takes its place. Moreover, the narrative structure that leads into the story of fraternal conflict between Eteocles and Polynices undergoes a significant transformation in the *Thèbes*, providing an overarching lens of literary interpretation that looms over the entire verse romance. In the French, the story of Oedipus's life is elaborated over approximately 600 lines, from Laius's encounter with the oracle who predicts his death by his own offspring, through to Oedipus's encounter with the sphynx, and finally his condemnation of his sons and self-imposed exile. The translator inserts original dialogues and monologues, emphasizing the perspectives of the agents of this tragedy through often emotionally-charged language. The moment when Jocasta realizes not just the identity of Oedipus, but the repercussions of her incestuous marriage on their lives and the fate of Thebes rounds out the Oedipus narrative. As she receives confirmation from her servants that Oedipus was also her son, she cries out "Mar fumes né, / car ambedui serons dampné! / Ton pere est cil que tu as mort, / ta mere sui si m'as a tort," (lines 525-528), ("How cruel it was that we were born, because we will both be damned! Your father is the man you killed, and it is reprehensible that you have me [as your wife],") followed by an equally emotional lament from Oedipus, along with a curse on his sons for trampling his eyes underfoot, finally joining up with the end of Statius' introduction.

The moment of realization lived by Jocasta is not the only extended section in which the translator endeavored to work out what kind of speech and what kind of thoughts the characters could credibly present in such a situation. The opening of the *Thèbes* presents a number of scenes that demonstrate *amplificatio*, a medieval rhetorical exercise employed during the course of studies covering the *trivium*, during which students would acquire a mastery of Latin. In the prologue, the anonymous translator chose a moment of suffering for Jocasta to develop. Laius has just announced his decision that all of his children—those born and those to yet be born—must be killed and Jocasta's lament opens an extended inner monologue exposing her concerns and thought process to the audience—she lays out her torment, mourns her (supposedly) condemned son, assigns guilt and gives pardon. She "pleure, crie et bret," (line 53), ("screams and wails") and "ses poinz detort, ses chevex tret," (line 54), ("twists her wrists and pulls out her hair,") a common Old French trope to express feminine anguish. Laius' order pushes her to a series of panicked attempts

to understand this ordeal, to discover some kind of underlying rationality: “Lasse, dolente, que fera?” (line 57), §“What will I do, as I am miserable, pitiful?”), “Chetive riens, por quoi nasquis?” (line 58), (“Miserable thing, why were you born?”), “Por quell forfet et por quell tort, / Petiz enfes, recevras mort?” (lines 61-62), (“What wrong, what crime will be behind your death?”) Being forced to kill her own infant is the immediate cause here, in other words, Jocasta’s torment is very mortal, caused by Laius’ cynical calculations. Yet, the lament ends on a final response from Jocasta providing the logic to her plight: “Vers les dex veut eschaucirer / et leur respons a faux prover,” (lines 75-76), (“He wants to dispute the gods, prove that their answer is false.”) All the more distressing for Jocasta is that she knows any scheme cooked up by Laius—and thus the unjust death of her own child—will be in vain, as she confirms that “ains sera conme il ont dit,” (line 78), (“it will be as they [the gods] said,”) no matter what the couple does. She locates the nexus of her suffering, a tormenting bind that forces her family’s fate: Apollo’s response to Laius’ enquiry as to “quel fin il [li dex] li voudront doner,” (line 40), (“what fate [the gods] will give him.”) This passage opens up a lexical field of criminality (forfet, tort), paltriness (chetive riens, petiz enfes) and suffering (pleur, detort, tret, dolente). This language serves to characterize the first perspectives of prophecy onto one image: prophecy is an affliction on humanity.

This initial image of prophecy as true speech is developed throughout the *Thèbes*, even though the longest extended passages are in the introduction. Oedipus is later teased and insulted about his origins: “Tuit li serjant de la meson, / le ledisent de leur reson ; / plus de cent foiz l'ont apelé / filz a putain, bastart prove,” (lines 149-152), (“All of the servants in the house insult him, called him ‘whore’s son’ and ‘bastard’ more than a hundred times.”) Without realizing it, his reaction is the same as his father’s, to visit Apollo’s cave:

En l’ille de mer Galillee,
qui mout par est et grant et lee,
fut fet un temple par Nature,
ce nos enseingne l’escriture.
Delfox a non, ce dit la lettre.
Cil qui s’en veulent entremetre
de leur aventures savoir,
viennent iluec respons avoir.
Appolo, le dieu de conseill,
par grant cure et par grant esveill
donne respons en une croute
de cele chose que l’en doute.
Li dex se repont et s’enserre
dedenz unne croute soz terre;
d’iluec desclost bien et desserre
ce que chascun li veut requerre.

Bien dit a chascun s'aventure,
mes sa response est mout obcure.
Pour ce sachiez tres bien de voir
que pour cest siecle decevoir
est la parole du deable
double touz jors et decevable.
(lines 175-196)

On the island on the sea of Galilee, great and wide, Nature had made a temple, our source teaches us this. It is called Delphi, according to the text. Those who want to inquire about knowing their fate come here to have an answer. Apollo, the god of counsel, with much care and attention, gives in his cave a response to whatever someone is unsure of. The god hides himself, locks himself up in a cave underground. From here, he unlocks and reveals whatever each person asks from him. In fact, he tells each person their fortune, but his response is quite obscure. For this reason, know that this is true, that the devil's word is meant to deceive this world, it is always double, always deceitful.

This time, the narrator provides a glossing of the place, telling his audience where it is, what it is like, and what kind of speech is found there. Now that we have seen Laius's reaction to Apollo's oracle and Oedipus arrives for his own reading, the narrator offers a warning: Apollo is the devil, and his speech is not to be trusted. Part of this intervention must be read through the lens of Christian reception of pagan religious ceremonies, showing unease with the practice and the need to rebut its claim to provide contact with the (heretical) divine.[123] The narrator is reappropriating a lesson from pagan antiquity for his Christian, vernacular audience. More importantly, he is denying the veracity of prophetic statements, in particular those emanating from supposedly divinely-inspired oracles. The speech is "double," but that duality is not analyzed for the half of

[123] This reading is not universal in medieval receptions of antiquity. The Second Vatican Mythographer, an 11th or 12th century compendium of short biographies and backgrounds of mythological figures, presents Apollo's prophetic abilities, and in fact those of the rest of the gods, without comment: "Men speak of Apollo's tripod because he knew the past, perceives the present, and will see the future … So do we read about other gods, that they prophecy sometimes on the kalends, sometimes on the ides, at other times at the first or middle or last part of the day." ("Apollinem tripodem dicunt quia preterita nouit, presential cernat, futura uisurus sit ... ut de aliis diis legitur aliquotiens kalendis, aliquotiens idibus uaticinari, nonnunquam diei uel prima uel media uel extrema parte …") Sometimes these ancient associations are presented with a euhemerist-style understanding, such as in Apollo's epithets, but they do not receive condemnation: "He is the god of divination, because the sun makes all dark things clear, or because in his rising and setting he shows the various outcomes of signs." ("... et diuinationis deum dixerunt quod Sol omnia obscura manifestat, uel quod in ortu suo et occassu suo multimodos monstrat effectus significationum.) Ronald E. Pepin, *The Vatican Mythographers* (Fordham University Press, 2022), 112; for the Latin, see Péter Kulcsár, *Mythographi Vaticani I et II* (Brepols, 1987), 117-118.

its meaning that is true. That is to say, this incident is markedly different from the kind of famously double speech an oracle can be known for, best typified in Herodotus's *Persian Wars*, where Croesus, after inquiring on the idea of going to war with the Persians, is told that he would destroy a great empire—the catch being that *his* empire was the one marked for destruction.[124] In the *Thèbes*, that duality has no salutary function, even one with a hidden meaning that once worked out could provide a moral lesson. In short, in the opening of the *Thèbes* the story of Oedipus allows the narrator to make a key move, which is to provide an unequivocal presentation of prophecy in antiquity. It comes from the devil, it is duplicitous, and it engenders torment, doubt, and self-destruction. The Old French parallels the emotional language opening the *Thebaid*, but the torment experienced by the inhabitants of Thebes is reoriented to a new source. Rather than arising from the fear of war, it is born from the inevitability of a future revealed by prophecy. The translator maintains the panic of Thebes, but through the introduction, attributes the *cause* of the panic to prophecy.

That focus on prophecy as a causal feature of the narrative has been overlooked in studies seeking to explain this shift in the opening from the *Thebaid* to the *Thèbes*. While the Oedipus tale, as we have seen, provided a moment for prophecy to be commented upon, it provided its own paradoxical twist that the translator could have considered too troublesome to explore. If Apollo is equated with the duplicitous nature of the devil and therefore his speech cannot be trusted, that postulate rubs up against the fact that both Laius and Oedipus in the end received a response from the oracle that was realized: Laius was killed by his son, Oedipus murdered his father. The translator does not engage in any further direct commentary for the reader on what to do when confronted with predictions of the future. This lack of explicit, critical engagement with the practices of oracles, prophecy, augurs and other forms of divination stands in marked contrast with Statius, which can be seen in a scene that comes relatively early in the *Thèbes*, and in Book III of the Thebaid.

In the *Roman de Thèbes*, before Polynices and Eteocles resolve the contested throne of Thebes through war, Tydeus convinces Polynices and Adrastus to resolve their dispute through diplomacy. As we saw earlier, this embassy is a failure, as Tydeus is unable to persuade Eteocles to hand over power to Polynices. During his return to Argos, Eteocles betrays the conventions of

[124] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, Loeb Classical Library 120 (Harvard University Press, 2014), I.53.

diplomacy and sends a group of knights to assassinate Tydeus, providing a painting of the depravity and rot in his character. Tydeus survives the attempt, leaving one Theban alive as a messenger to announce the ill news to Eteocles, while he returns to Argos. Both sides, then, are aware of the consequences of this encounter and resolve that the situation imposes war. The scene in the court of Thebes materializes the coming bloodshed, as the messenger commits suicide out of shame for Eteocles's actions, spraying the king's face with his blood. In a key move necessary to trace their path forward, both sides seek out oracles.[125] The Theban forces receive an unequivocal response and act accordingly: "Cil devin treuvent en lor sors / que Grieu chevauchent a esfors" (lines 2005-2006), ("The seers learn in their oracles that the Greeks are galloping straight for them.") In marked contrast, the Greeks' encounter with prophetic revelation is mired in controversy, indecision and indeterminacy. Adrastus calls Amphiaraus, "a most proper archbishop" (line 2056),[126] one whose powers were considerable: "Il prent response et giete sors, / revivre fet les houmes mors ; / de touz oisiaux sot le latin, souz ciel n'avoit meillor devin," (lines 2059-2062), ("He hears the answers [from the gods] and predicts the future, revives those who are dead, understands the language of the birds—there was no better seer under the sun.")[127] Once he follows Adrastus's request to determine the results of a future war with Thebes, Amphiaraus at first refuses to speak, and only delivers "que voir li dïe de l'angure," (line 2068), ("the truth of the augury") with great regret: if the Greeks leave for Thebes, nearly every member of their force will perish, including himself, who will be swallowed up by the earth.

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[125] The *Roman de Thèbes* moves away from the prophetic experience of one of the Theban soldiers sent to kill Tydeus in the *Thebaid*, a "Maeon Haemonides" who had foreseen his fate: "he had foreseen these things,being well-versed in sky omens, a man who could read a bird on the wing. Fearless, he'd warned his leader, but Fate had decreed his alarm must lack credence — he was doomed to be pitied for a life of futility." (*Thebaid* 2.691-696)

[126] In translating *cortois* here I take inspiration from Guy Raynaud de Lage, "En règle générale, il faut confirmer que *courtois* caractérise peu; c'est une épithète pour *gens de parage* qui ont une bonne éducation et l'usage du monde (*afaitié*), mais qui ont de surcroît l'élégance physique (*acesmé*), et cette élégance morale dont l'absence empêche Ethïoclés, et même Pollinicés, d'être qualifié de *courtois*." Guy Raynaud de Lage, "'Courtois' et 'Courtoisie' Dans Le Roman de Thèbes," in *Qui des sept arz set rien entendre: Études sur le Roman de Thèbes*, ed. Bernard Ribémont, Medievalia 43 (Paradigme, 2002), 111–15.114; originally in *Mélanges de langue et de littérature du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance offerts à Jean Frappier* (Droz 1970).

[127] As Petit has shown, the powers held by Amphiaraus to reanimate the dead should not be interpreted to mean that he was seen as some kind of sorcerer or necromancer by the medieval translator. Rather, it is in all likelihood an allusion to a scene from Book IV of the *Thebaid* where Amphiaraus summons the spirits of the dead (*manes*). See Aimé Petit, "'Monseigneur' Amphiaraus?"," in *Qui des sept arz set rien entendre: Études sur le Roman de Thèbes*, ed. Bernard Ribémont, Medievalia 43 (Paradigme, 2002), 133–40.; originally in *Les lettres romanes* 33 (1979): 163-171.

Statius instead indicted the human element of prophecy in this section. In the *Thebaid*, the two augurs Amphiaraus and Melampus (the latter not appearing in the *Thèbes*) equally keep quiet, as "They tremble under the future's weight, suffer the whole of things yet to be; terror seizes the seers..." (Trepidos sic mole futuri / cunctaque iam rerum certa sub imagine passos / terror habet uates ... III.547-549.) The narrator takes this opportunity to address the audience: "How did this universal sickness—this passion to know the future—first spring up in us wretched creatures?" (... Unde iste per orbem / primus uenturi miseris animantibus aeger / creuit amor? III 551-553.) Statius provides an unequivocal condemnation, not of prophetic speech itself, but of the "sick desire" (aeger ... amor) to know the future. It is the very human that Statius indicts here, not the divine component of divination, and rather than the result of tricky, untrustworthy, duplicitous gods evincing their ill-will to sow discord through carefully-worded revelation, the suffering that follows an encounter with prophetic speech is entirely rooted in the human desire to go beyond the bounds of what is proper: to know the future is "forbidden" ("quid crastina volveret aetas / scire nefas homini" III.562-3). Playing off the Golden Age myth, Statius attributes the ills that accompany the fall of man not to the traditional growth of greed and domination over others, but rather, to the desire to "seek the innermost [knowledge] of the gods" (scrutari penitus superos). It is thus indicative of society's decay that prophecy has become relied upon, at humanity's great expense. A scene such as this suggests source material for the *Thèbes* translator to focus on and expand moments of prophecy as moments of monologue, where the individual struggles to face knowledge of their fate.

The *Thèbes* transposes this inquiry into the morality and wisdom of prophecy onto the duplicitous speech of the devil, as seen in the Apollo scene. The condemnation of divination is not limited to the introduction, however, and returns within the narrative. This further complicates the translator's attempts to establish a uniform or self-consistent model for understanding the displacement of prophetic speech—with all its admitted consequences and shortcomings—from antiquity to the medieval present. Amphiaraus is called by Adrastus to provide a prediction of the future conflict with Thebes. He is seized by fear from the response he receives from the gods and only reveals under force the truth that most of the Argives, including himself, will perish. The Greek soldier Capaneus immediately understands the possible impact of such a prophecy on Adrastus, who could be persuaded by the predicted devastation of his army to call off the attack. Capaneus's response is an extended invective against both Amphiaraus and prophecy in one breath:

"'Sire,' dist il, 'ne doiz pas croire / quanque oz dire a cest provoire, / car de tout ce qui est a ester / ne te set rien dire cist prestre. / Mes coarz est, tel rien velt faindre / par quoi cist oz puisse remaindre" (lines 2081-2088), ("'Sire,' he said, 'you must not believe whatever you hear this priest say—he can't tell you anything of what is to come. He's just a coward—he wants to invent something so the army can stay behind.'") Amphiaraus's fatalist pronouncements are also effectively swiped aside by Capaneus's appeals to honor (this is your son-in-law, you are duty-bound) and emotion (Amphiaraus is motivated by fear)—classical sites of invention in rhetoric. He pulls the rug out from under prophecy as a discourse of veracity, yet in this situation, his argument presents a novel development from the issues of duplicity or the torment of inevitability already examined. In fact, Capaneus does not see Amphiaraus as a vessel through which divine knowledge is funneled. He qualifies the seer as a charlatan who has usurped the function of his role in order to realize his own will ("tel rien velt faindre"). Prophecy becomes a field of conscious action allowing for the agency of the receiver—here that agency is realized as duplicity. This argument parallels the narrator's association of oracular speech with deception, although Amphiaraus does not pursue the same ends as the Devil in sowing disorder among humanity. Foreknowledge of events to come is fundamentally unreliable since it passes through a human receiver. Capaneus does not suggest that Amphiaraus consciously manipulates divine truth—Amphiaraus could just be conveying his own will in the language of prophecy, in a sort of confused mashup. Or he could be unknowingly reformulating actual revelation to suit his own desires. In any case, foreseeing presents no advantage for Capaneus beyond the questionable reliability of the speaker: "Ride off, don't believe in predictions [sort], since your death will come when it does [a ton jour]."[128] The finality of all of life's events—the death of the listener—is guaranteed, and unpreventable. Prophecy proffers no protection—at best, when the prophecy is true (which is not a given for Capaneus), all that can come from it is false hope, unhealthy despair, or disastrous advice.

The rub, however, is that Amphiaraus ends up proved right: nearly the entire army that set out from Argos is wiped out, Amphiaraus himself is swallowed by the earth, and Adrastus returns

[128] "Chevauche toi, ne croi en sort, / Car a ton jour vendra ta mort. / Ja nus devins ne t'en garra, / ne ja ainçois ne t'avendra," lines 2097-2100.

home alone with only two other Greeks.[129] This parallels the paradox of the narrator's condemnation of the oracle of Apollo—while the devil only gives deceptive information, the oracle at Delphi did, indeed, correctly predict the future.[130] There is an underlying tension between the functioning of prophecy within the narrative on one hand, and the narrator's attempts to associate it with falsehood.

Beyond the paradox of the correct-yet-condemned revelation, the place of prophecy within the text is further complicated by moments where it occurs and is uncritically described by the narrator. In fact, an unequivocal praise of revelation figures early in the *Thèbes*, setting forth the motor of the conflict that allows for Argos to unite behind Polynices and challenge Eteocles's hold on Thebes and one which goes unchallenged by the narrator. After his departure from Thebes at the beginning of the novel, Polynices wanders through a menacing forest populated with wild beasts, finally coming across Argos whose tower stood out in the deluge with a brilliant garnet (*escarboucle*) shining on top. Here, while sheltering on the steps of the palace from the rain, he meets Tydeus and they begin fighting over who will have the right to the stoop. The narrator laments this turn of events: "Ja s'il s'entreconneüssant, / ne cuit qu'il s'entratendissant," (lines 755-756), ("If they had already known each other, I don't think that they would strike at one another.")

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[129] Two, perhaps three—in the two sections of the *Thèbes* where the survivors are mentioned, their identities are slightly off. Immediately after the battle, the narrator says, "There's nothing left to say about the Greeks, because all of them were martyred. In such short time, they were all killed, only three escaped alive: one of the three was Adrastus, the other was called Acastus and the third, born in Greece, had taken a hit to his body." ("Des Griex n'i a mes plus que dire, / car tuit se livrent a martire; / em pou d'eure sunt tuit ocis, / n'en eschapa que seul trois vis: / li uns des trois est Adrastus, / li autres ot non Acastus / et li tierz est de Gresce nez, / par mi le cors estoit navrez..." lines 9847-9854. Later, as the army of Greek women arrive in Athens to ask for the aid of the "Duke," Argia, daughter of Adrastus, tells him that, "Sire, Tegeus, a relation of Tydeus, sent by my father to us, brought us this news: of all of those who had gone there, only three escaped: my father and Pollitenus, and the third is Tegeus." ("Sire, dist ele, Thegeüs, / qui fu parent pres Thideüs, / que mes peres nos envoia, / ces nouveles nos aporta; / de touz ceus dist qui la alerent / que seul soi tierz n'en eschaperent / mon pere et Pollitenus, / et cist est le tierz, Thegeü," lines 10043-10050. Acastus has disappeared, and two others have been added to the list (perhaps one was the unnamed third from the narrator's earlier remark.) Yet when Adrastus meets up with the army of Argive women, he is accompanied by ... Acastus (10209-10210.) Aimé Petit has dedicated a short footnote to hypothesizing on the origin of the names of Adrastus's companions, see Petit, *Le Roman de Thèbes*, 593.

[130] As Sarah Kay eloquently summarized this section, "The pagan mythological framework from which this interpellation arises should, no doubt, serve as a warning to contemporary readers of its potential to mislead; the authority which seeks to define the subject is one which, from the point of view of the medieval audience, is *not* literally true, although the characters may believe it so." However, she considers this passage as indicative of "the experimental mode characteristic of the *romans d'antiquité*, inviting their audience to reflect on the continuities and discontinuities between antiquity and their own time." As I will argue further on, I consider those discontinuities less apparent, and the continuities hazier. There are prophecies which *are* true, such as Amphariaus's, already seen, as well as Adrastus' dream on the following page. See Kay, *Courtly Contradictions: The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford University Press, 2001), 160.

This intervention is a hint of things to come. Adrastus is roused by the noise and struck by the scene he sees before him. As he comes upon the fighting youths, the narrator tells us, "Puis se conmence a porpenser / et leur armes a regarder, / que ce sont cil que li promist / la deesse qui ce li dist, / c'un senglier et uns lÿons fiersavront ses filles a moullierz," (lines 833-838), ("Then he started to think through things, and looked at their weapons, and thought that these were the ones that the goddess had promised him, who had told him that a wild boar and a proud lion would have his daughters as wives.") The dream-vision is clearly from a pagan source—the goddess ("deesse") gave it to him, and it is never made clear which goddess it is, as the dream itself does not figure in the romance. This is a purely pagan source, then, which allows a violent conflict to be resolved in a way that provides for the rest of the text to unfold—Polynices and Tydeus become key allies in the war against Thebes. Unlike in the case of Apollo, the reader is not warned that this "goddess" is likewise not to be trusted. Perhaps the warning at the beginning of the text was felt to be enough, but its absence is nevertheless suspect, all the more so the case in a scene that unites—in a very literal way, through marriage—the key protagonists. How false is this prophetic speech, when it is so central to the text's internal coherence?

These reverberations of Oedipus throughout the *Thèbes* have not gone unnoticed. Sometimes they are identified in echoes seen elsewhere, sometimes in clear allusions, such as the paradigm of enigma sprinkled throughout the text.[131] Much scholarship has seen Oedipus through a Judeo-Christian lens.[132] Daniel Poirion's reading of the Oedipus segment of the *Thèbes* argued for a "hidden sense" behind the expanded biography provided in the Old French, more than just a moralizing tale, and one that can only be found by "decrypting it in the text itself."[133] In the fashion of the Oedipus complex, Poirion centers feudal concerns with threatening symmetries—when two

[131] Michèle Guéret-Laferté, "Figures du diable dans Le *Roman de Thèbes*," in *Le Diable*, ed. Alain Niderst (Librairie A.-G.Nizet, 1998), 41–53. As Mora-Lebrun wrote in agreement with Messerli, the Oedipus gives meaning to the *Thèbes* as a whole; Messerli, *Œdipe Enténébré*, 165.

[132] For Dominique Boutet, "Ce qui fait la force d'appel du roman de *Thèbes* pour les consciences médiévales, c'est le jeu d'échos qu'il met en place avec divers thèmes bibliques." Dominique Boutet, *Formes littéraires et conscience historique aux origines de la littérature française, 1100-1250* (Presses universitaires de France, 1999), 22. Francine Mora-Lebrun stated that the problem of "la malédiction divine et de son impact tant sur la puissance guerrière que sur le dessin des cités" is posed in the Thèbes. Francine Mora-Lebrun, "Mythe troyen et histoire thébaine. Le manuscrit S du *Roman de Thèbes*," in *Entre fiction et histoire: Troie et Rome Au Moyen Âge*, ed. Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Laurence Harf-Lancner (Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1997), 26.

[133] Daniel Poirion, "Edyppus et l'énigme du roman médiéval," in *Qui des sept arz set rien entendre: Études sur le Roman de Thèbes*, ed. Bernard Ribémont, Medievalia 43 (Orléans: Paradigme, 2002), 143, originally in *L'enfant au Moyen Âge : Littérature et civilisation* (CUERMA, 1980), 285–98

sons, two brothers, two mirrored selves (Polynices and Etetocles, Polynices and Tydeus, Adrastus and his daughters versus Jocasta and two sons) are confronted with primogeniture. The *Thèbes,* for Poirion, afforded a space to thematize the idealized philosophy founding feudal hierarchy, a "society of brothers," with the social and psychological violence of choice effected by the "cruelty of fathers." This complex projected a "collective unconscious" into the text, one that held incompatible views of the role of the father for the son and fundamentally feared paternal figures as possible origins of familial and, through the lens of feudalism, social strife. The question of fault, then, is never answered, since Oedipus is both victim and criminal—and, since his tale serves as a model for the rest of the text, so are Polynices and Eteocles, seen in a much more sympathetic light than the bloodthirsty brothers in Statius.

Zrinka Stahuljak has followed up on this work in her research on medieval genealogy, dedicating a chapter to the *Roman de Thèbes*. Stahuljak endeavored to understand why incest is "against nature" as the epilogue states it, but she moves away from Poirion's Freudian gaze on marriage and reproduction to focus instead on the domain of fealty and oaths.[134] The *Thèbes*, as Stahuljak observed, problematized bonds of fealty to an extent not seen in other *romans d'antiquité*, and reflects contemporary concerns with the structured orderliness of allegiances and law, through, for example, Eteocles's and Polynices's *novele lei*, that is, the novel power-sharing agreement they cooked up early in the text. Most importantly, incest is against nature because it unsettles linguistic signification: "to commit incest is to attack the linguistic positions within which the alliance of 'fathers' and 'sons' operate."[135] One cannot be both father and son. My goal here is not to restate this work—indeed, rather than a historicized reading, I focus on literary practices. We have seen that prophecy, while a widespread medieval mode of reading, is also a problem for the *Thèbes*, handled in a way that is non-uniform. I will now turn my attention to *why* that is the

[134] Both her and Poirion's readings are heavily historicized, and depend on ideas of feudalism and fealty that would be contested by medieval historians for whom "feudalism" is itself an imprecise notion. See, for example, Elizabeth A.R. Brown's milestone article "The Tyanny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe," *The American Historical Review* 79, no. 4 (October 1974): 1063–88 along with Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Susan Reynolds, *The Middle Ages without Feudalism: Essays in Criticism and Comparison on the Medieval West* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

[135] Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages*, 69. This reading contests the reception of *Thèbes* as a "lesson" imparted to contemporary nobles, for whom the Oedipus story was instead supposed to represent "the dangers and dire consequences of civil war." M. Clogan, "Visions of Thebes in Medieval Literature," in *The Force of Vision: Proceedings of the XIIIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, ed. Gerald Gillespie, Margaret R. Higonnet, and Sumie Jones, vol. 2 (International Comparative Literature Association, 1995), 148.

case: vernacular translation's transformation of the text into a site for new kinds of attention by a translator.

1.4 Prophecy, *Translatio*, and Reading History

So far I have explored the place of the Oedipus myth within the *Roman de Thèbes* as a whole, arguing for its centrality in the structuration of the text as well as providing an interpretive lens to understand the author's frequent yet irregular position on prophecy as an element of history and a form of discourse. This work has engaged with the intertextual web within which the *Thèbes* was composed, highlighting salient features that could otherwise be explained as straightforward commentary apparatuses necessary for (uneducated) lay readers, as elements reflecting medieval daily life rendering the story more immediate for medieval audiences, or unproblematic euhemeristic and Christian stances towards ancient pagan practices. This provides an updated tracing of the hermeneutic web in which the *Thèbes* came together as a novel text for its time.

My task now, as an end to this chapter, is to offer an explanation as to *why* prophecy occupies such a problematic space within the very first Old French romance, and the reverberations it has on textual transmission in a manuscript culture. In a way, I am responding to a challenge set out by Simon Gaunt, who wondered, "what did the Oedipus story actually mean to twelfth-century writers and readers?," that is, beyond identifying the empirical dots in the constellation of texts that are in dialogue with the *Thèbes*.[136] As another scholar has stated it, "For what kind of new question, for what kind of response did the 12th-century clerk reopen the 'Oedipus' file?"[137] What I seek to do here is to situate the problem of prophecy within the medieval project of *translatio studii* and *translatio imperii*, while avoiding a socio-political teleology that positions the text as reflective of social structures, or that sees the impetus for the text's production in a goal-laden mission of propaganda. Instead, I will argue that the position of prophecy within the text is fundamentally irresolvable, as it gestures towards the incompleteness and incoherencies of

[136] Simon Gaunt, review of *Œdipe enténébré: Légendes d'Œdipe au XIIe siècle*, by Sylviane Messerli, in *Speculum* 80.2 (2005): 640.

[137] "Pour quelle question nouvelle et pour quelle réponse le clerc du XIIe siècle rouvre-t-il le dossier 'Œdipe' que Stace lui-même en son temps avait repris?" Michèle Gally, "'S'en Tesent de Cest Mestier, Se Ne Sont Clerc Ou Chevalier,' Un Roman Pour l'élite," in *Méthode! N° 3, Automne 2002: Agrégation de Lettres 2003* (Vallongues, 2002), 29.

translatio studii and *imperii* within medieval models of history.[138] My claim, then, is that the Oedipus tale's fundamentally irreconcilable meanings flow from attentive attempts to capture and appropriate tales of prophetic revelation from antiquity.

Two manuscripts present the "short" or "savant" recension of the *Thèbes*, the version that I have mainly referred to in this chapter: Paris BNF fr. 784, referred to as manuscript "C," and Paris BNF fr. 60, labelled "B." The latter scatters rich miniatures throughout the text, which help to articulate transitions throughout the romance. One particular illustration precedes the presentation of a scene named the Nemean Games. On their march towards Thebes, the Argives, led by Polynices and Adrastus, pass through Nemea, where they come across a servant named Hypsipyle. She is tasked with protecting an infant in her care, who is the son of the King of Nemea, Lycurgus. Hypsipyle leaves the child in a grassy field to show the parched army of the Greeks a nearby water source. During her absence, a dragon ("serpant de male part ... Par les narilles giete hors / et feu et flambe de son cors," lines 2367-2370) comes out of the woods and kills him. Feeling responsible, the Greeks march to Nemea and ask Lycurgus to hold off from executing Hypsipyle and accept the charge of killing the dragon. Their task completed, Lycurgus decrees that celebrations and games be held in commemoration of the heroic act. Manuscript *B* provides a visualization of these games, which provides a striking image for both modern and medieval eyes, albeit for different reasons.

[138] Those theories of translation were themselves far from homogenous or coherent between them; see Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 55.



Figure 1.4 BNF fr. 60, 12v.[139]

Here an illustrator has produced two miniatures, under a rubricated heading stating, “Si comme li rois commande a faire feste pour le serpent qui est ocis et que Perthonopeus a tué et emporté la teste.” (“How the king ordered that games be held for the serpent that was slain and which Parthenopaeus killed and carried off the head.”) The first image probably features Parthénopée with the head being carried to king Lycurgus. The second image is less immediately obvious before the text is read. Here the manuscript describes the immediate aftermath of the serpent’s death, followed by the games performed.

[139] Photography from Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

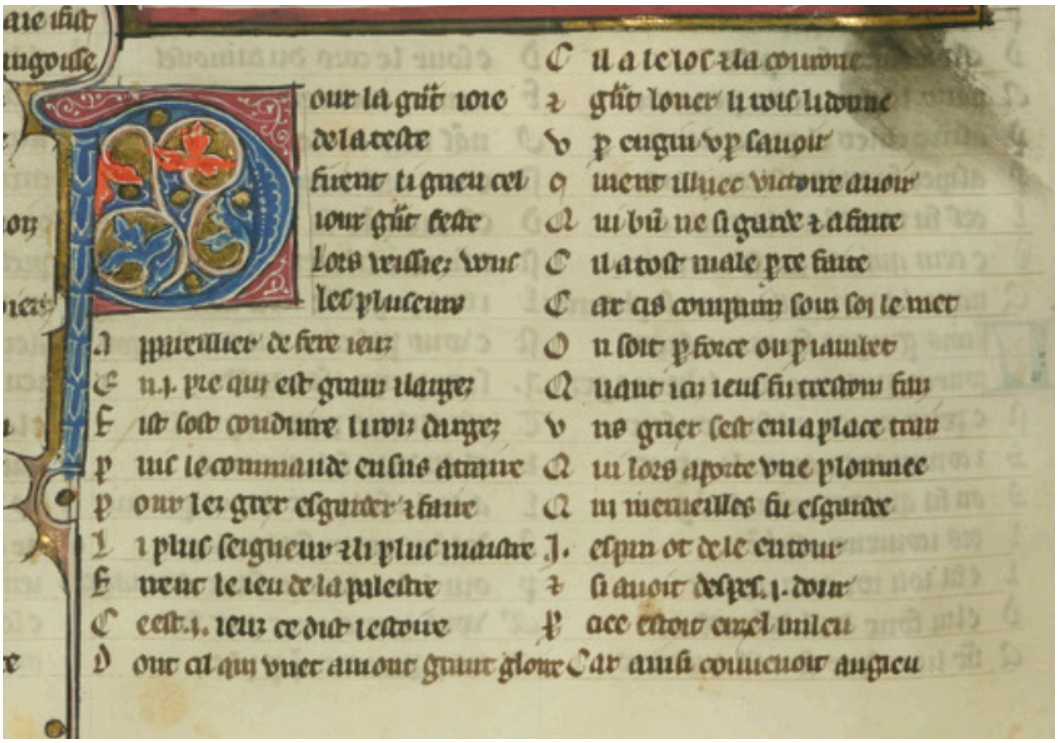


Figure 1.5 BNF fr. 60, 12v[140]

The text gives precedence to the wrestling matches ("palestre"), highlighting the honor of fighting in them, their conditions of victory, and their rewards of the rewards. Only at the very end does it describe, in two lines, what the actual game is—essentially, to trip your opponent or otherwise force him to the ground. It seems backward—there is a grand presentation of the honor that comes from it, and a markedly condensed presentation of the game's actual composition. Intriguingly, there is a somewhat awkward transition halfway through this section. We are told that "Ce est un jeuz ce dist l'estoire / Dont cil qui vuet a mout grant gloire. / Cil a le jos et la courone ..." ("This is a game, according to the story, from which whoever wants it, gets great glory. This person gets the praise and the crown ...") The Old French connects these two phrases with relative pronouns, *cil ... cil*, "he ... he ..." in a way that is not quite elegant. The repeating "cil" here does not refer to a specific antecedent—the first one is a substantivized relative clause ("cil qui vuet," "whoever wants") that serves as the subject of the main clause ("a mout grant gloire," "gets great glory".) The second one refers back to this substantive clause—"the person who wants it, *this* person gets the praise …" There is no clear referent in the text for the "cil." This small bump, which is not

[140] Photography from Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

incorrect or especially noticeable in a first reading, is explained by the probable erasure of a longer section that intervenes between these two lines in C, to which those relative pronouns *cil* intervened at different moments, referring to different agents, and thereby ensuring narrative continuity more clearly and fluidly.[141] In *C*—the manuscript that serves as the base for most modern editions—the ancient practice of wrestling is summarized and presented for the reader, in particular the fact that wrestling was done in the nude.[142] The writer, illustrator and therefore readers of *B* seem to be considerably less informed. Modesty could certainly be at the root of this, as we can imagine the difficulty of expecting a medieval artist to draw an oiled, male nude figure in full.[143] But it injects the writer and the illustrator's own reflection into the text as an object. It gestures toward the prophetic stance towards historiography that was so medieval—the past as a symbolic placeholder—of the present. In essence, the medieval depiction of ancient wrestling has been so divorced from the original, that the connection with the past—and the ways in which it really can prefigure the present—is considerably occulted.

Rather than introducing anachronisms into two time periods, this scene illustrates prophecy's tendency to collapse time into an ambiguous temporality in which all periods can simultaneously take place. Antiquity is not quite the other that modern conceptions of chronology emphasize through periodization: it is instead brought into contact with medieval contemporaneity through likeness, supplied by a form of *translatio* supported by prophetic readings of history.[144]

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[141] "Ce est uns jeux, ce dit l'estoire, / dont cil qui vaint a mout grant gloire. / Or vous dirai des joueours / quele est la painne et li labours. / Quant en la place sunt venu, / si se despoullent trestuit nu; / n'i remeint nule creature / chauce, souler ne vesteüre; / d'uile font bien lor cors enoindre, / puis si se vont ensemble joindre; / luitent a force et a pooir, / chascuns se garde de cheoir. / Li quiex que puet son per aquerre / tant que cheoir le fet a terre, / cil a le los et la coronne ..." lines 2697-2711.

[142] The transition is also somewhat more skillfully articulated—"Whoever overcomes his opponent ... *he* gets the crown," with the linking *Li quiex ... cil*.

[143] This image in *B* has gone unremarked and contextualized with regards to other strands of research on the *Thèbes*, it risks being subsumed into Petit's general interest in identifying "anachronisms" within the text. Petit compared the presentation of the games in *C* to manuscript *A*, the "long" or "courtly" version of the *Thèbes*, principally to determine the order of composition of different *Thèbes* manuscripts and to measure the distance between this section in the *Thèbes* from the games in the *Thebaid*. See *Aimé Petit, "L'épisode des jeux dans le Roman de Thèbes," in Qui des sept arz set rien entendre: Études sur le Roman de Thèbes*, ed. Bernard Ribémont, Medievalia 43 (Paradigme, 2002), 175–92.

[144] As Dominique Battles has observed, the *Thèbes* creates a "strange contest whereby medieval crusaders besiege the ancient Trojans, a contest between the cultural and political giants of antiquity and their medieval heirs." As I show in this chapter, the situation is more complex: the historical equivalencies and overlaps are hazier, and rather than a competition, the text constructs a gray space where different time periods coexist. Dominique Battles, *The Medieval Tradition of Thebes: History and Narrative in the OF* Roman de Thèbes, *Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate* (Routledge, 2004), 20.

This phenomenon has been termed "anachronic" by Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood in their study on temporality in Renaissance art to describe the effects created by an object decoupled from its original historical location as it travels forward into "an alien historical context."[145] These practices can be seen elsewhere in medieval hermeneutics, through allegorical/tropological readings of the Old and New Testaments. The ancient past precedes, foretells and thus (pre)figures the present. Prophecy engages in this process throughout the *Thèbes*, and it exposes problematic assumptions hiding with medieval modes of reading the past.[146]

In other words, this section in BNF fr. 60 illustrates how prophecy as a mode of reading invites the author to attend to the text in a way that seeks out piecemeal explanations. Here, the scene is read as a straightforward wrestling match, but the way it is interpreted is fundamentally prophetic. The author of the *Thèbes* paid particular attention to prophecy—but crucially, that attention does not necessarily equate with the resolution that an unequivocal interpretation would provide. Despite the attention paid to it by the writer, it remains a problem in the *Thèbes*. It is often condemned, sometimes in Christian terms (equating Apollo with the Devil's duplicity), on other occasions similarly to the *Thebaid* where prophetic revelation is taken to be a usurpation of power by the seer to have their own will realized (Amphiaraus' tragic foreknowledge of the future battle's price), and at other times it is allowed to be the motor of narrative progression without comment (Adrastus' vision of Polynices and Tydeus). The author of the *Thèbes*, while condemning the unnatural outright, while warning the reader of the danger lurking behind prophetic speech or while paying particular attention to prophecy are not quite able to come to terms with how the truth of prophecy is nonetheless at the heart of the story of Thebes. That is not for lack of trying, and in particular by deploying a new form of discourse in order to study and understand the story.

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[145] This shift allows us to investigate further the operations underlying such a decoupling, and the reverberations on historical practices as I show in this chapter, moving beyond the judgmental condemnation found in the term "anachronistic." It also avoids claiming that such objects constitute rehashings of authoritative imagery for social or political legitimacy. For the notion of anachrony, see Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (Zone Books, 2010), 10-14.

[146] Those problems extend to deciding which cultures have the right to such a timeline. Catherine Sanok has considered how the historicity of *translatio* takes place within a contested historiographic time that has socio-political consequences. That is, "The romance's strategies for representing historicity, especially genealogy and exemplarity, are reserved for the proto-European Greeks, while the Almoravides and other Muslims appear as themselves, not as the ancestors or metaphoric avatars of twelfth-century communities." Catherine Sanok, "Almoravides at Thebes: Islam and European Identity in the *Roman de Thèbes*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 64.3 (September 2003): 282.

It is perhaps expected for a manuscript culture to attend to the presence of the past in the future. As Catherine Brown has observed, "Handwritten words throw a line into the future to be caught by readers who can only be imagined by the scribe at the moment of writing."[147] The particularity of a manuscript culture is that those future readers' reflections are drawn towards the gestures made by the human hand that shaped the letters before them—for Brown, examining the movement traced out by a scribe's pen to form letters (the *ductus*) that plunges her back into that scribe's presentness. This creates manuscript time, an uncanny experience: "Just as you occupy both his future and your *now*, the moment of [the scribe's] writing is simultaneously many hundreds of years distant and right here at hand."[148] This factor—the text is formed by letters, but those letters and the layout of the page in general are invested by the experience of the individual that shaped them—creates a written space that is, as Sarah Kay put it, "not historical but phenomenal; the experience it provokes is both instantaneous, of this moment, and anachronic, of no determinate moment."[149] It is difficult to let go of the past when the connection to it inheres in the very mode of thought that allows for it to be stored, recalled, imagined, thought through. Prophecy then is particularly salient for the individuals formed in this culture, even if it is originally an issue that rises from the phenomenology of their written form, and particularly when problematized itself by the text and the task before them.

The layering of experiences, timelines and knowledge is built within manuscription, and medieval writers were drawn to express the sometimes overwhelming density of the material in affective terms, concerned for its threat against sustained reflection. As Jamie Kreiner has recently argued, the development of medieval anthologies and compendia of commentaries was spurred by anxiety about the ever-increasing number of texts, providing reading aids and exegetical revelations in order to prevent the distraction caused by incomprehension as well as fighting against the nature of the codex itself. Kreiner reminds us of Evagrius's dismay at knowing how the reader can flip through the folia of a manuscript wondering how many pages are left before the end of a section, giving way to *acedia*, "the toxic combination of restless and dissatisfaction that

[147] Catherine Brown, *Remember the Hand: Manuscription in Early Medieval Iberia* (Fordham University Press, 2023), 160.

[148] Brown, *Remember the Hand*, 161.

[149] Sarah Kay, "Mediality, Materiality, and Medieval Books," *Exemplaria* 36, no. 1 (2023): 90.

could make it difficult to do or think of anything."[150] Yet these tools do not simply engage readers with the text more deeply or more attentively--while the guidance given above in the margins helps the reader understand the "artificial" ordering of the text as a measure to prevent confusion, the same commentary apparatus brackets meaning to the syntax and 12th-century assumptions of the original text's cultural origins. Moreover, medieval memory devices, inherited from antiquity, were fundamentally visual, inviting individuals to store text and sensory impressions on backgrounds inherited from their daily life, associating each object in the background with a phrase to remember, for example. Building on this model, Quintilian played with the polysemia of *silva* as an imaginative metaphor for a grouping of heterogeneous objects in space (as a woods inhabited by different flora and fauna) as well as its disorderliness.[151]

Latin commentaries reinforce that model, materializing it through the shapes of the written glossing framing the text as a picture on a wall; vernacular translation undermines it, as the visual nature of the largely uncommented manuscripts copied in dense columns fails to present loci for memory formation. Read through the lens of Bernard Stiegler's distinction between "majority" (critical, generative) and "minority" (passive, assimilative) modes of reading,[152] the act of vernacular translation in the *Thèbes* models "majority" thinking, offering a public, participatory response to Statius and enabling the author's interpretation to become a subject for collective critique. That prophecy is not solved and in fact is troublingly inconsistent is not a failure of attention, as if the writer could not keep accurate track of his notes and ideas as they sprawled across an ever-increasing number of folia that he was desperately trying to harmonize into flowing verse without need for exegesis.

Attentive reading in Latin manuscript culture—geared toward clerical decoding—differs fundamentally from the creative, albeit sometimes unresolved attentiveness cultivated in the *Thèbes*. The commented folio in Figure 1.3 above is covered in information transmitted in different hands, pointing in different directions—lexical and grammatical, but mostly attempting to formulate the meaning of the text through external intertexts. This apparatus, associated with advanced linguistic and cultural literacy—only the most well-prepared, educated reader would find

[150]Jamie Kreiner, *The Wandering Mind: What Medieval Monks Tell Us About Distraction* (Liveright, 2024), 102.

[151] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory : A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 78.

[152] Bernard Stiegler, *Prendre soin. De la jeunesse et des générations* (Flammarion, 2008), 42.

it useful—calls into question Stiegler's denouncement of the impact of contemporary technologies on cognitive abilities as so inevitable, or even uniquely modern. Building on Katherine Hayles, he contrasts "deep attention"—sustained focus on a single object—with "hyper attention," a fragmented mode fostered by modern media that constantly seeks new stimuli and resists boredom.[153] While hyper attention is seen as a modern challenge, medieval textuality could also disperse the reader's focus: heavily annotated editions of the *Thebaid* scattered attention across text, scholia, and commentary, making concentration less about deep engagement with a single narrative and more about navigating multiple sites of meaning. Thus, the supposed superiority of deep attention is complicated by the material and cognitive demands of medieval manuscripts, which often encouraged a mobile, distributed attentiveness rather than singular focus.

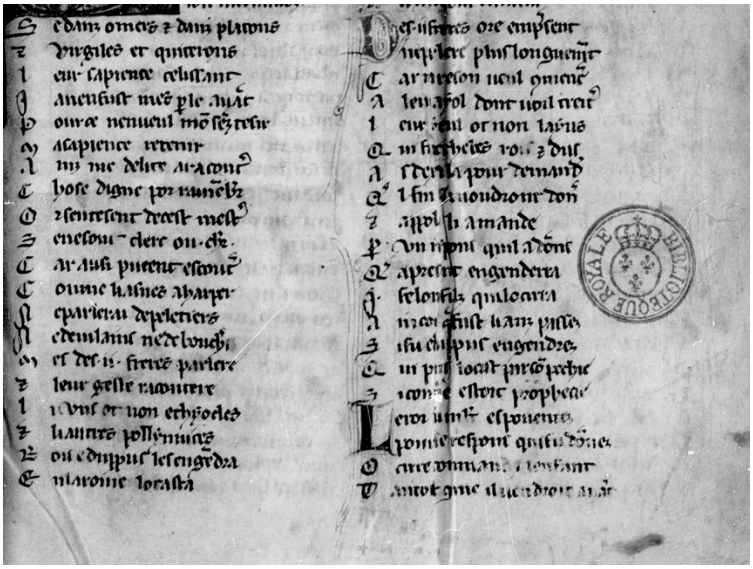


Figure 1.6 BNF fr. 784 1r

The encounter with medieval editions of Statius and the exegetical apparatuses that went along with them is fundamentally an openness to salient stimuli, local features in the text that feed into the translator's creativity and imagination as he composes his French understanding of the *Thebaid*. Those *other* neural signals will undoubtedly make it through to the translator's attention to prophecy during the act of composition, the plethora of textual glosses and exegetical apparatuses surrounding Statius would have shaped the translator's engagement with a text. The *Thèbes*, in the unglossed columns of vernacular romance form in the 12th-century (Fig 3.6), streamlines these

[153] Katherine Hayles, "Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes," *Profession* (2007): 187.

features into a narrative presented as unproblematic, tightly controlled by internal interventions by the narrator, providing directed guidance where gloss and commentary explode sites of focus.

From this perspective, the creation of the *Roman de Thèbes* resembles a decidedly "major" use of the intellect, while the supposedly learned encounter with the *Thebaid* appears more and more "minor," despite its association with more erudite Latin education. It exposes the author to the public circulation of ideas, to a not passive but rather active, generative use of the same intellect that came into contact with the text and its exegetical packaging. The translator is not simply a reader thinking through the meaning of the material, aided by the gloss, which is in itself a task when encountering the *Thebaid*--rather, the translator openly exposes a new text that streamlines narrative into a flowing whole to public reception. This phenomenon goes beyond the immediate *linguistic* consequences of vernacular texts that "[threaten] the notion of a recuperative coherence by opening a symbolically unified intellectual discourse to linguistic multiplicity,"[154] or the incoherences and interpretative difficulties arising from a parallel reading of Statius and his commentaries.[155] Moreover, *Thèbes* constituted an immersive, attentive experience, an extended engagement with the *Thebaid*—sometimes quoting, sometimes rephrasing, but using Old French to (re)tell the story. That attentive engagement with the *Thebaid*'s intertext and the (re)writing in the vernacular produces a different way of coming to know the story of Thebes. Vernacular translations can be a practice that produces a medium particularly apt for laying bare readings that surface from an attention to the text, absent from the more "scholarly" packaging found in Latin volumes.

The writer thinks through that material not just in in a novel way, but in one that openly seeks public exposure and reception.[156] This phenomenon goes beyond the immediate *linguistic* consequences of vernacular composition highlighted by Rita Copeland, who spoke of vernacular texts that "[threaten] the notion of a recuperative coherence by opening a symbolically unified

[154] Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 97.

[155] Messerli, *Œdipe*, 97; Mora-Lebrun, *"Metre en romanz,"* 196.

[156] Messerli considered that disagreements between Statius and his glosses invite clerks to "renew" ancient texts; Messerli, *Œdipe*, 97; Mora-Lebrun has discussed "a demand for clarification" in the Latin texts that the romance responds to, "*Metre en romanz,*" 196. My perspective matches Rita Copeland's view of vernacular translation, in particular the form that she labeled "primary," that is, influenced by rhetorical modes of exegesis as a way of understanding a text from an *auctor*. See Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 92-97.

intellectual discourse to linguistic multiplicity."[157] Vulgarization need not be analyzed teleologically (popularization, rendering an inaccessible text in Latin more available), but rather as an alternative form of commentary. And over which, moreover, the author exerts even greater control, which the lack of forerunners and audience expectations allows for. This feature of the *Thèbes* becomes all the more apparent as we have considered how to pigeonhole, or at the very least determine, the ways by which prophecy as a practice, idea, and fact of life were appropriated by the medieval translator. The answer is that that appropriation was only partial, it was accompanied by failure, and that the process itself is outlined as an extended reflection, throughout the text, on how to render something that is at once part and parcel of the target culture—prophecy is a fact of life in Christian worldviews—and also inimical, as *pagan* prophecy needed proper handling. Here, there is no "proper" handling that can remain self-consistent. Here, what is against nature is perhaps not just the incest of Oedipus, which can resonate with the shakiness of feudal bonds, but the underlying foundation of *translatio* itself, whereby the translator claims to appropriate something so fundamentally incompatible with Christian perspectives on the world.[158]

This reading is particularly available for a medieval engagement with the *Thebaid,* which opens itself to prophetic inheritance through its epilogue, or rather epilogues. It ends on a scene of mourning as the women of Argos, who had hurried to Athens and then Thebes to end the war, are finally able to carry out the funerals for the decimated Greek forces. Here, Statius ends the epic on the commonplace admission of poetic inability, "Not if some God let my heart speak in a hundred voices could I with my efforts do justice to all those funerals ..." ("Non ego, centena si quis mea pectora laxet / voce deus, tot busta simul vulgique ducumque, / tot pariter gemitus dignis conatibus

[157] Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, 97.

[158] I agree then with James Simpson's claim that romance as a genre showed that "civilized order" is different from "unitary order," that is that organized society must come into contact with hostile forces, alternative structures that oppose it, "they model how societies can maintain their balance only by entering into all that threatens them," in which case that threat here is antiquity. In a way, this exposes the role that *Thèbes* has in engaging the theme of social disorder—however, that is not in the visual and horrific civil war that it portrays, but instead the assumptions of *translatio* that subtend medieval intellectual culture and, concurrently and paradoxically, risk tearing apart that unity as well. See James Simpson, "Unthinking Thought: Romance's Wisdom," in *Thinking Medieval Romance*, ed. Katherine C. Little and Nicola McDonald (Oxford University Press, 2018), 51. Messerli's reading of this ending, a "surprising" addition, is also to invite the reader to read the *Thèbes* through the lens of Oedipus. Her goal, however, is to show how "l'histoire d'Œdipe modèle, ou du moins contamine, l'écriture du reste du roman," while I am interested in the meanings that come *out* of the *Thèbes* when it is put in dialogue with Oedipus. That is how Oedipus *informs* the text, rather than intrudes upon or "infects" some pristine (non-existent) original ur-text. See Messerli, *Œdipe enténébré*, 102.

aequem" XII.797-799), and welcomes his work to harbor as a ship coming home. He adds a second wish, a second epilogue, that inscribes the text both in the past and the future:

> Durabisne procul dominoque legere superstes,
> o mihi bissenos multum vigilata per annos
> Thebai? iam certe praesens tibi Fama benignum
> stravit iter coepitque novam monstrare futuris.
> iam te magnanimus dignatur noscere Caesar,
> Itala iam studio discit memoratque iuventus.
> vive, precor; nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta,
> sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora.
> mox, tibi si quis adhuc praetendit nubila livor,
> occidet, et meriti post me referentur honores. (XII. 810-819)

> Will you long endure? Outliving your master, will you be read, O my *Song of Thebes*, that I labored at late at night, for twice six years? Surely present already, Fame has eased your way and begun to show you, new-made, to the future; already, magnanimous Caesar deigns to acknowledge you; Italy's eager schoolboys already recite you from memory. Live on, I pray! Do not try to surpass the *Aeneid* divine, but, at a distance, follow and always revere Her imprint. Soon, if some bruised Envy still spreads clouds before you, it will set; after I'm gone, you'll win your well-deserved honors.

In the final lines, Statius densely combines a litany of sites of literary invention and dedication. He muses on whether it will "outlive" ("superstes") its master, even though its current success ("iam certe praesens tibi Fama") gives a hint of its future success ("coepitque novam monstrare futuris.") The text is also looking towards the past, to *the* work under whose shadow imperial literature was composed, Virgil's *Aeneid*—which it must not even try to surpass ("tempta"), although Statius winks at an inevitable eclipsing of Virgil's work by his own ("mox ... occidet.") He plays with what seems to be a feigned horror at imagining the *Aeneid* set aside for the *Thebaid*, while delighting in its current popularity—schoolboys already recite it from heart, he says—which provides a measure of its future success. The very idea of enduring is introduced here with its own

polysemia built in—*supersto*, which literally means to stand out or above (*super* / *sto*). From there it implies survival, but also surpassing—thus the work's survival is concomitantly a direct metric of its ability to surpass other works. This model can have an immediate reading for Christian audiences, in fact it is already a 'coming after' in the image of the apostle John, who in his conversation with the Pharisees describes Christ as "... he that shall come after me, who is preferred before me ..." ("ipse est qui post me venturus est qui ante me factus est"). The second half of that phrase, *qui ante me factus est*, literally "who was made before me," takes the meaning of preference through Latin's tendency to use spatial prepositions to figure order of preferences—*praefero* itself means "to put before." This phrase was notably glossed in the *glossa ordinaria* as *mihi prepositus est dignitate*, that is, "he was placed before me in terms of greatness." The role of prophecy in the text, then, latches onto and connects with already baked-in assumptions inherent to Christian hermeneutics that underlie *translatio*, as well as the particulars of the *Thebaid* which, by chance, offer up the epic to medieval reception.

In the end, the *Roman de Thèbes's* treatment of prophecy—marked by partial appropriation, interpretive instability, and attentive reworking—demonstrates not failure but the creative tension at the heart of medieval translation. If we pay attention to prophecy in the *Thèbes*, what we see is continued engagement but inconsistent treatment--as if the writer got bored. However, from the perspective of the translator, the Oedipus opening evinces clear attention to the effects and damage of believing in pagan prophecy. The irregular resurfacing of prophetic consequences, and their lack of uniformity in judgment from the narrator, can be read as resulting from effects inherent to attention--wandering off, spurious associations, the ever-expanding intertext associated with the *Thebaid* threatening the establishment flowing narrative in a translator's mind. Attention helps to see how the translator contributed to the story of *Thèbes* in a qualitatively different way from the Latin tradition of the time, allowed by translation as a process and the streamlined presentation of romance verse in unglossed columns. In the end, prophecy remains both familiar and foreign, resistant to containment by any single interpretive framework. This instability, far from a shortcoming, reveals the dynamic relationship between literary form, material culture, and the processes of reading and rewriting. Attending to this tension helps us better understand how medieval texts negotiate their own difference and continuity with the past, and invites us to rethink the boundaries between translation, commentary, and creativity in the development of vernacular literature in the 12th century.

Chapter 2 Diffracted Knowledge in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*

The story of Troy is a tale of death, destruction, devastation--the city is laid waste, not to be rebuilt again. The Trojan horse, only briefly mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey*, is the modern reader's main reference point for the beginning of the end for the Trojans, as well as a key element explaining the dismantling of such an illustrious site of power and wealth: deception and subterfuge. The medieval tradition is somewhat more ambivalent since it attributed to the deception to one of Troy's own. According to Dares in his *De Excidio Troiae*, a text from late antiquity that would bear considerable influence on medieval readers, Antenor and Aeneas conspired with the Greeks to throw open a gate in the middle of the night, once Antenor concluded that "patriam prodendam esse et sibi et suis esse cavendum" (...they must betray their country and look out for themselves and their families.) [1] In another tradition from late antiquity, Dictys of Crete retains the treacherous guilt of Antenor and Aeneas while bringing back the Trojan Horse and depicting their part in its construction. Benoît de Sainte-Maure, in his 12th-century *Roman de Troie*, follows largely Dictys' model. The Greeks had burnt their camps to deceive the Trojans into believing they had retreated, and once the Trojans tore down the city gates to make way for the wooden horse left by the Greeks, "Antenor, li coilverz Judas, / E Anchisès e Eneas / Les i ont conduiz e menez, / Feus e cruëus e desfaez" (lines 26135-26138) ("Antenor, that good-for-nothing Judas, along with Anchises and Eneas, led and guided them there like the wicked, cruel and faithless scoundrels they were.")[2] The medieval tradition is marked by a particular interest in the betrayal and hidden intentions that led to Troy's downfall.

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[1] Citations to the *De Excidio Troiae* refer to the 1873 edition by Meister and English translations are adapted from Frazer; Dares Phryigus, *De Excidio Troiae Historia* (Teubner, 1873), 47; Dictys and Dares Phrygius, *The Trojan War: The Chronicles of Dictys of Crete and Dares the Phrygian*, trans. R.M. Frazer (Indiana University Press, 1966).

[2] Quotes from the *Roman de Troie* are from Benoît de Sainte-Maure, ed. Léopold Constans, 6 vols. (Didot, 1904-1912), while English quotes are adapted from Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *The Roman de Troie*, trans. Glynn S. Burgess and Douglas Kelly (B.S. Brewer, 2017).

This chapter is interested in the mode by which that story was transmitted and in particular, how deception burrowed itself into the fabric of the story of Troy, changing forms as it moved from late antiquity, shaped by Dares and Dictys's accounts, to Benoît de Sainte-Maure's 12th-century *Roman de Troie*. My first move will be to explore how the notion of deception was shifted into the narrative itself in the *Troie*, while texts from Antiquity and their later Renaissance and modern readers thought more about the text as deception; for Benoît, deception becomes a quality of written language itself. That is, as late antique and medieval societies adopted and adapted the story of Troy, writers manifested increasing interest in the ways that story, and by extension the events of the war, were or were not true, enlightening or fooling the reader based on whether the author actually witnessed the events. Many writers from late Antiquity through to Benoît himself called out other stories of Troy, and in particular Homer's *Illiad*, as unreliable since their authors did not witness the events they recounted. Instead, Benoît works in a tradition that prized the accounts of Dares and Dictys, supposed witnesses to the Trojan war who set down their accounts into reliable testimonies. According to this tradition, these witnesses offer acces to the true origin of the war, and they testify to the facts and the events that weighed upon the minds of the Greeks and Trojans present.

Research on the *Troie* has increasingly been drawn to exploring the romance's manipulation of temporalities. This inquiry first began with the identification of changes to the narrative over time, as Dares's diary became Benoît's romance, as medieval objects foreign to late antiquity began to populate its pages. Aimé Petit catalogued many of these occurrences, such as the Medea passage with references to necromancy and magic rings, features more common to medieval romance, in an empirical approach to describing how romance literary processes engage with time.[3] This perspective draws borders: to recognize something as an anachronism is to admit an intrusion of a foreign object into an inappropriate temporal and literary space, the present seeping into the past. It is the result of "a will to suppress all distance" between the Trojan past and medieval present.[4] Yet such an analysis is possible for any medieval translation of antiquity. Troy poses a specifically dangerous duality: Trojans founded great cities, and thus legitimized

[3] Aimé Petit, *L'anachronisme dans les romans antiques du XIIe siècle. Le Roman de Thèbes, le Roman d'Énéas, le Roman de Troie, le Roman d'Alexandre* (Honoré Champion, 2002), 243-244.

[4] Emmanuèle Baumgartner, *De l'histoire de Troie au livre du Graal. Le temps, le récit (XIIe-XIIIe siècles)* (Paradigme, 1994), 107.

great future dynasties because their city and therefore their own legitimacy were annihilated. Engagement with Troy requires that "…the discontinuities and disasters that mark the past must be annulled through the intervention of an extrahistorical source of legitimization."[5] In this light, Maud Burnett McInerney has theorized the existence of "Trojan time" unique to this literary tradition, characterized by the inclusion in a historical timeline of narratives built on lived experiences; translation offers the possibility for the contemporary to inform these narratives, an ethical move allowing for a "reconfiguration of the past to shape the politics and culture of the present moment."[6] Rather than a question of medieval translators seeking to render a story relatable for medieval audiences, this is "romance historicity" at work, operating not just over time, from ancient text to medieval translation, but within manuscripts as well. Texts from across time touch and coexist, and flow together for the reader in a complex web of interactions, creating a "sense of temporality that is outside linear time."[7]

The materiality of medieval texts, layers of ink lying on top of vellum and constrained by the size of parchment and the space on wax tablets, encourages the complexity of the *Troie*'s temporality. That materiality, I think, is part and parcel of the text's composition. Luke Sunderland has valued *representations* of materiality in the *Troie,* seeing contact with the past in the "stimulation of affective and bodily links, of moods and senses," but confined to the many passages interrupting the narrative with descriptions of cities, buildings, countrysides and vistas bearing "no epistemological role."[8] I do not agree: there is a materiality in every line, constituted by Benoît's encounter with written language as translator, its confines and limits. As Sarah Kay wrote of the Alabaster Chamber and its automata, gifts from Priam to Helen and an original invention of Benoît, the chamber divides the desolation of war outside from the ordered logic within, a fitting representation of the romance itself. The *Troie* moves "the reader away from the violence of historical experience into the timeless aesthetic of art …" that provides an intellectual framework

[5] Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 159.

[6] Maud Burnett McInerney, *Translation and Temporality in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's Roman de Troie* (D.S. Brewer, 2021), 18.

[7] Venetia Bridges, "Touch and Temporality in Selected Manuscripts of the *Roman de Troie* and the *Roman d'Eneas*," *Anglia* 142.3 (2024): 461.

[8] Luke Sunderland, "Emotions, History and Presence in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 54.4 (2018): 443.

for the romance.[9] My work continues in the line of these scholars theorizing the *Troie* as a translation engaged with time, eschewing anachronism as a model, emphasizing written language as a material activity and exploring the way that process allowed a writer like Benoît to come to know Troy in a new way, through his skillful composition and ordering of its parts. I move away from deception, then, and cast my glance on the *knowability* of Troy, as Benoît's romance pushed the Dares and Dictys tradition further into epistemic inquiry.

That is, in a second move, I will show how the linguistic structures that established how the world comes to be known are often undermined in the *Troie*. The romance's innovation is not a positive affirmation of truth, but an act of spreading knowledge of the truth amongst a network of agents. These tools underlie Benoît's craft of rediscovering Troy, which I formulate through an analytical lens that I borrow from Jonathan Kramnick who considers writing as *craft*. By this term, Kramnick emphasizes how practices proper to the discipline of literary study such as close reading, which I will bring into comparison with medieval translation practices, constitute an "expert practice of writing prose and making text, of weaving one's own words with words that precede and shape them," which has epistemic consequences.[10] Here, he pushes against the model of close reading conceived of as "I look and think," a passive model in which a reader ruminates particularly deeply on a passage, and in which thoughts resulting from rumination find their way to publication later. Instead, it is a skilled practice done with the hands, a process that engenders its own way of coming to know the studied object, rather than an afterthought of thought.

To be clear, Kramnick makes a wider intervention in the practice and institutional existence of (English) literary studies, recasting close reading as a craft, in part, to emphasize the field's operation as a trade where skills are passed from generation to generation. He also makes deeper epistemological claims through his notion of "medium coincidence" by which he refers to the possibility of a writer getting another's words to fit into their own. The stakes are not only semantic and syntactic. Beyond linguistic mastery, medium coincidence means that rather than engaging in "ekphrasis" (such as art historians who *write* about art, rather than *paint* about art) literary critics inhabit a closeness to their objects of study that requires no translation to a new form. As he puts it, "To know something in [literary studies] is to meld, mesh, and turn something while maintaining

[9] Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions: The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford University Press, 2001), 114.

[10] Jonathan Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth: On Method in Literary Studies* (University of Chicago Press, 2023), 35.

its medium," offering a coincidence of knowledge and form unique to this one field.[11] This virtue is how Kramnick grounds *knowing* within close reading, as "[t]o understand the written discourse of another person correctly, in one's own written discourse, is to put oneself in the linguistic and psychological circumstances of that person."[12]

I do not bring in Kramnick's claims in this chapter to apply the institutional critiques of the 21st-century American university to the 12th-century clerk, nor do I necessarily endorse the reality of his epistemological grounds for close reading—indeed, a strict application of "medium coincidence" would imply that French literature could *only* be truly known by writing on, quoting and paraphrasing the (French) objects of study *in* French. That problem aside, it would trouble the basis by which I claim Benoît came to know Dares and Dictys in a new way, as he is paraphrasing their Latin in Old French. However, I take Kramnick's insight that close reading does indeed foster knowledge about its object, and by consequence produces knowledge on the world, by postulating that medieval translation, at least French vernacular translation in the 12th century, *is* a form of close reading, while suspending the finding that the knowledge it produces on the world is verifiable. In short, I show that what Kramnick describes is really a particular way of attending to a text, which he calls close reading and Benoît calls "en romanz metre," that reveals insights both on vernacular translation and on how attention can be brought as an analytic to bear on the semantic level of translation.

As Kramnick wrote in a response to a folio from the *Yale Review* on his monograph, "Close reading isn't exactly *reading*, I argued, at least no in the conventional sense of decoding graphic marks. Rather it is a way of adding one's own words to words in the world and so altering that world in turn. Our practice is less ocular than tactile, our skill less visual than dexterous. Close reading is active and creating. It makes things."[13] This practice, so described, is attentive: that dexterous engagement takes place over time, and encounters its own skips, jumps and discoveries that attentive engagement in my first chapter did. In short, Benoît crafted a new text that of allowed Troy to be known in a novel way, through attending to the Latin texts in translation, a mode of textual knowing that parallels Kramnick's skill of close reading. This is not to say that Benoît's

[11] Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, 73.

[12] Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, 68.

[13] Jonathan Kramnick, "The Living Practice of Criticism: A Reply to my Respondents," *The Yale Review Folios* June 17, 2024, https://yalereview.org/article/jonathan-kramnick-criticism-and-truth.

knowledge was *superior* to his Latin forebearers, but rather that attention to the semantics and syntax of Latin and the corresponding linguistic features of Old French produced new knowledge on what the story of Troy meant. It is in the physicality, the tactileness of writing that Benoît innovates.

In my first chapter, I considered attention at large in the process of translation, on the level of the narrative of the *Thebaid* and the *Roman de Thèbes*, as well as with regards to the material presentation and readerly experiences of Latin and vernacular texts. In this chapter, I am taking this concern for attention and zooming in on the level of Latin and Old French, and on Benoît as an attentive reader, parser, and composer in the act of translation. I will argue for a return to the fabric of translation, which is language itself, not as a way of testing to what extent Benoît "correctly" translated his sources, his abilities in Latin or rhetorical skills in Old French, but rather to probe how that craft, that practice, he carried out had consequences for the way the text makes claims for its ability to tell the truth and construct an ordered, consistent reflection of the world. I identify Benoît's key epistemological innovation to occur in the space between Latin and Old French morpho-syntax. Through the notion of *craft* that move is considered not as a clever, structured model laid out by the author, but rather as an outcome of linguistic patterns, a phenomenon that arises from the translator's handiwork throughout the text.

To do so, I will consider a particular function of language and thought in the *Troie*, that is, modality, the ways by propositions are signaled as known, possible, contingent, or necessary. From the standpoint of logical inquiry, modality has served as a site of reflection for philosophers both medieval and modern. Modal logic has received significant attention in Western analytical philosophy since the mid-20th century in the form of Possible Worlds Semantics, providing a formal language for describing necessity, possibility, belief, and knowledge, among other contingent interpretations of reality and logical propositions.[14] There are parallels of modal theorizing in in medieval treatises; while not necessarily precursors to modern approaches, they demonstrate that medieval writers were thinking modally. For example, an initial claim referred to as a *positio* is analyzed for the extent to which its truth and possibility are separable, such as the

[14] Sten Lindström and Krister Segerberg, "Modal Logic and Philosophy," in *Handbook of Modal Logic*, ed. Patrick Blackburn, Johan Van Benthem and Frank Walter (Elsevier, 2007).

phrase "I am in Paris," which is usually possible, but not always necessary or true.[15] From a logical standpoint, modal reasoning is foundational to being able to investigate the world, "as the process of ruling out that the world is some other *possible* way"[16] and has been recognized as "undeniably an extremely productive notion"[17] in investigating not just morphology and syntax, but epistemic conditions, contingency, and truth in language. Linguistic modes of encoding nonreal situations are what interest me most here, and they hide throughout morpho-syntactic and semantic structure. Linguistically, modality is a "phenomenon whereby grammar allows one to say things about, or on the basis of, situations which need not be real."[18] Modal situations go beyond verbs, however, and take place whenever a statement is actualized in a "nonfactual world," that is, that the situation is always true of a modal world, but only sometimes of the factual world, and this phenomenon happens through the intervention of a "modalizer."[19] This modalizer can be a verb, such as "must" in "You must go to the store." This statement is true since "You go to the store" is actualized in a hypothetical, future world that may (or may not) coincide with the factual world. It can also happen by other means, for example through "modal backshifting" to reinforce obligation, shifting "It is time we leave" into the preterit "it is time we left,"[20] meaning that not just specific categories of verbs called modals, but also tense can participate in modality.

My engagement with modality will begin on the level of semantics, but mine is not a linguistic study of the *Troie*. Although the formal language of modality in philosophy informs modal linguistics here, I do not directly argue for philosophical models, but instead will move from observations of modal structures in language to the consequences of those structures on the narrative and the text as a whole by considering how they come to bear on the epistemic dimension of history writing. In particular, the shifts in modality from Latin to Old French lead to a focus on the sites of information storage and the circulation of knowledge: who knows what, how do they

[15] Simo Knuuttila, "Modality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John Marenbon (Oxford University Press, 2012), 316.

[16] Sònia Roca-Royes, *Modality* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 3.

[17] Martin G. Becker and Eva-Maria Remberger, "Introduction" in *Modality and Mood in Romance: Modal Interpretation, Modal Selection, and Mood Alternation*, ed. Martin G. Becker and Eva-Maria Remberger (De Gruyter, 2010), 1.

[18] Paul Portner, *Modality* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

[19] Declerck, "The Definition of Modality," 25.

[20] Declerck, "The Definition of Modality," 28.

qualify that knowledge, how do others perceive it. That is, modality emphasizes the complex cognitive processes underlying the concept of perspective, which for Umberto Eco is a core element of human existence, displacing Aristotle's model of humanity as an animal with the supplement of language. In Eco's model of the *animal catoptricum*, (a mirrored/reflective animal) "... we are the way we are just because we are (also) catoptric animals and have developed a double ability to look at ourselves (insofar as it is possible) and the others in both our and this perspective reality and catoptric virtuality."[21] The mirror, the catoptric element, provides a surface for thinking about the complexities of perspective: when I view a mirror, I see behind me but in an inverted space, yet I can, intuitively, navigate it by understanding that inversion. Likewise, catoptric existence is encoded within modal thought, where expressions of certainty, seemingness, possibility, and necessity presuppose an awareness of others' vantage points, other possible worlds and other possible subjects.[22]

At the heart of Troy for the 12th century is the act of imposing the self in a reflected reality, a Trojan chronology. First, from the perspective of the author-translator: who knew what and how did they know it? The answer to that question is through the text as a mirror, allowing for reflections of perspectives onto other perspectives through the dialogue inherent to romance form in the 12th century. It is also with respect to the agents within the narrative. How do Briseida and Troilus, in Benoît's telling, construct two versions of a deceptive lover? Compared to his sources Benoît's *Troie* is particularly concerned with subjects may, or may not, know.

My approach places perspective, a "presupposed viewing arrangement pertaining to the relationship between the conceptualizers and the situation being viewed,"[23] at the heart of modality, since Benoît's text renders knowledge as contingent on awareness of perspective. In other words, what is peculiar to language and merits particular attention in the *Troie* is modality, as slight changes can have lasting consequences on the "possible world" envisioned by a phrase. More consequently, those language acts--be they those of the characters or a narrative intervention in the guise of authorial statements--presuppose other independent perspectives, as hearers, readers, or imagined or real third persons. Many modal structures carry within them epistemic consequences. The phrase such as "He must go" may be a straightforward command, but the same

[21] Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Indiana University Press, 1984), 207.

[22] Werner Abraham, *Modality in Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 13.

[23] Ronald Langacker, *Concept, Image and Symbol: The Cognitive Basis of Grammar* (De Gruyter, 2002), 16.

verb employed in the phrase “He must be going right now” is ambiguous: while “must” may encode the obligation of the first statement, it is also likely that it is an assumption of the speaker on what the *they* are currently doing, communicating the speaker's knowledge. This indicates “viewpoint contrasts between the level of the sentence subject and the level of the speaker”[24] and illustrates how a series of operations--deixis, the identification of subjects in discourse, encoding of viewpoint differentiation--are layered within a simple modal structure and communicate epistemic knowledge. That operation is skillfully toyed with within the *Roman de Troie* and, as I will show, it comes to the fore particularly when knowledge (who knows what and when) is at stake.

2.1 Skirting the Truth, Trojan Style

Benoît's *Roman de Troie*, composed around 1160 or 1165, surviving in 58 manuscripts, including 30 in complete form,[25] marked a major intervention in the Troy tradition for medieval readers, in that he not only provided an evaluation of the textual sources available, but his vernacular text sought simultaneously to displace them. Composed of approximately 32,000 lines of octosyllabic verse, on the romance begins with 144 lines surveying Benoît's sources and laying out his historiographic and compositional approach, followed by 570 lines summarizing the rest of the sizeable romance. Three principal Latin sources informed the medieval reader interested in Troy: the two similar texts from late antiquity presented as firsthand accounts of the war, Dares's *De Excidio Troiae* and Dictys's *Ephemeris Belli Troiani*, mentioned above, and a 1st century CE epitome of Homer now referred to as the *Ilias Latina*, perhaps written by a Baebius Italicus but believed by medieval readers to be the work of Homer.[26] Benoît's work was timely: interest in Troy grew considerably in the 11th and 12th centuries. The *Ilias Latina,* while composed during Antiquity, began to be copied significantly around this time,[27] while essentially no original medieval poetic compositions on Troy survive before the middle of the 11th century.[28] Benoît's

[24] Abraham, *Modality*, 20.

[25] Maud Burnett McInerney, *Translation and Temporality in Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s* Roman de Troie (D.S. Brewer, 2021), 194-206.

[26] Baebius Italicus, *Ilias Latina*, ed. Marco Scaffai (Pàtron, 1997), 15.

[27] Birger Munk Olsen, *I classici nel canone scolastico altomedievale* (Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, 1991), 63-65.

[28] Jean-Yves Tilliette, “*Troiae ab oris.* Aspects de la revolution poétique de la seconde moitié du XIe siècle,” *Latomus* 58.2 (1999): 407.

work straddles this tradition, although not in its entirety: while the *Troie* significantly expands Dares' *De Excidio* for the first two-thirds of the romance, it relies on Dictys' *Ephemeris* only for the last third recounting the final events surrounding the fall of Troy.[29]

Benoît's method lies in alternately contesting and elevating earlier authorities: he calls into question the reliability of Homer, who is swept aside for Dares and Dictys, the two traditional sources who had come to form "a medieval diptych" for readers.[30] Benoît begins by addressing the work of Homer,[31] a "clers merveillos" ("wonderful clerk"), "sages et escïentos" (line 45), ("wise and learned") who provided a broad picture of the Trojan war: why the city was destroyed, how it was besieged, and why it was never rebuilt. Benoît does not find this exhaustive overview sufficient or reliable, however, and it is at this point that Benoît first begins to lay out his criteria of truthfulness which, when applied to Homer, Dares, and Dictys, exclude the first, and retain the latter two. Concerning Homer, "ne dist pas sis livres veir" (line 51) ("his book does not tell the truth"), and that is simply because he was not at Troy to see the events himself, having been born "puis de cent anz") (line 53), ("a hundred years later.") Homer was no eyewitness, and that excludes him from Benoît's field of interest. This external factor is subsumed into a larger principle on the work of a historian, necessarily built upon first-person reports. This historiographic principle, according to Benoît, is patently obvious: "N'est merveille s'il i faillit / Quar onc n'i fu ne rien n'en vit" (lines 55-56), (No wonder he failed, for he was never present there and never witnessed anything that happened.") Deficiencies internal to the work eroded its acceptability as well, as the Athenians were shocked by scenes of gods fighting with mortals: Homer was accused of "desverie" (line 63), ("madness") for this choice, although Benoît fails to elaborate on why this quality was so offensive. Nevertheless, and this is the main thrust of Benoît's desire to explain his rejection of Homer as a source text, the ancient author's later accomplishments (what they are is not addressed either) eventually cloaked his work in authority and led to its undeserved acceptance.

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[29] As the *Ephemeris* is from the perspective of a Greek soldier, Benoît appears to have limited his use of Dictys to the dispersal of the Greek army following the victory over Troy: he notes in his summary early on that the final section of the romance, beginning at the betrayal of Priam, that "Après orreiz del grant traitié / Que fait Ditis d'ore en avant" (lines 548-649) ("From this point onwards, you will hear from the great treatise that Dictys wrote…")

[30] Graziana Brescia et al., "Introduction" in *Revival and Revision of the Trojan Myth: Studies on Dictys Cretensis and Dares Phrygius*, eds. Graziana Brescia et al. (George Olms Verlag Hildesheim, 2018), 7.

[31] As noted, the text behind this Homer is not the Greek *Iliad*, but instead the first-century CE *Ilias Latina*, a Latin adaptation of the *Iliad*. Benoît nevertheless considered Homer in the same historic sense as modern readers do, and for the purposes of this chapter I will refer to the writer of the *Ilias Latina* as "Homer" in order to remain in dialogue with Benoît's perception of the Greek tradition.

Benoît is not the first writer to criticize Homer as a historian in the West. Dares, referred to by Isidore of Seville as the first pagan historian, got there first.[32] This Dares, the writer of the *De Excidio Troiae*, was believed by medieval readers to be the Dares referred to by Homer in the *Iliad*, and therefore an eyewitness to the events at Troy. His testimony was made available in a Latin translation attributed to the first-century BCE Roman biographer Cornelius Nepos, to which Nepos prefixed a letter addressed to the historian Sallust presenting his translation of Dares. According to him, it was up to the reader to decide whether they should believe Homer "...qui post multos annos natus est, quam bellum hoc gestum est. De qua re Athenis iudicium fuit, cum pro insano habetur, quod deos cum hominibus belligerasse scripserit." ("... who was born many years after the war was waged. When the Athenians judged this work, they considered Homer insane since he wrote that the gods fought with men.")[33] The similarity to Benoît's condemnation of Homer is not a coincidence: Dares's text was a major source for the *Troie*, making Benoît's claim an inheritance, not a revolutionary historiographic perspective. And it is inherited from a text that seeks to position itself as an authority and displace its rival. Such mistrust for Homer, in both Dares and Benoît's works, is nevertheless not a given for writers from late antiquity since it does not arise from a general consensus. Orosius's early-fifth century *Historiarum Adversus Paganos Libri VII* (*Seven Books of Histories Against the Pagans*), found in at least two manuscripts accompanying the *De Excidio Troiae*,[34] paints a laudatory image of a "Homerus poeta in primis clarus" ("Homer, who is head-and-shoulders above the front-rank of poets.") Orosius assumes that Homer's depiction of the savagery of the Trojan war is accurate, and he harnesses this passage to demonstrate that war has become less destructive since the acceptance of Christian truth by the Romans.[35] In other words, Benoît's perspective on historical sources is borrowed from

[32] "Historiam autem apud nos primus Moyses de initio mundi conscripsit. Apud gentiles vero primus Dares Phrygius de Graecis et Troianis historiam edidit, quam in foliis palmarum ab eo conscriptam esse ferunt." (*Etymologiae* I.43) ("For us [Christians], Moses was the first to write history, about the beginning of the world. But for pagans, Dares was the first, who wrote the history of the Greeks and the Trojans, which, they say, were written by him on palm fronds.")

[33] Dares, *De Excidio*, 1.

[34] I have identified at least two, British Library Royal 6 C VIII and British Library Burney 216.

[35] "verumtamen qui diuturnitatem illius obsidionis, euersionis atrocitatem caedem captiuitatemque didicerunt, uideant, si recte isto qualiscumque est praesentis temporis statu offenduntur quos hostes occulta misericordia Dei cum per omnes terras instructis copiis bello persequi possint, pacis gratia praetentis obsidibus per omnia maria sequuntur; et, ne forte haec quietis amore facere credantur, se ipsos ac pericula sua pro Romanorum pace aduersum alias gentes offerunt." Orosius, *Historiae* 1.17 ("Nevertheless, those who have learnt about the length of that siege

his source, the author of the prologue to *De Excidio Troiae*, rather than from a widely-held medieval view. Benoît is arguing from authority through Dares's and Nepos's unimpeachable statuses, yet the existence of contrary authorities (Orosius was a student of Augustine and held in high esteem) goes unaddressed.

However, adding another twist to the quest for authenticity, Cornelius Nepos's work is a multi-layered fraudulent enterprise: the supposedly historical Dares did not write the *De Excidio* and Cornelius Nepos did not translate it into Latin. This framing is a forgery: both the letter *and* text were in all likelihood written in the 5th century CE, around five hundred years after the death of the real Cornelius Nepos, and the very existence of a Greek original is open to debate.[36] That is, Cornelius may have invented the text of Dares, *or* he may have translated a Greek Dares that has since been lost. In any case, Benoît's model for the dismissal of Homer as an unreliable source comes from a text that is itself deceitful and misrepresents its origins to the point of obfuscating them for future readers. This quality of the fraudulent writer and the forged text has become attached to the tradition of Troy as it issued from Dares's text. As Frederic Clark puts it, contesting forgeries and exposing them for what they are inevitably draws the critic into an ethical and personal relationship with the texts and other readers, creating in-groups and out-groups on the

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and the atrocities, slaughter, and enslavement that took place on Troy's fall, might see if they have any justification to be angry with the present state of affairs, whatever it is like, when their enemies [the Goths], through the workings of God's hidden mercy, pursue them over every sea to offer peace and surrender hostages, although they could have armed themselves for battle and pursued them in war in over every land. Moreover, in case it is thought that they have done this through a love of peace and quiet, they are offering to risk themselves against other peoples to keep the peace for the Romans.") Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the* Pagans, trans. A.T Fear (Liverpool University Press, 2010), 66-67.

[36] Stefan Merkle gives serious consideration for Cornelius and Dares being the same author, cf. Stefan Merkle, "News from the Past: Dictys and Dares on the Trojan War," in *Latin Fiction: The Latin Novel in Context*, ed. Heinz Hoffmann (Routledge, 1999); see also Horst Brunner, *Die Deutsche Trojaliteratur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit: Materialen und Untersuchungen* (Reichert, 1990), 52 and 511-518. More recently scholarship agrees largely on two points: on a date for the Latin text some time in the 5th century CE (Elisabet Gómez Peinado "The Greek *Ephemeris belli Troiani* by Dictys Cretensis and its Latin and Byzantine Testimonies," in *Revival and Revision of the Trojan Myth: Studies on Dictys Phryigus*, eds. Graziana Brescia, Mario Lentano, Giampiero Scafoglio, and Valentina Zanusso (Olms, 2018) while rejecting definitively a Greek original for Dares (see Giovanni Garbugino, "Osservazioni sulle fonti e sulla cronologia di Darete Frigio," in *Revival and Revision of the Trojan Myth: Studies on Dictys Phryigus*, eds. Graziana Brescia, Mario Lentano, Giampiero Scafoglio, and Valentina Zanusso (Olms, 2018). Andreas Beschorner has been an outlier, concluding that while arguments claiming a Greek original translated into Latin cannot be definitive ("Die Frage nach dem Original des 'Dares' muß prinzipiell offen gelassen werden. Die literarischen Zeugnisse bieten zu große Schwierigkeiten, um sie eindeutig als Beweis für die Existenz griechischer Acta ansehen zu können." Beschorner, *Untersuchungen zu Dares Phrygius* (Gunter Narr, 1992), 241; 231-243. He opts for the assumption that a Greek original is most likely, on stylistic grounds: "Dabei hat es sich erwiesen, daß man eher davon auszugehen hat, mit der lateinischen Version liege uns die Übersetzung eines griechischen Originals vor, da dessen spielerische und teilweise parodierende Intention keine Parallele in der lateinischen Literatur der in Frage kommenden Zeitspanne besitzt." Bechorner, *Untersuchungen* 263.

same level as the forgers: those who have understood the truth, and those who are duped. In other words, "Either the Phrygian was true, and rival accounts of Troy were pernicious falsehoods that would corrupt their readers, or he was false, and his ignorance proved the intellectual benightedness of those daft enough to fall for him."[37] Homer was not the only author who erred in his historiographic practices according to medieval writers. In a 12th-century commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid* once attributed to Bernard Silvestris, Virgil strayed from depicting the true course of history: "Intendit itaque casus Enee aliorumque Troianorum errantium labores evolvere hoc non usque secundum historie veritatem, quod Frigius describit."[38] ("He intends to expose the labors of Eneas and the other wandering Trojans, but not entirely by following the historical truth, which the Phrygian [Dares] describes.") Another 12th century text entitled *Versus contra Daretem* (*Verses against Dares*), later defended Virgil against this charge and sought to reintegrate him into the circle of authorities on history, rather than just morality.[39] Who was in and who was out has a very long history as an approach to selecting which Trojan narrative to follow, and therefore which group to belong to.

This hostility becomes stuck to stories about Troy, as readers and editors felt required to stress the issue of fraudulent authors peddling false knowledge to naïve readers, even to modern era: a British Library catalogue guide written in 1808 for the Harleian manuscripts provides an inquisitive reader searching for a description of a manuscript containing Benoît's *Roman de Troie* (British Library Harley 4482) with an explicit condemnation of the contents within: "Benoît professes to translate from Cornelius ...This Cornelius is a pretended Cornelius Nepos, whose Work, the Forgery of a Dark Age in a corrupt Latin, without any Greek original, has often been published with Dictys Cretensis, a similarly spurious production."[40] It has been almost impossible, until recently, to work on Dares, Dictys or Benoît without the critic taking an ethical stance on

[37] Frederic Clark, *The First Pagan Historian: The Fortunes of a Fraud from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 5.

[38] Julian Ward Jones and Elizabeth Frances Jones, eds, *The Commentary on the First Six Books of the Aeneid of Vergil Commonly Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris* (University of Nebraska Press, 1977).

[39] Birger Munk Olsen, *I classici nel canone scolastico altomedievale* (Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1991), 93. There developed a parallel reading of the Aeneid as a kind of "meta narrative with a plot quite different" from the classical text established by 12th-century scholars, borrowing from Servius and Fulgentius's commentaries, focused on Vices and Virtues (Haynes, 25-26).

[40] *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Museum, with Indexes of Persons, Places, and Matters*, vol. 3 (British Museum, 1808), 163.

fraud, championing true knowledge, and placing themselves in the "right" camp. These texts integrate a surface discussion of truth into their rhetoric and this feature is apparent in the particularities of the search for knowledge in Benoît's translation.

Nepos's letter played a key role in shaping the reception of Dares's *De Excidio*. First, Dares's account is valued for the immediacy with which its contents can be seized--it is clear, direct, and simple, and so is Cornelius's translation, "vere et simpliciter perscripta" ("written out accurately and clearly"), "ad verbum in latinatem transvertere" ("translated word-for-word").[41] Textuality is essentially demoted to a second-rank phenomenon, a surface feature: focus should be on the events that it recounts, rather than on how they were portrayed or how the text containing them came to be. Rhetoric is a less interesting and presumably distracting characteristic for a text reporting true events. Yet rhetorical strategies are what instantiate truthfulness as a quality inherent to those texts, effectively guiding the reader through turns of phrases to look at some things and disregard others. A second gesture seeks to erase the possibility of textual *mouvance* over time and evolution through translation. Once again, the reader can suspend a critical glance, a possible reassessment of the text's reliability. It can be taken at face value, but for another reason this time: they were written by the hand of Dares "ut titulus indicat" ("as the title shows") and this unproblematic transmission extends to Cornelius's translation, "cui nihil adiciendum vel diminuendum rei reformandae causa putavi, alioquin mea posset videri"[42] ("I did not find anything that needed to be changed, adding nothing to it and removing nothing, otherwise it could appear to be my own.") This claim cements two key arguments for the text: the immediacy of access to Dares's experiences, and the immaculate way those experiences have been preserved. The paradox of the forged text is the extent to which deception is married to faithfulness and truth: the truth proceeds from a (forged) eye-witness account unproblematically transformed into language, and an (invented) preservation of that language as it made its (fictional) journey from Phoenician, to Greek and finally into Latin.

Yet another text from antiquity influenced the *Roman de Troie*, the daily journal of Dictys of Crete entitled *Ephemeris Belli Troiani*, although Dares informed Benoît's work to a much

[41] Dares, *De Excidio*, 1.

[42] Dares, *De Excidio*, 1.

greater extent and had a wider readership in the medieval west.[43] The *Ephemeris* is unrelated to Dares's *De Excidio*, and yet the way it represents its own composition shares many fundamental features with Dares's text. It is presented as an original document translated into Latin from Greek, although unlike the *De Excidio* it is indeed a (partial) translation of a text most likely composed in the first two centuries CE.[44] Masquerading as a Latin translation of a Greek translation of Dictys's Phoenician original, it is another forgery. It has a somewhat more complicated introductory apparatus, based on two separate manuscript families: one (older) tradition introduces the text with an anonymous prologue scouting its movement from Phoenician into Greek, while another (later) tradition prefaces the text with a letter from a certain Lucius Septimius who claims to have translated the text from Greek into Latin. Both downplay the problematic provenance of the text by insisting on Dictys's authorship and his eye-witness participation in the events he reports. To further cement its authoritative perspective, the anonymous prologue states that the journal was not written on a whim by Dictys, but rather he "...a [ducibus] ordinatus est, ut annales belli Troiani conscriberet" ("...was ordered by [the leaders of the army] to write down the annals of the Trojan War.")[45] Its translation also passes through chains of command: while the letter from Septimius and the anonymous prologue disagree as to which language the original text was composed in (an early form of Greek or Phoenician),[46] they emphasize, to varying degrees, Nero's role in assuring

[43] Stephen P. Oakley, *Studies in the Transmission of Latin Texts*, vol. 1 *Quintus Curtius Rufus and Dictys Retensis* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 419; Peter Gainsford, "Diktys of Crete," *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 58 (2021): 60.

[44] For recent overviews summarizing the vast scholarship on Dictys, see Alessio Ruta, "I nuovi papiri greci di Ditti Cretese e la traduzione latina di Settimio: osservazioni su lingua, stile e 'intenzione' letteraria," in *Revival and Revision of the Trojan Myth: Studies on Dictys Phryigus*, eds. Graziana Brescia, Mario Lentano, Giampiero Scafoglio, and Valentina Zanusso (Olms, 2018) . Papyri of the Greek *Ephemeris* were discovered at the beginning of the 20th century; through this, it has been determined that the Greek original was likely written between 66CE (the date given in the prologue of the text, the thirteenth year of Nero's reign) and 200CE (the accepted date of the earliest Greek paprus); the Latin translation has been placed in either around 200 CE, for example inAlan Cameron, *Greek Mythography in the Roman World* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 172-175, or some time in the 4th century CE by Merkle, "News from the Past," 137. Karen Ní Mheallaigh and Gainsford have both suggested that the author was a Greek-speaking Syrian; Karen Ní Mheallaigh, "The 'Phoenician Letters' of Dictys of Crete and Dionysius Scytobrachion." *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 58 (2012): 186; Gainsford, "Diktys of Crete," 63.

[45] Much like Dares, I consulted Frazer's edition for English translations for Dictys, making modifications of my own in order to hew more closely to the Latin, and to make up for Frazer's occasional omission of clauses from the Latin. For the Latin, see Dictys Cretensis, *Ephemeridos Belli Troiani Libri a Lucio Septimio ex Graeco in Latinum Sermonem Translati*, ed. Werner Eisenhut (Teubner, 1994), 1.

[46] For more on this tangle of languages in Dictys, see Stefan Merkle *Die 'Ephemeris Belli Troiani' des Diktys von Kreta* (Peter Lang, 1989), 109-113.

the text's circulation. The anonymous prologue assures the reader of Nero's search for experts to translate the text:

> Haec igitur cum Nero accepisset advertissetque Punicas esse litteras, harum peritos ad se evocavit. Qui cum venissent, interpretati sunt omnia. Cumque Nero cognosset antiqui viri, qui apud Illium fuerat, haec esse monumenta, iussit in Graecum sermonem ista transferri, e quibus Troiani belli verior textus cunctis innotuit.[47]
>
> When Nero received the texts and noticed that they were in Punic, he summoned experts in this language. When they came, they translated it all, and once Nero realized that these were the recordings of a man from antiquity who had been at Troy, he ordered that they be translated into Greek, so that a more accurate presentation of the Trojan war may be revealed to all.

Just like the pseudo-translator's introduction to the *De Excidio*, the prologue to the *Ephemeris* assures the reader of this text's superior ("verior") portrayal of the events at Troy, made available through an expert navigation of linguistic differences. Dictys himself, according to the prologue was "peritus vocis ac litterarum Phoenicum" ("an expert in Phoenician speech and writing"), mirroring the "peritos" (experts) summoned by Nero. The note from the translator Septimius, while engaging in a trope of authorial humility, also recalls the place of expertise in language arts: he states that he translated the text from the Greek "non magis confisi ingenio, quam ut otiosi animi desidiam discuteremus" ("not so much because I was confident in my ability, but because I wished to break up the idleness of my lazy mind.") Both the *De Excidio* as well as the *Ephemeris* insist on the importance of a cunning ability in language in order to ensure textual transmission.

Another shared quality, which serves to cement these texts' authority for future readers, is the material fact of that transmission. That is, both are presented as miraculous finds, unearthed after having been forgotten for countless centuries and displaced by Homer's account. In Cornelius's telling in the *De Excidio*, which will be recounted by Benoît with his own twist, it is his serendipitous find in Athens of an obscure text in Greek that changes history. Yet he fails to

[47] Dictys, *Ephemeridos*, 3.

provide an account of the text's preservation up to his day, he simply stumbles upon it. The two prefatory notes to the *Ephemeris* agree on a more elaborate and dramatic find for Dictys's account, establishing provenance along the way. Septimius's version draws the most vivid picture of the text's (imagined) preservation.[48] Here, the original is resurrected from a sole surviving exemplar locked away in Dictys's tomb which, according to the prologue, is specifically located underground; the text was buried with him and only later revealed by an earthquake. There is an ironic twist: the shepherds who find it are disappointed at their discovery, having hoped to instead uncover gold from an opulent past. Yet, while they were, according to Septimius, robbed of their initial hope ("at ubi spes frustrata est," 1) Nero later showered their lord with gifts for sending him the texts which, as recorded in the prologue, he recognized as potentially holding lost wisdom ("existimans quaedam in his secretiora contineri," 1) Through Dares and Dictys, the rediscovered text becomes a miraculous event announcing knowledge and riches.

Thus the prefaces to both Dares and Dictys each agree on two principal factors as the determinants of true history texts, although they discuss them in more or less elaborate terms. First, truth is conveyed through the adroit use of language, and that adroitness is defined through immediacy, simplicity, and expertise in formulation. The difficulties of translation are smoothed over. While Cornelius fails to address this sticking point, Septimius swipes it to the side by stating that he need not be particularly skilled to accomplish the translation into Latin, and the anonymous prologue to the *Ephemeris* emphatically insists on the expertise of the translators who brought the text into Greek. Second, the two traditions depend on the trope of the found text, a fossilized imprint of the past that was unknown to historians past and which is the sole vector of the truth of the past. It is not through the monument that was Homer's *Iliad* that the war may be known, but through a text built on the very opposite: its lack of literary authority is a badge of honor, as the bluntness of the soldier's translation of experience into text becomes the measure of truthfulness.

[48] "Deinde post multa saecula collapso per vetustatem apud Gnosum, olim Cretensis regis sedem, sepulchro eius, pastores cum eo devenissent, forte inter ceteram ruinam loculum stagno affabre clausum offendere ac thesaurum rati mox dissolvunt. Non aurum neque aliud quicquam praedae, sed libros ex philyra in lucem prodierunt." (Dictys, *Ephemeridos*, 1) ("Then, after many centuries, [Dictys's] tomb at Knosos, once the seat of the King of Crete, collapsed from old age. Shepards came upon it, and by chance they found a small box ingeniously locked up in tin. Thinking that it was treasure, they quickly broke it open: rather than gold or any other kind of prize, they brought to light books made of bark from the linden tree.")

To combine these factors, it is through language and in particular fortuitous encounters with written language that history can be credibly known.

2.2 Attending to the Past, Replacing the Past

The invective against Homer and approval of Dares that frame Benoît's *Roman de Troie* lay the foundation for his romance. Presenting Dares's *De Excidio* as his sole source, he provides an even more dramatic recounting of the paths taken by Dares. He describes Nepos, in his version Sallust's nephew,[49] stumbling across the text while searching for grammar texts in a cupboard. The Greek fighter Dares, "... clerc merveillos / E des set arz esciëntos" (lines 99-100), ("a marvelous cleric, learned in the seven liberal arts"), set down the day's events on a nightly basis for posterity. Perhaps in anticipation of a future critical reader's impeachment of his star witness, Benoît not only repeats Nepos's emphasis on eye-witness recording but also introduces another layer of veridiction to Dares's journal: whereas the soldier-author fought on the Trojan side, he took no favorites, "Onc por amor ne s'en vousist taire / De la verté dire e retraire." (lines 111-112), ("He could not be deflected even by fidelity to his own people from saying and telling the truth.") This emphasis on devotion carries over the *amor* of Cornelius, who translated Dares from Greek into Latin "summo amore complexus" (*De Excidio*, 1), ("seized with such delight.")[50] The trope of the dedicated and gifted translator is also carried over, since the text was made available through Cornelius's "sen et engin" (line 122), ("knowledge and ingenuity.") In his translation, Benoît inscribes himself within the discourse constituted by Cornelius, Septimius and Dictys, triangulating historic truth through a translator's expertise in language and composition: Septimius's *peritus* here has *sen et engin*. Benoît continues the claim to unimpeded access to an original experience.

But this claim is a framing device for Benoît's 32,000 verse text; translation itself is the terrain on which he explores the possibility of a true account of the past. Benoît's arguments for his source's textual authority are more extended than Cornelius's letter, and this verbosity begins to destabilize the otherwise straightforward picture set out in the shorter statements by Cornelius and Septimius. That is, Benoît explores the nature of Homer's distancing from the event: it was not just that he was born one hundred years later, but as Benoît takes Cornelius's claim to a wider

[49] See my speculation on this twist in Nepos's identity later in this chapter.

[50] Citations from Dares will supply in parentheses the paragraph in which the quote appeared.

conclusion, he writes that Homer "rien n'en sot, içe savon / Se par oïr le dire non" (lines 127-128), ("knew nothing about it—this much we know—except through hearsay.") "Knowing" is in fact separated from "hearing about": Homer knew nothing. Here the *Troie* begins to introduce inconsistencies in the straightforward claim to authority seen in Dares and Dictys. Benoît does not represent *himself* as a particularly knowledgeable authority on Troy: like Homer's, his portrayal of events also comes from second-hand accounts. As he admits often, "ço truis lisant" (line 81), ("I have read so"), although the verbs of perception--*oïr* (Homer) and *lire* (Benoît)--set up a hierarchy in preferring textuality over orality. Benoît risks becoming a reflection of Homer, since he knows about the events recounted in the *Troie* only through hearsay, "se par oïr le dire non." In an even more extreme move, Benoît further distances his *Roman de Troie* from its sources inherited from antiquity:

> Ceste estoire n'est pas usee,
> N'en guaires lieus nen est trovee :
> Ja retraite ne fust ancore
> Mais Beneeiz de Sainte More
> L'a contrové e fait e dit
> E o sa main les moz escrit
> Ensi tailliez, ensi curez,
> Ensi asis, ensi posez
> Que plus ne meins n'i a mestier. (lines 129-137)
>
> This history [Dares's] is not told too often, nor is it widely available. It would not yet have been told, had Benoît de Sainte-Maure not invented, composed and related it, writing it down with his own hand and shaping, polishing, arranging and disposing it so that neither more nor less of it is required.

Benoît innovates by parsing language and explaining in his own terms: this is close reading. He outlines his own project in the prologue: *ceste estoire n'est pas usee*, he writes, which we can understand as "Dares's history is not told often," and he adds "ne en gaires de lieus trouvée," that

is, “nor is it widely available.” That, at least, is how Glyn Burgess and Douglas Kelly’s 2017 translation into English renders the expression.[51]

Understood in this way, Benoît puzzlingly presents the *De Excidio* as a recently recovered text—perhaps the understanding here is that the translation prepared for Sallust, which Benoît recognized earlier, never entered general circulation. The only way for Dares's account to be well known is for himself as translator to popularize the text. Yet the *De Excidio* was already a well-known account: while the copying of Dares took off only in the mid-twelfth century,[52] Isidore had referred to him as the first pagan historian in his *Etymologiae*, and his report on the Trojan war informed texts spanning from Jerome's *Chronicon* to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*.[53] In describing Benoît’s work some manuscripts, such as British Library Harley MS 4482, say that he began (“commencié”) it, that he composed it and related it, “l’a faite et l’a dite.”

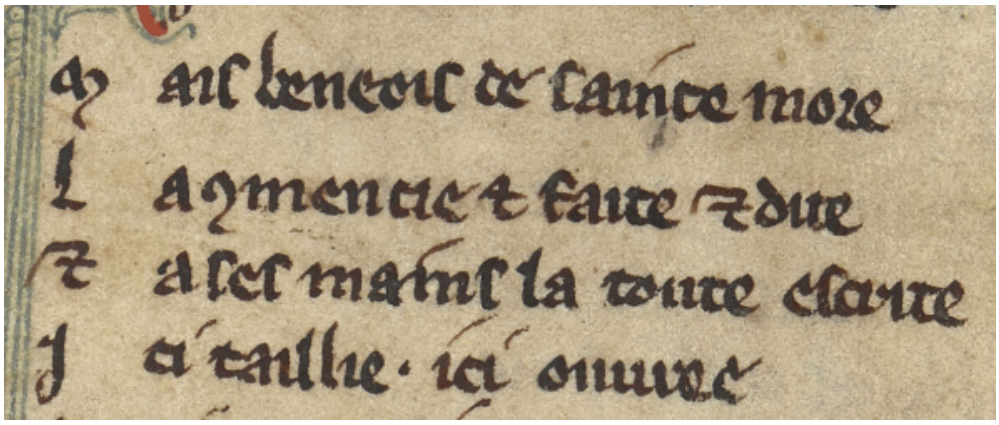


Figure 2.1 British Library Harley MS 4482, 1v[54]

Yet many other manuscripts, such as the one that served as a basis for Constans’s edition, replace that *commencié* with *contrové*, a verb that means to engage in literary invention: just like the Latin “inventio,” a term for coming up with a story, it comes from the verb “to find”: *controver*. This use resonates strongly with the earlier line stating that the story itself is not found, *trové*, in many places, except that Benoît himself has completely found it, *contrové*. *Controver*, “invented,” lines up with the Latin rhetorical practice of *inventio*, defined by Cicero in his *De Inventione* (popular

[51] Burgess and Kelly, *The Roman de Troie*, 44.

[52] Francine Mora-Lebrun, “Joseph of Exeter: Troy through Dictys and Dares,” in *Brill’s Companion to Prequels, Sequels, and Retellings of Classical Epic*, ed. Robert C. Simms (Brill, 2018), 115.

[53] Frederic Clark, “Authenticity, Antiquity, and Authority: Dares Phrygius in Early Modern Europe,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72, no. 2 (2011): 183-185.

[54] Photograph by Adam Grant.

enough to receive a commentary by Thierry of Chartres in the 12th century) as “excogitatio rerum verarum aut veri similium quae causam probabilem reddant” (“the discovery of true things or true-seeming things that reinforce a matter's plausability.”)[55] The activity of the translator in this prologue recalls core steps laid out by Cicero in rhetorical formulation: *inventio* (invention) and *controver*, *dispositio* (arrangement) and *aseoir*/*poser*, *elocutio* (expression) and *taillier/curer* (*memoria* and *pronuntiatio*; memory and delivery--coming through Benoît's insistence on textual memory and communication).

What Benoît describes here is a rediscovery not of a text, but of the experiences that constitute the otherwise hidden matter of Troy. Benoît's story sounds more and more like an original account: “Ceste estoire” is perhaps not Dares's story, but rather the story of Troy that will only be told for the first time truthfully thanks to Benoît's writing practices. Yet, instead of implying that the story is his own--if so, why recognize Dares's account and emphasize the importance of eye-witness testimony?--he has opened his romance on the materials that rendered that resurrection possible, Dares's *De Excidio Troiae*. His work is superior to his source material as “ceste estoire n'est pas usée.” *User* here introduces a troubling polysemia into the *Troie*'s portrayal of its novel engagement with novel (or not) sources. Much as in modern French, it can refer to deterioration through use--this story is not thumbed through much, it is not known. Yet it can also mean exploited in its very literal sense: no one else has yet based a new tale on it, it has not much been *used*. This work is the opposite of the disinterested, expert translators that inhabit the tradition of Dares and Dictys.

The work of an authoritative translator requires Benoît to note the distinction and distance between his work and Dares's: if he fails to bring an addition for the reader, his translation is worthless.[56] Yet this claim names more than the help provided by a savant guide: hints that Benoît’s *Troie* is the first *real, true* account of the Trojan war are peppered throughout, including in the extended summary of the romance that follows the introduction, where Benoît promises that his audience will learn about “Les songes qu'Ulixès sonja / Que ja nus hom mais teus n'orra” (lines 705-706), (“... the dreams Ulysses dreamt, the likes of which no one will ever hear told.”) The actual nuts and bolts of his claims rub up against the approval of Dares and Dictys that situates his

[55] *De Inv* 1.7; translation mine.

[56] Paul Vincent Rockwell, “Remembering *Troie*: The Implications of *Ymages* in the *Roman de Troie* and the Prose *Lancelot*,” *Arthuriana* 7, no. 3 (1997): 22.

translation in relation to a preceding and controlling authentic account. In fact, it is only in light of this slippery relationship between originality and fidelity to a source that the opening programmatic description of his project can be appreciated for the (limited) extent to which its truth claims occupy a preeminent position:

> En une estoire comencier,
> Que de latin, ou jo la truis,
> Se j'ai el sen e se jo puis,
> La [estoire] voudrai si en romanz metre
> Que cil qui n'entendent la letre
> Se puissent deduire el romanz
> Mout est l'estoire riche e granz
> E de grant uevre et de grant fait.
> En maint sen avra l'om retrait
> Saveir com Troie fu perie,
> Mais la verté est poi oï. (lines 37-44)
>
> I would like to translate it from the Latin in which I find it, providing I have sufficient intelligence and skill, into the French vernacular so that those who are ignorant of Latin can enjoy it in French. The history is most noble and grand, and it treats of a great enterprise and great deeds. The destruction of Troy has been related in many diverse ways, but the truth of the matter is rarely heard.

Truth returns here in Benoît's claim that the truth of the story is little known. In this context, his translation practices will finally reveal the truth. Yet, the claim rubs up against an internal contradiction: how will Benoît relate the truth of Troy when he is significantly more removed from the event than Homer reportedly was? Benoît is himself participating in similar "pseudepigraphic conventions," that is, modes of falsely presenting a work as authored by another, as belonging to Dares and Dictys.[57] He is diminishing the possible insights found in other accounts so as to

[57] David Rollo, "Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*: Historiography, Forgery and Fiction," *Comparative Literature Studies* 32, no. 2 (1995): 191.

strengthen the value of his own. Perhaps Benoît was secretly suspicious of Dares's account: Benoît's lexicon provides slippage between "find" and "compose" in its use of *controver*, potentially "unveiling Cornelius' text as a self-authenticating hoax."[58] The "aumaire" (shelf/library/cabinet) where Cornelius finds the books of Dares can also name a sacred space for relics, while the "gramaire" (text) found there is phonetically and orthographically close to a "grimoire" (spellbook), another space where, just like a history text, experience and language coincide, and where something not of this world is conjured up.[59] Regardless of its inspiration, Benoît's language delights in the polysemia of writing overlapped with "devising," that is, lying. The language that referred to original invention also describes active deception: finding, rhetorically, is not only archeological or forensic (which Benoît would have us believe) but also inventive; it comes up with something new, previously unsaid, and thus in a historical narrative, potentially divorced from the event recounted. His own representation of textuality hints at an active reflection on the intrusions made by writing in the act of recording and translating history.

Benoît claims to expose finally, once and for all, the truth of a text already well-known and in circulation for centuries. This "new" work on the Troy tradition does not depend upon some fortuitous discovery of lost commentaries providing as yet unheard of interpretations or the translation of a found text written in an unknown language. Nor does Benoît concern himself with the discourse of deception underlying the translations from Late Antiquity: Homer was simply wrong. Rather, the truth emerges from his own skilled practice as a writer, adroitly quoting, paraphrasing, and referencing his sources in the *Roman de Troie*: "si vos dirai tot a devise" (line 315), ("I shall tell you in correct order ...") "Devise" comes from an unattested late verb "divisare" formed from the supine of "divido"; in its immediacy, then, "devise" is about dividing and separating things. By extension, the term is about dividing materials up and disposing them according to a well-wrought plan. The organization of objects into a plan presupposes choices, and *devise* can also refer to an individual's will. The skilled organization of disparate parts pervades Benoît's work, and that skilled manipulation results from subjective choices: once again, Benoît's clarification of the Troy story is emmeshed within his own ability as a *deviser*. In a reflection of Benoît's editorial practices, King Peleus (who, as we soon shall see, was associated with deception

[58] Rollo, "Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*," 209.

[59] Emmanuèle Baumgartner, *De l'histoire de Troie au livre du Graal. Le temps, le récit (XIIe-XIIIe siècles)* (Paradigme, 1994), 145-8.

as soon as he was introduced in the *Troie*) analyzes his own battle strategy along similar terms, combining order and a strong will in order to take Troy in its first destruction at the hand of the Greeks. He announces:

> Partons noz gens e ordenons
> E nos echieles devisons
> Par tel sen e par tel maniere,
> Com plus nos seit chose legiere,
> Que, quant ço vendra a la feire,
> Qu'il nen i ait rien a refaire,
> Que ne seiens gent esbaïe. (lines 2277-2283)
>
> Let us separate and deploy our forces, arraying our divisions intelligently and in the most straightforward way. Then, when it comes to combat, no changes will be necessary and we shall not be confused.

Peleus's immediate concern is for clarity and efficiency in the battlefield: the forces ("noz gens") and divisions ("echieles") need to be properly and intelligently disposed ("par tel sen"), to allow the confrontation with the Trojans to proceed without undefended lines, missed openings, or soldiers without a task. That is, the pieces and the units they constitute need to operate together as a complex flow that interlocks and responds accordingly to corresponding changes in the opposite camp's approach.

That clarity of design (Peleus is an insightful strategist) and flawless ability to respond to the enemy's moves can only be achieved by "tel sen" ("such an intellect"), recalling the double use of "sen" in Benoît's prologue which conditions the future success of his translation on his own intellectual capacity ("sen") to render this foreign tale understandable and the "maint sen" ("many ways") the story had been (failingly) recounted in the past. In Benoît's narrative, Hercules proposes an alternative, in which the Greeks would hide most of their troops in the ships and he along with a small squadron would engage the Trojans so as to send their entire army out for a sure victory over a small group, at which time the Greeks hiding in the ships would rush out and

ambush them. This scene is absent in Dares who has Hercules undertake a straightforward siege of Troy. The language and terms that populate it are Benoît's own making.

2.3 Attending to the Past through Language

Benoît is taking extant Latin authorities, the *De Excidio Troiae* and *Ephemeris Belli Troiani*, and opening them up to disentangle underlying meaning from them for his audience. The texts may be known and read, but the truth beneath them is little understood ("Mais la verté est poi oï"). Exposing the truth of a text is a claim made by critical readings accompanied by Benoît's attention to the "shaping, polishing, arranging and disposing" of his composition ("Ensi tailliez, ensi curez, / Ensi asis, ensi posez"). Seeing romance composition in terms of craft enquires as to how the ordering of the translation produces a new way of coming to know the text and the features of the world that the text describes. This turn requires fitting the words of another into our own, part and parcel of Kramnick's conception of close reading, as discussed above. A craft here is any activity carried out with skill to make something, just as dexterous, experienced hands weave together reeds to make a basket. An attention to craft can reveal close reading as a physical and material act of making an object through skilled labor. This is the kind of activity Benoît undertakes.

Translation and close reading share the qualities of being located on pages and constituting a process that extends over time; they require taking time to read and time to reflect on, but most important, they require time for the act of composition to take place. The time of writing creates the text as a fabric with its own weave, a kind of handiwork that involves know-how, for Kramnick. With this term, Kramnick references the philosopher Gilbert Ryle's distinction between knowing *how* to do something and knowing *that* something is, with the former receiving significantly less emphasis in literary criticism. That is because the field, for Kramnick, suffers from a bias towards the intellectual, seeing writing as an afterthought, only transcribing in the outside world the big insight, the critical thought, reduced on paper to "a shadow antecedent to [skilled action]" that had already formed "in the phantom space of the mind."[60]

Writing as a process of transcription flattens out the complex interplay between thought and written language, since "the performance of the intelligent act is merely the execution of a

[60] Jonathan Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, 52.

well thought-out plan."[61] It does not allow for the complexity of writing, of finding words and stringing them together, of battling with morphology and syntax, with improvisation, local tensions and inconsistencies that are invariably found within even the most structured project, and which nevertheless contribute to the way that project is understood. Close reading reintroduces depth, process, and materiality into the activity of coming to understand a work, as it recognizes the extent to which thought, language and writing are mutually dependent raw materials for the critic.

An attention to the ordering of the material world is inherent to medieval composition, as erasable wax tablets often served as the medium for initial composition before definitive copying onto vellum took place. Marilynn Desmond has explored how the (limited) physical space of wax tablets determined the amount of expansion each "schematic unit" from Dares could receive, therefore shaping the episodic structure of the *Troie*.[62] Writing, and in particular writing translation entails a material struggle with language in its very act, not just syntactically and lexically (fitting another's words into my own) but in a determined space as well. Verse form imposes the needs of meter onto expression; the limited volume of wax imposes a physical limit to the length of a complete thought. It is in that *know-how,* the weave of the text, that is, in its lexical, syntactic, morphological, metrical particularities and patterns that the bulk of Benoît's work takes place, instead of the work being located solely in a translator's mind. Composition, just like reading, happens in a physical space that requires conforming to these material limits, it is not only abstract words that constitute the new material of close reading. As I have shown so far in this section, examining that work closely reveals the extent to which Benoît's engagement with the discovery of truth differs from that of Dares and Dictys. It is above all mediated through translation, but not in the programmatic approach to translation explicitly expressed in the prologue; instead it arises in the language that sustains the translation and its self-representation.

Medieval knowledge-making practices, particularly in the 12th and 13th centuries, were centered on the library; knowledge was pursued "by reading new texts" instead of through experiment procedures foundational to modern scientific practices.[63] Thinking, discovering, and

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[61] Jonathan Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, 52.

[62] Marilynn Desmond, "Translatio in Wax: The Wax Tablet and the Composition of Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*," *Viator* 49, no. 1 (2018): 51-76.

[63] Mary Franklin-Brown, *Reading the World. Encyclopedic Writing in the Scholastic Age* (The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 7.

writing were synonymous, and abstract knowledge prized over concrete interactions with the world. Contemporary understandings of skilled writing practices such as close reading suffer from the same bias to abstraction and antipathy to the material, yet writing as a practice is not entirely abstract--there is the very concrete work of stringing words together. A skilled encounter with something concrete--the language of Dares and Dictys--happens in Benoît's close reading of their texts. This activity can be best described as concrete because it acts in a very real sense as the construction of an idea using language as a toolkit, joining together thoughts transcribed in the form of words and clauses in the way that mortar holds together bricks. The key insight this perspective offers is its clear emphasis on written expression itself as an activity in which ideas and arguments take shape, rather than as a passive reflection, a shadow of the clarity in thought sparked in the mind. As Benoît himself wrote, his task was one in which he "o sa main les moz escrit / Ensi tailliez, ensi curez, / Ensi asis, ensi posez" (lines 134-136), ("writing it down with his own hand and shaping, polishing, arranging and disposing it.") It is the "apt placement of words"--the knowing *how* to write--that leads to "the creation and discovery of truths in the activity itself."[64] Eloquence is not some port of entry that facilitates the movement between the ideas within the mind and the physical world outside: it is the craft that generates the meaning, "skilled practice is the idea itself."[65]

Medieval encounters with Dares suggest that readers brought in the kinds of materials needed to skillfully read and interpret his account. A 13th-century manuscript transmitting Dares' *De Excidio Troiae* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae,* Sydney Sussex College 75, places them after 103 folia of a variety of linguistic material. Here, compiled in a single hand, is an eclectic and most likely original set of reading aids: lexical glossaries of biblical texts, lists of the sounds made by animals in Latin called *voces animalium*, along with grammatical and spelling manuals summarized from Priscian's *Institutiones Grammaticae*. A second hand, also in the 13th century, added in a similar style the two history texts to round out the volume.[66] For example, a text located toward the beginning of the compilation, entitled the *Expositium Parcium*

[64] Kramner, *Criticism and Truth*, 63.

[65] Kramner, *Criticism and Truth*, 63.

[66] Vivien Law and James P. Carley, "Grammar and Arithmetic in Two Thirteenth-Century English Monastic Collections: Cambridge, Sidney Sussex College, MS 75 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 186 (S. C. 2088)," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 1 (1991): 142.

Ueteris et Noui Testamenti (Exposition of Parts of Speech of the Old and New Testament) and probably a 9th-century text, provides explanations for specialist terms in the First Epistle of John in a very straightforward layout:

> De ep*istula* p*ri*ma s*anc*ti joh*ann*is ap*osto*li. *Propitiatio*. Placatio. Anti*christus* d*icitur* contrari*us christo*. Anti enim g*rec*e, latine contra significant.
>
> Concerning the First Epistle of Saint John the Apostle. "Atonement" [means] "appeasing." "Antichrist" means against Christ, for "anti" in Greek means "against" in Latin.[67]

Much of the volume follows this model. While this first text allows a reader to first identify the book of the Bible where a term poses an issue before then finding it in an alphabetical list, others, such as the *Differencie similium partium orationis* (*Differences Between Similar Parts of Speech*), falsely attributed to Cicero, are more general and may have served as a vocabulary tool for young students or struggling writers. One passage stands out in particular when the presence of Dares's *De Excidio* is recalled, although it may not have caught the medieval scribe's notice:

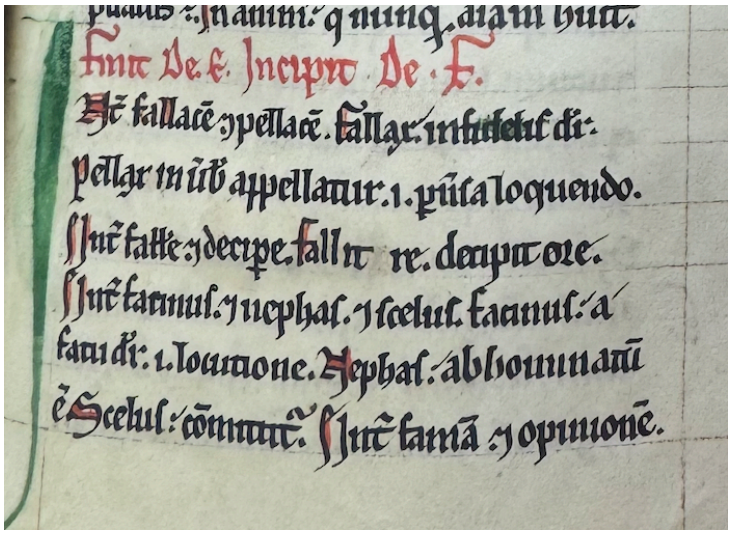


Figure 2.2 Cambridge, Sidney Sussex 75, 50r[68]

> Finit de E. Incipit de F.

[67] Translations from manuscripts my own unless otherwise noted.

[68] Photograph by Adam Grant.

Inter fallace*m et* pellace*m*. Fallax infidelis dicitur, pellax in verbis appellatur, *id est* p*er*u*er*sa loquendo. *Inter* fall*er*e *et* decip*er*e. Fallit re, decipit ore. *Inter* facinus et nephas et scelus. Facinus a fatu dicitur, id est locutione, Nephas abhominatum est, Scelus co*m*mittitur.

Here ends "E." Now begins "F." Between "deceptive" and "deceitful." "Deceptive" is said of an unfaithful person, "deceitful" is formulated in words, that is, through speaking perversely. Between "to trick" and "to deceive." Tricking is in deed, deceiving is through speech. Between a misdeed, *nefas* and a crime. A misdeed is said of a declaration, that is through speech, *nefas* is something abominable, and a crime is something that is committed.

The layout attests to the scribe's dedication to facilitating reference work. Rubricated titles provide the letter heading, capital mentions of *Inter* with red highlighting mark out new entries, and those entries are (mostly) in alphabetical order: Fallax, fallere, facinus, fama. These texts display original engagements with their sources through re-reading, excerpting and finally re-ordering their source material--sometimes through alphabetizing, sometimes thematically, constituting an original reference work reflecting the interests of "an individual with a particularly lively interest in words and their meaning."[69] The close attention paid by Pseudo-Cicero in the second example to "differences" in associated terms testifies to an acute awareness of the propensity for lexical choices to shape textual composition. That is, this text's inclusion in the manuscript can be read as more than a normative vocabulary guide--"use *fallax* when you are talking about a person, *pellax* when you are talking about words"--and instead creates an environment in which the reader-writer is invited to reflect on the nature of the character they are describing.[70] What actions make Peleus, for example, *fallax*, why could his words be considered *pellaces*? This manuscript shows the point of union between translation and close reading and suggests that in the medieval practice they are

[69] Vivien Law and James P. Carley, "Grammar and Arithmetic in Two Thirteenth-Century English Monastic Collections: Cambridge, Sidney Sussex College, MS 75 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 186 (S.C. 2088)," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 1 (1991): 143.

[70] Priscian accompanies Dares in at least one other manuscript, British Library Royal 15 B XI, and incidentally this manuscript also introduces clear rubrication into the *De Excidio* by identifying "Primum Bellum" (First Battle) "Secundum Bellum" (Second Battle) and so forth, introducing organizational order into the text.

essentially the same activity. The writer and reader (one is necessarily doing both, to continue Kramner's rejection of the passive model of close reading) is actively invited to weigh the consequences of small lexical choices, led to see how they contribute to larger characterizations and narrative and moral stakes: *nefas* will necessarily mean that an act will be appreciated for its inadmissibility. Working on Dares (and any Latin text for a 12th-century writer) entails working with the language that makes up the text, parsing it into its pieces, understanding the valences of its terms, detailing the tiniest of gaps between synonyms and syntactic choices, and then displaying the fruit of that labor. Carrying Dares and Dictys over into a new language is an extension of this hermeneutics. It is in this parsing, this close reading, that Benoît innovates: *ceste estoire n'est pas usee.*

The second half of this chapter emerges from this perspective, considering how the stringing words together in the act of translation as craft gave rise to the unique trait of the *Roman de Troie* of reconsidering and questioning the way knowledge arises and circulates in the text, from the narrator, between characters, and in dialogue between the two. I will argue that the text worked out by Benoît's hands works against and undermines the fluid access to truth imagined or promised in his prologue. Benoît's innovation in the Troy tradition was to attend to the linguistic undercurrent that flowed through the Troy tradition. That is not to say, however, that by attending he perfectly assimilated the Latin into Old French. Attention, as we have seen, allows for interruptions and unforeseen, even unwanted influences; therefore, through translation those linguistic structures in Latin are not perfectly mirrored in the Old French. Rather, the structures that emerged from his attending undermine certain currents of the tradition that would claim a clear-cut division between the known truth and the known lie and instead exploring their overlap through linguistic acts.

As an example: *devise*, the term used by Benoît in the prologue to describe his task, covers over the very subjective nature of putting things in their proper order. This task is fundamentally realized through the adroit manipulation of language. The *Troie* does not claim to lay the grounds for Troy to re-emerge in the present or to connect the present to past bloodlines or inheritance, although there was plenty of that going even before the 12th century, beginning with Fredgar's 7th-century chronicle later combined in the 9th century with Dares and entitled *Historia Daretis de*

Origine Francorum (*Dares' History on the Origin of the Franks*).[71] Instead, he will simply represent Troy truthfully: "Ne di mie qu'aucun bon dit / N'e mete, se faire le sai, / Mais la matire en ensivrai" (lines 142-144), ("I do not say that this will not include some clever additions of my own, if I am capable of doing so, but I shall follow my source material.") He is acutely aware as an author of the function of "epistemic control" that subtends his source material and as a translator mastering a language unknown to his audience, of "inhabit[ing] a cognitive hinterland in which truth and falsehood escape the judgment of others...to regulate not only what is known, but also what is not."[72] Benoît is in dialogue with the theme of subterfuge inherent to the Troy tradition, acknowledging the textuality of the *Troie* as a textual representation of the city and its inhabitants (rather than a straightforward transposition into writing of eye-witness experiences) while exploring how each succeeding generation of history writing reinvents its own origins. As I will show in the following section, Benoît's prefatory apparatus appears to be oriented toward a meta-exploration of the nature of truth within translated history texts; however, the language of the *Troie* as it stretches throughout the 32,000 lines of the romance investigates, in a step before the truthfulness of a claim can be evaluated, whether an event can first come to be known unequivocally. Attending to his concerns, then, does not equate with realizing the project he outlines in the first lines: through language, the task ultimately escapes him.

2.4 Fractured Knowledge

The *Troie*'s complication of knowing history arises not from a methodological claim, but rather through linguistic structures communicating knowledge of the world. This feature was highlighted in the first part of this chapter in the parsing of the terms employed by Benoît to describe his activity as a translator using a register more rhetorically assimilable to the language employed to describe medieval authorship. His knowing, then, is an authorial one. The *possibility* of knowing, however, is complicated by specific forms of modality in the *Troie*. The forms of modality that I identify are epistemic structures which communicate "degrees of certainty, degrees of commitment" and also information sources.[73] In more general terms, "epistemic utterances" take

[71] Clark, *The First Pagan Historian*, 81-91.

[72] Rollo, "Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*," 195-96.

[73] While some linguistic schools separate *episteme* (certain knowledge) from *doxa* (belief or expectations), others loop them together as participating on a scale of epistemic assertions; see Kasper Boye, *Epistemic Meaning: A Crosslinguistic and Functional-Cognitive Study* (De Gruyter Mouton, 2012), 15-16.

place whenever a speaker evaluates the extent to which the modal (possible) and the factual world overlap or are compatible.[74] When I say "I know that Benoît is coming," "I believe that Benoît is coming," or "I doubt that Benoît is fun," I am giving different kinds of assessments of how much the modal world can overlap with the factual world or of the extent to which "Benoît is coming" or "Benoît is fun" coincides with my understanding of reality. Beyond a given lexicon that communicates knowledge--believe, know, seem, hear, assume--other structures in language encode epistemic evaluations. The imperfect, for example, can be used both in English and French to imply not necessarily a counterfactual evaluation of a statement, but a distancing from the current factual world: "If Benoît were here, we would be delighted to see him." The imperfect counterfactual is followed by a conditional that implies that the situation is certainly possible from my perspective as a speaker.[75] The future participates in epistemic evaluation as well, although unlike the imperfect, it is not the distancing provided by another chronology that allows for this. Rather than a tense, the future is perhaps best understood as its own mood. It is, after all, fundamentally different from the past: the past "subsum[ing] what may have already taken place, barring science fiction, is immutable," while the future "is necessarily more speculative" since any claims on the future can be later proven false by time, changed by the intervention of others or the speakers themselves.[76] "He will come" is a statement gaging my perception of, and claims to know, a future event, rather than a description of time other than the present.

Finally, I will also consider evidentiality, a form of epistemic evaluation where the source of information is encoded in a statement. Indeed, in some languages "it is obligatory for a speaker to indicate how they acquired knowledge," that is, it is grammatically necessary to communicate how the speaker acquired information.[77] In Indo-European languages, this can come up as simply as in the act of deixis, pointing out the speaker, when we say "Benoît says that ..." and these moves can create through dialogue subjective positions as a form of "deictic identity," where speakers'

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[74] Renaat Declerck, "The Definition of Modality," in *Cognitive Approaches to Tense, Aspect, and Epistemic Modality*, eds.Adeline Patard and Frank Brisard (John Benjamins, 2011), 33.

[75] Adeline Patard, "The Epistemic Uses of the English Simple Past and the French *imparfait*: When Temporality Conveys Modality," in *Cognitive Approaches to Tense, Aspect, and Epsitemic Modality*, eds.Adeline Patard and Frank Brisard (John Benjamins, 2011), 297.

[76] Bernard Comrie, *Tense* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 43-44.

[77] Dalila Ayoun, Agnès Cell and Laure Lansari, "Introduction: On the Gradience of TAM-E Categories," in *Tense, Aspect, Modality, and Evidentiality: Crosslinguistic Perspectives*, eds. Dalila Ayoun, Agnès Cell and Laure Lansari (John Benjamins, 2018), 10.

identities are derived from their position as knowing subjects in concrete discursive situations.[78] I will focus on these structures to explore how knowledge is identified in specific loci in the *Troie* an represented in vastly different ways in its movement from Dares' *De Excidio* through Benoît's translation practices into the *Roman de Troie*.

The *Troie* begins with the prologue that we have already seen; the narrative, perhaps appropriately, begins with a tale that branches off from Benoît's opening concerns about truth and turns to origins and duplicity. Like Dares, Benoît opens with Jason and Peleus, however in the *Troie* this story lies under the shadow of uncertainty and mistrust projected by the preceding discussion of textual traditions. The episode treats of origins, as Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece provides a genealogy for enmity between the Greeks and Trojans. King Peleus, an otherwise "riches reis / Mout proz, mout sages, mout corteis" (lines 715-716), ("a powerful king who also was very worthy, sage and courtly") becomes threatened by the popularity of his nephew Jason who, Peleus fears, may one day overthrow him. Peleus's entire character is subsumed into this hatred: he developed a "cuer felon" (line 753), ("treacherous feelings"), hid his thoughts from those around him ("ne nul semblant ne l'en mostrot" line 762), operated in secret as "... ne voleit pas ne n'osot / Mostrer ne faire aucun semblant / Qu'il le haïst ne tant ne quant" (lines 786-788), ("... he did not want, nor did he dare, to show or reveal any sign of his hatred" while developing an "engin" (line 782), ("ruse") to lead Jason to his death. The description of Peleus is replete with terms for deceitfulness, recalling the *Differentie* seen above: *felon, engin* he "mout s'en celot" (line 761), ("hid very much from him"), he was "mal porpens" (line 781), ("wicked.") For an author concerned with truth, the choice to begin with a lively account of deceit is striking. The text does, however, enact a key association: this lexical field of trickery and subterfuge is married with that of fearing ignorance--Peleus is unaware of Jason's intentions:

> Quant ço vit li reis Peleüs
> Que Jason montot plus e plus
> E que chascun jor s'essauçot
> Dotanz en fu, paor en ot

[78] Gabriele Diewald and Marijana Kresić, "Objectivizing Subjectivity: Person Deixis and the Constitution of Dialogic Identity (With an Example of German Discourse Data)," in *Subjectivity in Language and in Discourse*, eds. Nicole Baumgarten, Inke du Bois and Juliane House (Emerald Group, 2012).

Que tant creüst, que tant montast
Que de la terre le getast... (lines 744-746)

When King Peleus saw Jason's ever-increasing rise and his celebrity that grew daily, he became anxious and began to fear that his nephew might grow and rise so high that he would drive him out of his own land.

This motivation and conclusion are clearly drawn from Dares's description of a paranoid Peleus, "Pelias rex ut vidit Iasonem tam acceptum esse omni homini, veritus est, ne sibi iniurias faceret et se regno eiceret."[79] ("When King Pelias saw that Jason was popular with everyone, he feared that he might do him some harm or drive him out of the kingdom.") Both texts set up a factual construction, as Peleus *saw* something (vit, vidit), and began to fear (paor en ot, veritus est). The *Troie* explores the nature of that fear more considerably, however, and connects it with ignorance. Peleus feared that "s'il vit longement" (line 747), ("if he [Jason] lived long enough"), he would be dispossessed of his kingdom; that "se il s'en vueut entremetre" (line 751), ("if Jason should decide to attempt it"), a plot to overthrow him would be successful. The description of his fear is predicated on conditions, expressed in *if* clauses, that is, it is determined by uncertainty. Peleus' deception, then, is a turned around, mirror-image of his self-representation of Jason: Peleus's deceitful behavior is a turning inward, making his own intentions unreadable in the image of his nephew's unknowable future.

Gaps in the circulation of knowledge lay the foundation for Peleus's ruse. He decides to send Jason after the Golden Fleece of Colcos, ensuring certain death, as "A rien n'esteit chose seüe / Coment la Toison fust eüe, / Onques nus hom saveir nel pot..." (lines773-775), ("No one knew how to get the Fleece, nor had anyone ever been able to know.") What the king *does* know, and what Jason does not, is that the quest is equivalent to sentencing his nephew to death. Peleus is "de ço bien a fiance" (v. 796), ("quite certain") that Jason will meet his death on Colcos. Jason had his own knowledge as well that constructed in his mind future success. He "knew" (set, 861) that his strength and endurance would bring the Golden Fleece into his possession, and "cuidot bien certainement, / Senz nul autre decevement" (v. 877-878), ("thought for certain that, without

[79] Dares, *De Excidio Troiae*, I.

detecting any deception") that his uncle's mission was for his own good. These are two competing world views are isolated from each other, since Peleus hides his intentions and Jason fails to note the need to reassure Peleus of his loyalty. The *Troie* draws out their respective knowledge-sets about the world (the nature of the quest for the Fleece and its feasibility) and their relative lack of knowledge of each other, dramatizing the incompatibility between them. Both project a false image of the other and both proceed on false knowledge: in the end, Jason will succeed in obtaining the Fleece, and the conflict between them is left unresolved, although Benoît implies that Peleus's enmity remains repressed.

Through these moves, Benoît sets up the stakes for opening his history with the fall of Troy in a very different way from Dares. The displacement of claims from the realm of knowledge to suppositions is continuously thematized throughout the Jason story: knowing the world slowly slips into an impression of the world. That gap between knowing and sensing is filled with deception: as Jason hears of the gifts, renown, and power promised by Peleus for returning with the Golden Fleece, he is seduced, "Mout li fu bel et mout li plot / E mout grant joie en sei en ot" (lines 859-860), ("He liked and was very pleased by what he heard, and it filled him with immense joy.") The gap in knowledge between Peleus and Jason is measured in language, over which Peleus has masterful control and which Jason passively receives. Elegant speech becomes duplicitous precisely because it plays with the borders between knowledge and impressions: *set* and *cuide*, although implying vastly different epistemic conditions (certainty versus likelihood) intermingle and weaken the sense that either Peleus or Jason know what is really going on.

Epistemic uncertainty continues to shape the unfolding of the Jason narrative framing the *De Excidio.* In linguistic terms, the *Troie* is breaching the barrier between different forms and degrees of epistemic modality, certainty and possibility. This move leaves open the knowability of the past: is the account certain, or only one that is *possible*? Benoît's translation technique first and foremost injects this question into the narrative's time in the dispute between the Trojans and the Greeks. In search of the island of Colchis, Jason and the Argonauts ("whoever wants to know more about them, read the *Argonautica*"[80] writes Dares) land on a coast near Phrygia, and news of the "mirandam navem" ("strange ship") with Greeks troubles King Laomedon. He sends a messenger to command them to leave immediately, specifying that "si non dicto obaudissent, sese

[80] "Demonstrare eos qui cum Iasone profecti sunt non videtur nostrum esse: sed qui volunt eos cognoscere, Argonautas legant."*De Excidio* I.

armis eos de finibus eiecturum" ("if they did not obey his command, he would drive them from the border by force.") Offended by Laomedon's cold reception, Jason and his party depart. This passage essentially ends Jason's story—Dares ties up the question in one long sentence, explaining that the Argonauts were unwilling to go to war over this offense, they successfully retrieved the Fleece, and went home: "Colchos profecti sunt, pellem abstulerunt, domum reversi sunt" (II), ("they set off for Colchis, took the Fleece, and returned home.") The story lacks resolution since it ends without detailing Jason's fate.

Benoît, however, takes Dares's Latin *si* clause and expands it. Laomedon's vague suspicions of a Greek invasion are fleshed out into a vivid image of certain destruction, as he hears that knights, "plus de set cenz, des plus hardiz / E de Grece des plus esliz" (lines 1007-1008), ("more than seven hundred of the most excellent and courageous of Greece") are flowing onto the Phyrgian shores. Dares's Laomedon describes the threat as a present contrary-to-fact condition: "consideravit commune periculum esse, si consuescerent Graeci ad sua litora adventare navibus" (II), ("He thought that it would be a danger for everyone if the Greeks were to begin arriving on his shores.") This hypothesis becomes a future certainty in the *Troie*: "Le païs avront confondu, / Les chasteaus ars, prise la preie, / Se il mout tost nes en enveie" (lines 1010-1012), ("They will overwhelm the land, burn the castles, take away spoils, if he does not send them all away.")[81] Laomedon, being "de grant sens" (v. 1015), ("of high intelligence") maps out a series of consequences: "Qu'il arrivassent a ses porz / il en sereit honiz e morz, / bien en porreit perdre s'onor" (lines 1019-1021), ("If they arrived at the gates, he could be shamed and killed, he could lose his kingdom from it.") This expansion highlights the cause of the first war over Troy which is, in a mirror to the conflict between Jason and Peleus, fundamentally epistemic: each side is unaware of the other's knowledge base and intentions. As the messenger Peleus sends to the Greek states, "Il ne set por quel afaire / Mais mout li torne a grant contraire" (lines 1045-1046), ("He does not know why [you came], but he is very angry], and they are ordered to leave. Jason and Hercules take turns addressing their grievances for this reception to the messenger, claiming asymmetric treatment, as King Laomedon would have been graciously welcomed in Greece, and they qualify his actions as giving them "grant honte" (1064), ("great shame").

[81] Burgess and Kelly's edition elides this transformation, by translating the phrase as a present contrary-to-fact condition, and add an additional "It was believed" that is not in the text, "It was believed that they would destroy the country, burning castles and seizing booty, if Laomedon did not drive them away forthwith." Burgess and Kelly, *The Roman de Troie*, 58.

This expansion ends with a reflection on communication, misunderstood functions, and turns the embassy from Laeomedon into a mirror for textuality. Hercules steps in and where Jason denounced Laomedon's actions, Hercules pushes forward into the future with a threat: the Greeks will return in three years and will not leave again so easily. He creates a frame in which "Ne ja por vié ne por manace, / O li seit bel, o li desplace, / N'i laisserons a sojorner" (lines 1097-1099), ("... no refusal or threat will keep us from staying here, whether he likes it or not.") The envoy takes offence, referring to Hercules' response as "laide chose" (line 1109) ("churlish thing"), and responding on a moral footing. But the vassal-envoy's overall reaction is not to push forward on those moral grounds by delivering an indictment of threats against envoys or the proper behavior expected of guests in a foreign land, both of which standards Hercules is breaking. Instead, he argues that his speech and function have, in essence, been exhausted: "Mon message vos ai dit bien / Ne cuit qu'i obliasse rien / Jo n'en ai plus o vos que faire" (lines 1111-1113), ("I have properly delivered my message to you; I do not believe that I left anything out of it. I have no more business with you.") Continuing on this thought, he lays out the state of things at the end of the discussion and connects it to his function, saying "Se il vos plaist, vos en ireiz, / E, s'il vos plaist, vos remandreiz; / Mais, ço sacheiz, jo loëreie / Que vos meïsseiz a la veie" (lines 1115-1118), ("If you like, you will depart, and if you prefer, you will stay. But know that I would advise you to leave.") Up to this point in the romance the envoy is the sole character attempting to engage with an accurate construction of reality as he knows it, by recognizing the contingency of knowledge and the extent to which *possibility* more than certainty shapes decision-making processes. That is, despite Jason's and Hercules' assurances of their desire for revenge, measured against their promises to leave and hesitation to engage with the Phrygians on the battlefield, the envoy admits uncertainty into his perspective epistemic: you may do this, you may not. That uncertainty is not deeply explored, the envoy does not dive into the issue to explore the unknowability of others' motivations and thoughts, but simply admits that their future choices are unavailable to his current knowledge. All of this is wrapped up with a reminder of his function: as an envoy, the clearest perspective he can provide is "I would advise [loëreie] that you leave [meïsseiz]." That is, he skirts the epistemic theorizing that Peleus and Jason engaged in earlier, each making *saveir* and *cuide* coincide as propositions to represent and project the future to themselves, with the understanding that as knowledge of the present was fully assimilated, it allowed a way to come to know the future. Instead, much like a ventriloquized, speaking, self-aware text, the envoy remains in a consultative

position, grounding his interaction with the Greeks in the model of a recipient of information that can, at best, observe and advise.

The envoy, in this sense, stands outside the perspective of Jason and Peleus as his epistemic grounding is altogether different and he presents a model different from what any character has so far followed--a model, however, which does match with Benoît's adroit manipulation of the knowability of events. That is, Benoît's perspective on his material is a mirror image of the envoy's, simply with the slight transformation that the unknowable area glimpsed by Benoît is in the past, not the future. While he does make strong claims to deliver the truth in the prologue, as we have seen, he often makes narrative interventions that attest to a much more ambivalent judgment of his knowledge-base. Earlier in the narrative, before Jason leaves Greece, Dares recounts that Peleus had a great ship built by Argus, in fact, "navim ... quam pulcherrimam" (I), ("the most beautiful ship"). It is perhaps this superlative that opened the door to the kind of theorizing on the ship's originality that will spur chastising from the *Troie*'s narrator. Benoît writes that the ship was large, well-constructed and strong, and for these reasons, he warns his reader, many people claim ("vuelent dire") that this is the first ship built with sails and a mast, but that "jo nel truis mie en l'autor" (line 914), ("I cannot find it in my author.") This is an issue of impressions, Benoît qualifies, "ço est cuidé" (line 919), ("it is believed") that Jason's ship was the first, but he cannot find any "autorité" (line 910), ("authority") to confirm this assertion. *Cuide* here, again, is associated with mistakes, false knowledge, unfounded assertions. It is somewhat curious that the verb governing Benoît's rhetorically more careful position, staking out comparative work to confirm the claim through concordant assertions elsewhere, can occupy an ambivalent epistemic position as well. *Truis* [find] in "Mais jo nel truis mie en l'autor" refers to the act of searching and locating--we can imagine Benoît paging through Dares, trying to identify a passage to confirm this hypothesis on Argus's ship, just as he presented his activity as a writer in his prologue. Only a few lines down, he notes that it was believed that Jason's ship was the first of its kind, "Mais n'en truis mie autorité" (line 920), that is, "I cannot find any authority *for this*." A slight change in the semantics, "en" to "le," for example, would push *truis* into epistemic territory, that is, "I do not find *it* [the text] to be an authority at all." Benoît, in any case, remains the outside authority, weighing possibilities and likelihoods. This narrative role is available to the translator as an affordance unavailable to the Latin text, since Dares is purportedly noting down events he

witnessed (even though Jason existed in the distant past for him), whereas Benoît, like the envoy, acts as an evaluator-translator.

The reliable distinction between *saveir* and *cuider* breaks down as a very possibility as the text continues, and this breakdown happens because of the way the text transforms Dares' Latin into Old French romance form. Cuider has an implied *may* in it, when compared with *saveir*--I do not know that world is like this, but, according to my knowledge, it *may* be like this, for I believe it to be so. By the intermixing introduced in the *Troie*, the force of *saveir* is attracted into the epistemic modality of *cuider*, beginning to upset settled claims to knowledge. Another character comes into play during the Golden Fleece narrative, after the encounter with the Trojan envoy, disrupting the otherwise straightforward trajectory followed by Jason, and in a passage that constitutes an addition to the story by Benoît, one that went undeveloped in Dares. This is Medea, whom Dares glossed over by referring readers to Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*. In the *Troie*, her disruption is not just in the space and structure of the narrative, as Medea warps reality around her: she knows everything about astronomy and necromancy, she can turn night into day, she can make people "look like" (line 1225), ("ço fust viaire") they are flying. As he describes Medea's arrival into the romance and the path of Jason's fate, Benoît's interventions mimic the racing mind of an invested reader, already trying to project the outcomes—"Dès or criem que trop ne li place" (line 1268), ("I already fear that she will be attracted to him!") and "Ne cuit ja l'en escondeïst" (line 1282), ("I doubt that she would have ever spurned him.") It is almost as if this episode itself constitutes an exception to the historical work being done elsewhere, where Benoît, as the master close reader, portrayed himself as a diligent researcher presenting the audience a carefully crafted text. Instead, he falls into the position of an uncertain narrator recounting his own readerly experiences.[82]

While Benoît transforms into an anxious and unsure reader, Medea is given the position of the savant outsider, a *deus ex machina* displaying epistemic mastery of the story's course and possessing a reality-warping ring. This move seems to coincide with an admission of ignorance on Benoît's part, as he admits that she treats Jason with an ointment "Ne sai com fu faiz ne coment"

[82] Sarah Kay has noted these disruptions in roles as key to the Medea and Jason episode, as both misconceive their own roles through magic or delusion: Jason, made a successful knight by doing what he cannot (the magic provided by Medea "seal[ing] up what should be open"), and Medea failing to perceive her status as a "contingent love object to be later cast aside." Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions: The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford University Press, 2001), 170.

(line 1672), (“I do not know how or with what it was concocted.”) This narrative intervention by the compiler is not unique in Old French romances and it occurs often enough to be an authorial habit for Benoît. However, in the context of the Medea episode, it takes on another effect in the text. Indeed, in this same passage Benoît manifests a deceitful compiler's certainty, falsely claiming that Medea and Jason spent the night naked together in bed “Ensi com jo el livre truis” (line 1644), (“as I find it in the Book”), combined with uncertainty, as he muses on the probability that, “Se il en Jason ne pecha / Cele nuit la despucela” (lines 1647-1648), (“Unless Jason did it [sex] badly, he took her virginity that night.”) By contrast, Medea provides key material for framing the dangers of the quest--she informs Jason of the beasts, spells and traps that line the path to the Fleece and emphasizes her role in revealing them (lines 1351-1386). Much like the messenger from Laomedon, she states the future in unequivocal terms: “... bien entent / N'en querreies chastiëment. / Seürs puez estre de morir” (lines 1401-1403), (“I knew well that you would not heed my warning. You can be certain of your own death.”) That is without her help, however, and she offers Jason a deal: if he agrees to marry her, she will provide him with information and enchanted objects that will protect him, reminding him that “Fors mei ne t'en puet rien aidier / Ne aveier ne conseilier” (lines 1417-1418), (“I am the only person who could help, guide and counsel you.”) Part of what she offers is the ointment referenced above, joined with a magic ring that blocks all spells, attacks, and makes the wearer invisible (lines 1643-1702). Medea, in fact, occupies a privileged epistemic position in this passage, being a character both all-knowing (correctly describing the dangers hidden on the path to the fleet) and all-powerful, manipulating a situation that appeared otherwise hopeless through means that reshape reality: spellcasting and incantations to speak to the cursed sheep bearing the Golden Fleece (lines 1711-1715). The narrator instead flounders through predictions and uncertainty, sounding similar to the courtiers around Medea who reason in terms of inferences: “Bien afichent veraiement, / S’as deus ne venist a talent, / Ne poüst pas estre engeignié. / Se d’eus ne li fust otreié, / Com faitement e en quel guise / Poüst par home estre conquise?” (lines 1995-2000), (“they claimed that, in truth, if the gods had been opposed to Jason's exploit, it could not have been obtained by any cunning artifice. If they had not granted it to him, how or in what way could any have acquired it?”) The courtly inferiors to Medea struggle to understand the situation just as much as the narrator does. Who knows what here? It’s not the members of the court, and it’s not even Benoît: it’s Medea.

To be sure, the Benoît-narrator is not presenting himself as unaware of the story's key details or of the nature of challenges to come or of individual personalities. Instead, the narrative's mixing of uncertainty and absolute knowledge invite closer consideration of the way this text explores not just how the story of Troy is recounted or translated, but how it is known. We are once again back in the ambiguity where *saveir* and *cuider*, knowing and believing, overlap. The text has strayed so significantly, already, from the promise of unambiguous revelation made at its opening. What is Benoît's close reading of Dares delivering us, besides a picture of history that is even more muddled than his source?

That question can be answered by examining the consequences that such a porous border between believing and knowing have on the narrative structure. To seal her relationship with Jason, Medea produces a statue of Jupiter that Jason must swear on, and he does indeed swear to be a faithful husband. However, the narrator breaks any illusions that the audience may have: "Jason ensi li otreia / Mais envers li s'en parjura; / Covenant ne lei ne li tint : / Por ço, espeir, l'en mesavint." (lines 1635-1638), ("Jason acceded to her wishes, but he did break faith with her. He kept neither covenant nor marriage vow. Perhaps that is why he suffered misfortune.") The narrator engages in an epistemic function that textuality is particularly adroit at manipulating, which is revelation of the future. The present textual moment is reinterpreted through the lens of a narrator aware of what comes next. The verbs here are in the past—*otreia*, *parjura*, *tint*, *mesavint*—yet that past is imposed by the narrator's time of composition, and what he really is engaging in is a revelation of the future, much like Medea's warning to Jason that "your death is certain." Jason does not actually abandon Medea in the narrative—Benoît only provides a swift summary once the fleece is obtained, claiming that "Assez l'en prist puis malement; / Quar, si com li Autors reconte, / Puis la laissa, si fist grant honte" (lines 2034-2036), ("Afterwards, things turned out very badly for her because, as my author says, [Jason] later abandoned her, thus committing a very shameful act.")

Medea and the narrator at times occupy similar functions with regards to the narrative, revealing future material, wielding tools that shape the direction of the story. The clauses by which their revelations are stitched together are, on morpho-syntactic terms, built on a competing structure. That is, they both occupy the first-person presenting what is to come: the narrator engages in direct epistemic formulations (e.g. "I am unsure") and Medea communicates her own certainty (i.e. "Ainz te di bien" line 1385). Benoît then tries to intrude again by talking about

Medea, saying what *she* did not know, that "things would turn out very badly for her." This play between narrator and character calls attention to not just what is known and the extent to which it is known, but who knows it. Benoît and Medea vie for the position that provides the real description of reality. Knowing is not just coincidental with believing, it is also spread out, polyphonic.

This worrying decentering of knowledge claims also occurs in a section, as already mentioned, that was an original composition by Benoît, absent in Dares' *De Excidio*, and an addition whose grounds are fraudulently presented. Indeed, the *De Excidio* openly admits to excising detail from the story of Jason by referring readers elsewhere: "demonstrare eos qui cum Jasone profecti sunt non videtur nostrum esse; sed qui volunt eos cognoscere, *Argonautas* legant." (*De Excidio*, I), ("It did not seem to be our business to list those who went out with Jason; whoever wants to know who they were can read the *Argonautica*.") Rather than noting this summary dismissal by Dares, Benoît is instead explicitly *duplicitous* with his audience. He assures his reader that Dares relates their story--he states, almost as if justifying the description, that the two lovers spent all night naked together in each other's arms, " Ensi com jo el livre truis" (line 1644), ("as I find in Dares's Book.") Instead, the *Troie*'s Medea is most likely drawn from Ovid's *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses*.[83] Medea as a character bearing hidden motives had already been used to enlighten classical texts by Servius in his commentary on Vergil's *Aeneid*, written in the late 4th or early 5th centuries CE. In the opening of his commentary on Book 4, he references Medea to explain Dido's behavior, motivation and place in the epic, referring like Dares to the *Argonautica*: "Apollonius *Argonautica* scripsit et in tertio inducit amantem Medeam; inde totus hic liber translatus est."[84] ("Apollonius wrote the *Argonautica* and in the third book portrays Medea in love; this book (of the *Aeneid*) was carried over entirely from there.")[85] Vergil described a Dido who "caeco carpitur igni" (*Aen*. 4.2), ("was consumed by an unseen flame") and Servius glosses "caeco" (unseen) by referencing Pyramus and Thisbé in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, another tale of subterfuge and hidden desires: "...unde Ovidius *quoque magis tegitur tanto magis aestuat ignis* [*Met* 4.64] *caeco* ergo

[83] Barbara Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Romans antiques* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 99.

[84] Servius, *Servius' Commentary on Book Four of Virgil's Aeneid*, trans. Christopher Michael McDonough (Bolchazy-Carducci, 2004), 2.

[85] Servius, *Commentary on Book Four,* 3.

igni 'ualidiore' cuius natura est ut compressus magis conualescet."[86] ("...here Ovid, 'the more a fire is covered, the more it heats up.' By "an unseen fire," therefore, means "by a fairly strong fire," the nature of which is to grow stronger when suppressed.") Medea participates in a vast intertext of duplicity in Late Antiquity; in Benoît's work, that duplicity has spilled over to the narrator who is dishonest about the very origin of his account. Benoît is drawing clear connections between the lines of deception running under Dares's text with a character that Dares excised, referring curious readers elsewhere. Instead, the attention paid to evidentiality, and the shift from third into first person, is what marks the *Troie*.

This phenomenon's linguistic foundation, and evidence of how it arises from a close reading practice, shines through clearly in a later part of the work. Benoît's writing often amplifies sections of particular doubt in Dares's narrative, when characters expressed uncertain knowledge through fear, doubt, and belief. For example, Laomedon's son Priam decides that Troy's renewed strength should allow them to retrieve his sister Hesiona, whom the Greeks had kidnapped during their first incursion. Priam's son Hector counsels prudence, and Dares provides a very brief description of his speech in which he accepts that the actions of the Greeks merit revenge, "sed vereri, ne perficere non possent quod conati essent: multos adiutores Graeciae futuros, Europam bellicosos hominese habere, Asiam semper in desidia vitam exercuisse et ob id classem non habere" (VI), ("that he feared that they would not accomplish what they had attempted; that the Greeks would have help, that Europe had many warriors, that Asia spent its life in laziness and for this reason had no navy.") This section attracted at least one medieval reader's attention, marked out by a marginal *NOTA* [Note!] in a 12th-century copy of the *De Excidio*, and accordingly this intervention is expanded into over 70 lines in Old French:

[86] Servius, *Commentary on Book Four*, 2.

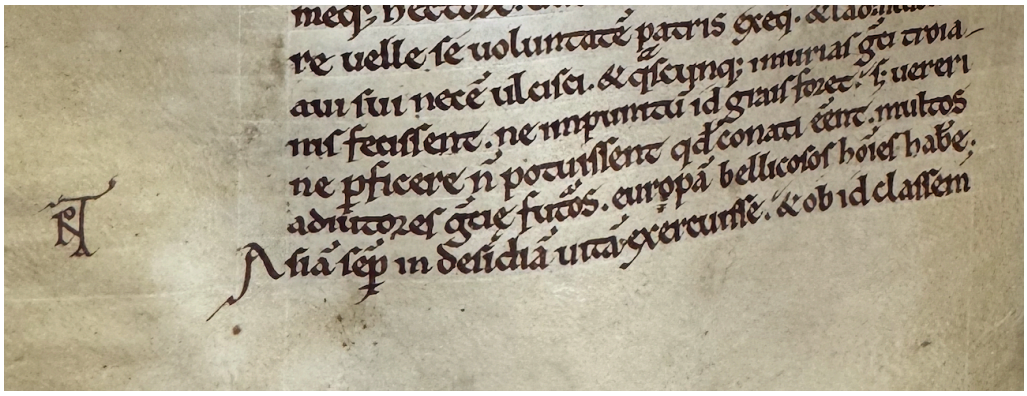


Figure 2.3 British Library Royal 15 A XXII, 75v[87]

In the Latin, Hector's perspective is subsumed into a series of clauses of indirect discourse: there is no Hector saying "I…" but rather a narrator summarizing the information given, with infinitives serving as objects of infinitives: *vereri, perficere, futuros [esse], habere, exercuisse, non habere.* Benoît attends to this passage, by amplifying it and exploring the words by which knowledge can be communicated. After developing why it is just to seek vengeance on the Greeks and describing his burning desire to do so, Hector, rather than fearing, instead speaks in terms of what is known: "Bien savons tuit qu'en tot le mont / N'a si tres fort gent come il sont" (lines 3809-3810), ("We all know that nowhere in the world are there any people as strong as the Greeks"), followed by a list of those strengths. With regards to the ships, rather than explaining that the Trojans are lazy, he notes that they are simply ill-equipped and declares himself ill-equipped to pronounce a decision: "A ço ne sai conseil doner. / Senz nes ne sai com faitement / Lor poissons faire nuisement" (lines 3832-3834), ("I do not know what advice to give for that. Without ships I do not know by what means we can do them any harm.") That this knowledge comes from Hector, emanating from a speaker, is more strongly materialized in the romance, and emphasizes the extent to which decision making, rather than emerging from a larger moral, cultural code determining behavior, proceeds from individual knowledge bases. That is, the basic structure of Latin, through these infinitives, allows for the generalization of perspectives as agreed-upon facts; it papers over the individual voices that provide differing perspectives, which Benoît's close reading instead draws out. This shift occurs continuously in the movement from the Latin diary to French romance.

The shift to first person, then, allows for this extended focus on individual knowledge-bases and their quality as isolated perspectives, that is, this shift implies that information about the

[87] Photograph by Adam Grant.

world proceeds not from an external, objective source, but rather is dispersed among individuals and expressed on a sliding scale from certainty to doubt. The effects of that mixing can be clearly seen through another encounter with Hector, this time with his wife Andromache who experiences a prophetic dream. Twice in both texts, Hector's sister Cassandra, gifted with prophetic powers, reveals the disastrous future of war with the Greeks. The first revelation comes immediately after Priam decides to raise an army to attack the Greeks, which Dares describes in straightforward terms: “Cassandra postquam audivit patris consilium, dicere coepit quae Troianis futura essent, si Priamus perseveraret classem in Graeciam mittere” (VIII), (“Once Cassandra heard her father's determination, she stated what would happen to the Trojans if Priam persisted in sending a fleet against Greece.”) The operative clause here is “quae Troianis futura essent,” combining a general, but fairly common Latin formula for expressing the future with a relative clause and the subjunctive imperfective of *esse* in a relative clause of characteristic. This rather vague type of construction waters down the content and impact of Cassandra's predictions--that is, not only does the narrative abandon them (Dares fails to follow up with what those predictions were) but the grammar itself confines them to the modal background of the phrase. This phrase, while making a claim towards future knowledge, weakens its epistemic stakes through its semantics.

A set of linguistic features of Old French along with structural elements of the romance genre render this style and its epistemic consequences nearly impossible to port over into the romance. Old French is less disposed to employing verbal clauses for abstract concepts (i.e. “what would happen” as in Latin “quae future sunt” instead of a simple substantive, “the future”) and less attached to the subjunctive in subordinated clauses than Latin. Moreover, the dialogical nature of romance, populated with finite clauses delivered by separate characters speaking to each other, requires set perspectives. Revelation in the *Troie* rests on considerably more concrete grounds, rather than objective facts established by a neutral narrator. Cassandra spells out the situation based on clearly drawn causes and consequences:

> “Nel vos penseiz,” fait el, “por rien;
> Quar, s'en Grece vait li navies,
> Poi porrons puis preisier noz vies.
> Troie en revertira en cendre:
> Ne nos en porra rien defendre.

A mal irons e en peril,
E li plusor en lonc eissil." (lines 4150-4156)

"Make no mistake about it," she exclaimed, "for if our fleet goes to Greece, we can consider our lives to be of very little worth. Troy will again be reduced to ashes; nothing can prevent this. We shall endure destruction and peril, and many people will embark on prolonged banishment."

Cassandra's prediction is assuredly more vivid than the Latin in its description of the consequences of war with the Greeks. Syntactically, the future and first person work together to emphasize her status as a knowing subject. As if tacitly aware of the possible weaknesses of the future form, which I have characterized more as a mood than a tense, Benoît adroitly shifts it into the past, adding: "Bien lor anonçot chose veire: / Cui chaut? qu'il ne la voustrent creire" (lines 4159-4160), ("She clearly was predicting the truth. What good did this do? They refused to believe her.") Benoît's Cassandra speaks in similar conditional terms to her counterpart in Dares (both predicated on an "if" clause concerning the Trojan fleet) but then employs concrete verbs in the future specifying the consequences, beyond Dares' laconic "quae Troanis futura essent" ("what [future] things there would be for Troy"): *porrons*, *revertira*, *irons*, along with concrete images of lives being erased and Troy burnt to the ground. Cassandra, in Old French, resolves a tension or at least an epistemic ambiguity from Dares by providing a forceful image of destruction through future certainty and concrete images that strengthens the vibrancy of her knowledge.

A model of knowledge narratively and dialogically oriented around individuals is pursued in the *Troie* through the relation of Andromache's dream, halfway through the romance. Yet here, it demonstrates the destabilizing propensity of polyphony. According to Dares, the daughter of Priam and Hecuba experiences a dream vision that indicates "Hectorem non debere in pugnam procedere" (24), ("Hector must not go into battle.)" Her attempts to intercede are swiped away by Hector as "muliebra verba" (24), ("womanly words"), and she turns to her father so that he may block Hector's participation on the field. A confused scene follows: when Hector learns that he is to be left behind, he chastises Andromache and states that "nec retineri ullo modo potuit" (24), ("no means could hold him back"). Andromache twice uses their child as an affective tool to garner sympathy, first with her husband ("Astyanactem filium protendens ante pedes Hectoris eum

revocare non potuit") and then, in a second visit, with her father ("proiectoque ad genua Astyanacte filio suo eum revocare mandat".) While Priam now explicitly forbids Hector from meeting the Greeks, Hector ignores the order and is later killed on the battlefield by Achilles. In a strange turn, during her second plea, Andromache seems to reveal that her dream vision in fact revealed that Hector would find a way to fight, and that her pleas were in vain: "refert quae in somnis viderit velle Hectorem ueloci saltu in pugnam ire" (24) ("she recounted what she had seen in her dream, that Hector was willing to quickly jump into battle.") In his text, Dares draws a picture of inevitability, of an approaching, unstoppable timeline of necessity: Andromache's dream is not a depiction of Hector's future death but rather his inertia towards that death rooted in his desires: he *wants* (velle) such a fate. It is something that, for Andromache, must not (non debere) happen, but it could not (non potuit) be stopped.

The *Troie* takes a decidedly different approach. The narrator opens the passage with a dramatic call to attention, "Oëz com fait demostrement!" (line 15279), ("Listen now to what had been prophesied!"), assuring the audience that the divinely-inspired dream visions convinced Andromache of the truth: "Mais de ço fu seüre e certe, / S'Ector s'en ist a la bataille, / Que ocis i sera senz faille" (lines 15291-15293), ("But of one thing she was certain and convinced: if Hector went out to do battle, he would surely die.") The narrator predicates the future on Andromache's current perspective, drawing consequences from the knowledge available to her: "La dame sot la destinee / Que la nuit li fu demostree" (lines 15295-15296), ("The lady learned of his destiny as it was revealed to her that night.") This formulation is markedly different from that of Dares, which constructed the inevitability of Hector's death on what cannot happen, what is not possible, what cannot be done. Two issues collide here: first, as we have seen in the *Troie*, *knowing* is not a sign that the narrator confers on the character's perspective a particular truth value, and second, as I argued in my first chapter, the translation of pagan prophecy from antiquity into romance leads to an internally inconsistent discourse. Hector responds to his wife's claims with a particularly forward invective contesting their validity, stating what he has learned ("sai bien e vei" v. 15329) from her speech, namely "Qu'en vos n'a sen ne esciënt" (line 15331), ("that you have lost your good sense and your reason"). What happens in the Troy, then, is that epistemic phrasing is used to unsettle, rather than determine, the truth--the straight arrow of fate depicted by Dares becomes a nexus of contested realities.

This epistemic spreading of knowledge among a chorus of voices ruptures and disrupts centralized knowledge storage allowed for by the savant narrator, which is the basis of Dares's diary and the ostentatious foundation of Benoît's authority in his prologue. This possibility is thematized in the text shortly after Cassandra's intervention. Menelaus sails past the Trojan fleet, commanded by Paris, as it heads for Greece, a moment which Dares dramatized: "Alexandro in itinere occurrit et mirabatur classem regiam quo tenderet. Utrique occurrentes aspexerunt se invicem inscii quo quisque iret." (9) ("He came across Paris and marveled at the royal fleet, and where it was heading. Each party looked at the other, unaware of where each was going.") Dares emphasizes the chance meetings (in itinere occurrit) and wondering born from ignorance (mirabatur...inscii), yet part of that wondering is on the reader as well: Menelaus has been effectively absent from the narrative, and only in the following chapter does Helen's abduction by Paris prompt Menelaus's assumption of agency in the conflict. The re-imagining of this scene in the *Troie* amplifies these two sites of ignorance:

> Fu Menelaus entrez en mer :
> Dreit a Pile voleit sigler.
> Nestor l'aveit mandé a sei,
> Mais ne sais pas dire por quei.
> ...
> Quant cil des nes s'entrechoisirent
> E li un d'eus les autres virent,
> Ne sorent dire ne penser
> Quel part chascuns voleit aler ;
> Ne se voustrent tant aproismier
> Que l'uns poüst l'autre areisnier. (lines 4223-4238)
>
> Menelaus put out to sea. He intended to sail straight to Pylos. Nestor had summoned him, but I do not know why ... When those in the ships spotted and observed one another, they could not tell or determine whither each wanted to go. They declined to draw near enough to speak to each other.

Benoît's “ne sais pas dire por quei” takes up here greater valency than the trope of a compiler's inability to find answers in their source material. In this case, Dares is effectively silent on why Menelaus was summoned by Nestor--yet, as the *Troie* has been dissolving the authority of the narrator as an anchoring point for knowing the world, the admission here can be re-read as the narrator's point among a constellation of knowing characters, that is, as an emphasis on the narrator's ignorance, rather than the inaccessibility of that knowledge for the reader. This reading is strengthened by the narrator's uncertain grasp of the story, with an admission of “ne sais pas dire por quei.”

This passage hints at the destabilization in authority brought by the epistemic flattening in the text. Menelaus's “mirabatur” (“wondered at”) spreads to the Old French narrator, who in his own wondering at Menelaus's motivations, muses on his lack of information at the spectacle before him: “ne sais pas dire por quei.” Much like the two passing ships, Benoît subsumes himself into a space of limited knowledge, bricked off from a full understanding of the events unfolding before his eyes. The consequences of this shift in epistemic framing and the breaking up of monolithic knowledge bases are explored more greatly in a later section that is unique to the Troie, that is, which is absent from Dares and Dictys' texts, the love narrative between Briseida and Diomedes. Briseida is presented as the daughter of Chalcas, a Trojan commander of unreliable loyalty,[88] and acting as an anti-Helen in the story, becomes like her father another unreliable character with unreliable knowledge. Calcas requests that Agamemnon demand that Briseida be handed over to the Greeks as a prize of war, in a veiled attempt to save his daughter from the future destruction of his city which he sees as inevitable. Briseida appears to be tainted by the treachery of her father, and Benoît's surface interest is in demonstrating her betrayal of the Trojan Troilus. The two are recognized by the Trojan people as lovers in an ideal amorous union (nevertheless outside of marriage), as “El li raveit de sei fait don / E de son cors e de s'amor: / Ço saveient tuit li plusor” (lines 13268-13270), (“...she too had given to him both her body and her love: many people knew about their liaison.”) The separation caused by Calcas's plan pains them and, even before her removal to the Greek host, interrupts their love: “Mais la dolor qu'al cuer lor toche / Lor fait venir

[88] As Benoît writes, “Ne voleit pas d'ore en avant / Qu'ele fust plus en lor comune, / Car trop les het, ço set, Fortune.” (lines13094-13096), (“Her father did not want her to remain in Trojan company any longer, for, as he well knew, Fortune hated the Trojans.”) Constans took this as a quote from Calcas talking about Briseida, that is, that Briseida is the subject of “voleit,” whereas Burgess and Kelly understand it as a narrative description of Calcas's disposition. I am inclined to side with the latter; cf. *Le Roman de Troie*, ed. Constans, vol. 2, 274-275; Burgess and Kelly, *The Roman de Troie*, 202.

par mi la boche / Les lermes qu'il lor chiet des ieuz." (lines 13305-13307), ("But the sorrow that gripped their hearts made the tears falling from their eyes flow over their mouths.")

Benoît moves from this gripping scene to an uncategorical denouncement of Briseida, as he warns the reader that while the crowds were so distressed as she was marched out of the city to the Greeks, her love for Troilus would soon end, "Por que chascuns sopire e plaint" (line 13428), ("That was why everyone was sighing and lamenting.") By claiming this future for Briseida, Benoît quickly shifts to a general misogynistic denouncement of women: "A femme dure dueus petit : / A l'un ueil plore, o l'autre rit" (lines 13441-13442), ("Woman's grief is of short duration. If one eye sheds tears, the other is smiling.") Women are, in fact, most deceptive, and anyone who believes in them is punished. The tale, then, is less about Briseida and Troilus, and more an illustration of the unreliability and scheming of women and the victimhood of men. Benoît recognizes that "cele que tant a bontez" (line 13458), ("that woman who has so many fine qualities") may blame him for these claims, but he only shifts his tone by instead praising the rare virtuous and "constant" women that may exist.

Benoît then presupposes for the reader not just a future betrayal of Briseida's given word to be a faithful lover, but an internal, psychological disposition to be aware of her own duality (charitable on the outside, duplicitous on the inside) and to mobilize it for her own benefit: she ought to, just like most women, have one eye weeping while the other flashes a smile. Yet the narrative resists this framing, which in retrospect appears somewhat forced. Briseida begs for Troilus's forgiveness, promises to maintain her love, and they separate after having sworn vows of faithfulness to each other. The Briseida painted by the narrative does not demonstrate the duplicity that the narrator seeks to associate her with, and in fact epistemic modality penetrates the language depicting her departure:

La danzele cuide morir,
Quant de celui deit departir
Qu'ele tant aime e tant a chier.
Ne li fine hore de preier
Qu'il ne l'oblit, quar a sa vie
Ne sera ja autrui amie ;
S'amor toz jorz li guardera

Ja mais jor autre ne l'avra,
Ne rien avra joie de li. (lines 13495-13503)

The maiden thought that she was dying when she had to leave the one that she loved so much and held dear. She constantly begged him not to forget her, for she would never become another man's beloved as long as she lived. She would always retain her love for him, and never would another man receive joy from her.

This passage is hard to interpret given its context--it may be some kind of ironic third-person quotation, characterizing what she said from Troilus's perspective. Here the reader is slipped behind the eyes of Briseida's lover to experience the moment of separation in visceral terms, seeing the pain she expresses. Yet that readerly position also penetrates into Briseida's perspective on the world and builds up the experience from Briseida's own epistemic frame. She "believes" that she is dying, rather than saying "I am dying"; she makes promises in the future that attend to her own knowledge basis, that no lover "will" replace Troilus, and no other "will" ever receive joy from her. The infusion of modality into the composition of the narrative prevents smooth narrative development.

Benoît's *Roman de Troie* is fundamentally different from the histories of Dares and Dictys, although it clearly grows from them, magnifying features rooted in their first-person composition. It insists on who knows what, and who does not know what, here in the attempt to dramatize the narrator's revelation of the future, the Trojan people's beliefs, Troilus's convictions, and Briseida's behavior, while fitting them into an explicable psychological mold. Yet in the language itself there is a constant coming and going back and forth from the present to the past to the future, to line up an internal modal narrative (showing chains of knowing and consequences of actions) at the expense of chronology. By the end, we are told that Briseida does indeed fall in love with Diomedes, her Greek captor, but Benoît abandons dialogue as a mode for exploring this change--rather, he tells us that, "Anceis que veie le quart seir, / N'avra corage ne voleir / De retorner en la cité. / Mout sont corage tost müé / Poi veritable e poi estable ..." (lines 13859-13863), ("Before she had reached the fourth evening, she would not have felt like returning to the city or have any wish to do so. Human hearts change rapidly, they are seldom true and stable ...") Benoît here moves beyond a criticism of fickle women and instead characterizes human sentiments at large.

The instability of knowledge, desires, and intentions taints *all* perspectives, and this despite Benoît's unambiguous assertion to absolute epistemic control. Attending to certainty and knowledge within the narrative did not ensure coherence and regularity, inconsistencies seeped in as that attention was deployed over time. In part, this feature arises from the linguistic structures employed by Benoît: knowledge claims in the *Troie*, such as Hector's counseling of Priam, Medea's mastery of the world and predictions for Hector's death, are instantiated *within* individuals, including the narrator, a knowing "I." And yet, the choices made in Benoît's translation of Dares mark individual claims to knowledge with failure, as seen above. This turn is curious, since much of the text is concerned with, as Benoît writes, "Saveir par com fait acheison / Avint cette destrucion" (lines 2829-2830), ("to know for what cause the great destruction took place"). The *Thèbes*'s radical departure from the tradition, even the case in Benoît's own time, to set out an unequivocal account of the causes and events of the Trojan war shines through here. As we have seen, Benoît claims the guiding desire to know the causes of the war, despite his text's inability final to realize this goal. Yet other 12th-century imaginings of the Fall of Troy stuck to this plan, including an anonymous untitled poem referred to by scholars as *Pergama flere volo* ("I want to mourn Troy") after its opening lines.[89] In modified form it precedes Dares's *De Excidio Troiae* in at least one manuscript:

[89] André Boutemy, "Le poème Pergama flere volo et ses imitateurs du XIIe siècle," *Latomus* 5 (1946): 233-244; Mora-Lebrun, "Joseph of Exeter," 115.

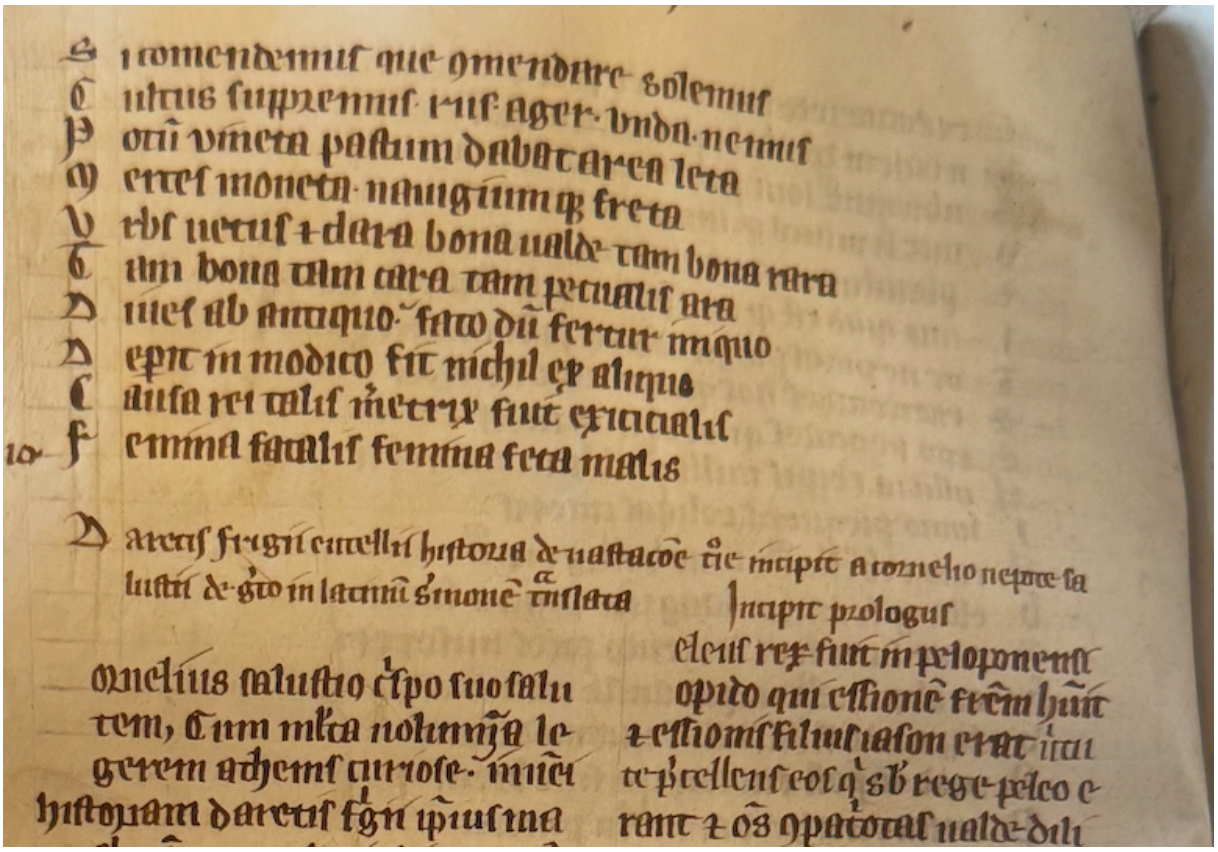


Figure 2.4 Caius and Gonville 402/411 257v (circ. 1306)[90]

Here, a truncated end to *Pergama flere uolo* brushes up against the incipit of the *De Excidio* and provides a possible framework for the reader about to enter into Dares' account:

> Diues ab antiquo fato dum fertur iniquo
> Deperit in modico fit nichil ex aliquo
> Causa rei talis m*er*etrix fuit exicicialis [sic] [91]
> Femina fatalis femina feta malis

> Rich from ancient times, until taken by an unfair fate,
> It perishes in a blink, nothing is made from something.
> The cause of such a thing was a destructive harlot
> A deadly woman, a woman teeming with evil.

[90] Photography by Adam Grant.

[91] The scribe most likely doubled a syllable here by accident, writing *exicicialis* for *exicialis*.

These lines evoke the dramatic antithesis that characterizes the Fall of Troy, the brutal swing from wealth to ruin: “dives” (“wealth”) lines up visually with “deperit” (“perishes”) on the line below. Where the copyist of this version of *Pergama flere volo* innovates is in the abrupt ending, since the longer version in circulation in the 12th century contained twelve more lines, discussing Helen, fallen Greek and Trojan heroes, and extolling the virtues of Homer's verse.[92] Here, the ruin of Troy is cut short once it is attributed to a “meretrix ... exicialis” (“destructive harlot”), as if the identity and implication of the “femina feta malis” (“woman teeming with evil”) were obvious enough. The *Pergama* is not an outlier in medieval reading interests: in the textual transmission of Guido delle Colone's 13th-century translation of the *Roman de Troie* into Latin, the most numerous readerly engagements through underlining, *notae* and maniculae (hands drawn in the margins pointing to passages) were misogynistic condemnations of the “inconsistency of women.”[93] A reader of this manuscript enters into Dares' account with a clear, and foreboding, interpretive framework: Troy's fall was caused by an immoral woman. By providing such a tight framing, the manuscript sets aside an approach to the text that emphasizes slowly discovering the story through narrative development in favor of the exploration of the *causes*: we know that Troy will fall, and here we will find out *why* (a woman).

Truth in Benoît's version, as we have seen, is situated in his focus on a specific set of causes, but not causes of the war. Instead, the verse narrative explores who knows what and why things happened. I am tempted to think that this manuscript or a manuscript from the same family was consulted by Benoît in preparing his critical translation. A particular error in the incipit to Dares mistakenly rewriting the proper name Cornelius Nepos as instead “Cornelio nepote Salustii” (“Cornelius [Nepos] the nephew of Salust”) figures in Benoît's description of Cornelius as “un nevo” (line 82) (“a nephew”) of Sallust, a fairly rare misprision in the manuscript evidence.[94]

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[92] Barthélemy Hauréau, *Mélanges poétiques d’Hildebert de Lavardin* (G. Pedone-Lauriel, 1882), 207-209.

[93] Florence Tanniou, “The Hand that Touched Troy: Using *Maniculae* in Latin and French Manuscripts (Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, Guide delle Colonne's *Historia* and their Respective Prose Versions),” *Anglia* 42, no. 3 (2024): 471.

[94] Louis Faivre D’Arcier, *Histoire et géographie d’un mythe. La circulation des manuscrits du De Excidio Troiae de Darès le Phrygien (VIIe-XVe siècles)* (École nationale des chartes, 2006), 13-14. Other errors in scanning Cornelius' name, as well as the title of Dares' text, cropped up over its medieval transmission, but “Cornelius the nephew of Sallust” remains relatively rare. The oldest copy of the *De Excidio* dating to the late 8th century retitles it as *De Vastatione Troiae* (*The Ravaging of Troy*) and states it was written “a Cornilione poete,” that is “by Cornelio the poet” (Clark, 89-90). I have not found mention of this coincidence elsewhere.

Regardless of this possible proximity with the *Roman de Troie*, the misogyny evident in this poem, while taken up by Benoît, is nevertheless undermined by the epistemic structure of the romance's narrative. That is, while the narrator goes to great lengths to condemn women just as the *Pergama* lyric does, there really is no central truth in the Briseida narrative: there are competing perspectives, the culmination of translation strategies taken up earlier. While the *Pergama* is able to condemn feminine scheming, Benoît's translation techniques, insofar as they allow epistemic polyphony to flourish, are more invested in who knows what and when, allowing multiple readings of the *De Excidio* to inhabit the narrative simultaneously. *Acheison* itself is a slippery term in Old French compared to the Latin *causa*, covering "multiple senses, from occasion and cause to obstacle or difficulty, already hint[ing] at the friction between apparent accidents of history and its underlying inevitability."[95] Benoît's own writing strategies undermine the narrator's attempts to use the text as a vehicle for unequivocal claims, *acheisons* do not furnish the straightforward etiology provided by *causae*.

2.5 Close Reading, the Materiality of Writing and the *Troie*

I would like to conclude on two points. First, that Benoit's translation methodology maps onto close reading not just through its rhetorical and stylistic strategies, but also to the extent to which conflicts over its propensity to produce truth permeate discussions of its means and goals. These conflicts arise, in my view, from two sources, one grounded in methodology and another in the institutional and social context in which the critic's work takes place, conflicts which are more deeply understood when the nature of attention as a process that unfurls over time, and which naturally encounters points of failures, is brought to bear on the matter. Second, that the discourse on duplicity which the *Troie* inhabits is markedly different from the one attached to it by its later renaissance and modern readers, who focus on its status as a consciously-devised forgery, and that it is rather an engagement with textuality itself as a source of deception.

Around 150 years after Benoît wrote his romance, another medieval translator explained his own take on the reliability of Trojan history texts. The anonymous writer of the *Ovide moralisé*, the first full translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into Old French from the first quarter of the 14th century, looks back on Benoît's work in the same light that Benoît had addressed the authorities

[95] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "Remembering the Trojan War: Violence Past, Present, and Future in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's Roman de Troie." *Speculum* 90, no. 2 (2015): 372.

available in his own time. That is, Benoît had become a notable contributor to the story of Troy whose intervention needed weighing. Benoît "bien translata la letre" (XII, 1717) ("translated the text well, 821),[96] yet in a crucial qualification, that "bien" refers to Benoît's rhetorical abilities as a poet and writer, rather than a writer of history.[97] For that dimension of the *Troie*, the anonymous translator of the *Ovide* subjects Benoît to the same criticism that the latter had afforded Homer: "Il ne dist pas en touz leuz voir" (XII, 1723) ("...he does not speak the truth in every instance," 821). The *Ovide moralisé* indicts Benoît's ability to understand figurative speech, an unsurprising position for a writer who lifts the integument veiling Ovid's verses by demonstrating how Apollo's pursuit of Daphne represents Christ's transformation into materiality through the virgin birth.[98] Instead, the *Ovide* relocates the truth in Homer, as the number of Romans and Greeks who approved of his works "Tesmoignent la matire à voire" (XII, 1740), ("testify to the truth of the material...") Truth is a sticky analytic for engaging with the story of Troy, it attached itself to the textual traditions in ways unlike the other *romans d'antiquité*.

It is, perhaps, the possibility of fraud and deception that underlie Dares and Dictys--found texts and alien languages are inherently subject to suspicion--that cemented the gaze desirous of unmasking lies and revealing the truth in readers approaching them. Yet it is also a habit to delegitimize specific texts as misguided and wrong and, in a wider perspective, entire fields of research. In a 21st-century parallel, recent trends in university governance sidelining the humanities in favor of fields (often erroneously) considered more economically productive or apt to produce employable graduates have agitated debates on the tools, methods and goals of literary studies. One significant area of push and contestation has been that point of contact with a text in a fundamental method deployed in literary criticism since the 20th century, which is close reading. Much like the medieval encounter with Troy, the propensity for one approach rather than another to produce "truth" has become lodged within academic discourse. In a 2024 essay contesting Jonathan Kramnick's claims about close-reading's ability to produce truth and knowledge on a studied object, Ryan Ruby recontextualizes Kamnick's emphasis on close reading as a "story about

[96] References to the *Ovide moralisé* are taken from C. De Boer's five-volume Old French edition undertaken between 1915 and 1938, and from the 2023 English translation by K. Sarah-Jane Murray and Matthieu Boyd.

[97] "Moult fu li clers bons rimoierres, / cortois parliers et biaus faigtierres" (XII, 1719-1720), ("The clerk was very good at making rhymes, a courtly speaker, and a good craftsman," 821.)

[98] *Ovide moralisé* I, 3215-3260.

criticism that is partial,"[99] one that accords too great a place to the "institutional, generic, stylistic, and methodological norms of the English department" for all of literary studies. Ruby's main contention is that close reading fails to produce actual knowledge: it "suffers from an induction problem"[100] since larger claims about meaning in a work "must be supplemented with (other) truth-bearing functions of scholarship," such as historical contextualization. Close reading can too often engage in irresponsible data analysis ("the difference between a cherry-picked quote or passage and an appositely picked one is vague"[101]), and it is fundamentally incompatible with features of the hard sciences that make claims about the world, such as reproducibility. Indeed, unlike the hard sciences, literature does not strive to produce verifiably true claims for Ruby: "a programmatic dissensus rather than consensus is what the discipline [literary studies] encourages and rewards."[102] Ruby's goal is not to discredit literary criticism, but rather to orient the discussion away from the epistemic and towards ethical grounds, exploring how other engagements with textual criticism than close reading or academic publications can be useful, rewarding, or meaningful encounters with literature. Here, works of fiction are brought to the fore as alternative forms of dialogue with texts that they critique in their own way such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* as commentary on Homer. Both Kramnick and Ruby are nonetheless committed to wrenching thinking about criticism out of the shadows of abstraction and into the light revealing its materiality--and in any case Kramnick's approach is not restricted to the institutionally-nourished genres of elite (tenured) circles suggested by Ruby, as he does not draw an exhaustive border around the practices that constitute close reading.[103] Kramnick thinks of criticism as a material process, while Ruby instead valorizes writing providing a "carnal 'knowledge of"[104] through corporeal, experiential and erotic personal writing that mixes the writer's subjective and material experience of the world with literary criticism.

These criticisms appear to be opposed on the question of what literary criticism should be doing, either exploring experiences and borrowing from other fields to produce meaning from a

[99] Ryan Ruby, "Criticism as a Way of Life," *New Literary History* 55, no. 3-4 (2024): 454.

[100] Ruby, "Criticism as a Way of Life," 455.

[101] Ruby, "Criticism as a Way of Life," 456.

[102] Ruby, "Criticism as a Way of Life," 457.

[103] Colin Vanderburg, "The Impossible Critic: Laura Riding and the Way We (Don't) Read Now," *ELH* 92, no. 2 (2025): 520.

[104] Ruby, "Criticism as a Way of Life," 470.

text or focusing on the text alone to produce truth from it. Yet they both devalue abstraction in the search for truth and promote material productions and interactions, finding verifiable, or at least relatable and credible truth claims that weave embodied experiences into knowing the universe, either the a priori of the critic for Kramnick or embodied affects for Ruby. It is particularly telling that Ruby's first sentence situates Kramnick's work in the context of political upheaval: "Times of crisis typically see returns to myths of origin."[105] For Kramnick, that would be a return to the origin of literary criticism in English departments, close reading, in times of crisis for the humanities in the American university system, which Ruby indicts as a myth for a field in crisis after a century dividing itself from other forms of critique considered too plebeian.

Benoît's own time saw a crisis in leadership interwoven into the literary practices of the intellectual elites. While in his prologue Benoît explicitly engages with discourses on veracity, that head-on confrontation with a text's truthfulness is diluted as his verse lines continue to stream from the wax tablet and onto the velum. The main grounds on which he anchored the authority of his text to know history was in a sustained linguistic construction of epistemic modes, rather than the contestation of truth claims. The lack of *fides* in traditional authorities wrapped up in current scholarship on critique carries particular echoes for a writer of history such as Benoît de Sainte-Maure in the 12th century. That is, the disintegration of power structures in society was evoked by writers throughout the 12th century. Quoting the Book of Hosea, Peter the Venerable wrote to Pope Innocent II in 1138 from Burgundy that "...terra nostra ut nostis *sine rege et principe* existens, quibuslibet exposita raptoribus est..." ("...our land, as you know, is without king or prince, and left open to all sorts of plunderers...")[106] Around the same time, Orderic Vitalis, in documenting the rebellion in Normandy against Henry I from 1118-1119, noted the pain at seeing "sacerdotalis pene adnichilatur reverentia, cui pene omnis denegatur obedientia; vehementer insurgente et furente malorum violentia." ("respect for the priesthood has almost wholly disappeared together with obedience to it; evil and violence erupt and ravage everywhere.") Orderic compared early 12th-century Normandy to the rebellious Israelites of the Book of Kings, for whom "non erat rex neque dux" ("there was neither king nor duke").[107] Wace, at the end of his *Roman de Rou*, explicitly calls into question the reliability of lordship, as he hands his history project off to Benoît:

[105] Ruby, "Criticism as a Way of Life," 453.

[106] *Letters of Peter the Venerable*, 21 (P. 42), ed. Giles Constable vol 1.

[107] Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 228 Latin, 229 English.

although “Li reis jadis maint bien me fist” (line 111425), (“The king in the past was very good to me...”), it appears that Henry II changed his mind, and “n'est mie remés en mei” (line 11430), (“it is not my fault.”) He laments that “e se il tot doné m'eüst / ço qu'il me pramist, mielz me fust.” (lines 11427-11428), (“and if he had given me everything he promised me things would have gone better for me.”)[108] Thomas Bisson claims that the experience of power was that of violence, with little distinction made between lordship and war until the mid-12th century when “the recognition of social purpose amongst those serving lord-princes and urban communities” began to surface and the exercise of power began to be limited by normative judicial procedures.[109] Benoît, then, not only grew up in a period particularly aware of the vicissitudes of lordly exercise of power and the unreliability of authorities but also was explicitly informed by the predecessor of his historical project, Wace, of the consequences of falling out from favor. And he worked on Troy, a mythic place as an origin that offered alternative modes of thought to “une vision du monde exlusivement théocentrique”[110] The discovery of new authorities, Dares and Dictys, offering new Trojan origins for the present, is thus a particularly urgent task that would have subtended Benoît's project.

As it is, this questioning of the means of literary studies is an offshoot, in my mind, of the broader “method wars” of the last 20 or so years, which featured challenges to one or more modes of literary criticism as inapt to engage in proper scholarship, with the assumption, much like Benoît and company, that the *proper* mode is one that reveals the true nature of reality. This contestation engages in one way or another with Paul Ricœur's formulation of the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” according to which the text is assumed to not be self-evident, that its immediate presentation is, in a way, deceptive.[111] Critical reassessments of literary scholarship in the 21st century, have grappled with the question of whether literary studies is producing legitimate knowledge about its objects of study. That question has consistently occupied more space in the field, tracking the sidelining of the humanities in society; yet these debates are not a simple protest for more funding or institutional support. Rather, they question the goal of specific methodologies that has been contested, as if that misguided goal is part of the problem and its resolution the answer. Rita Felski

[108] *Roman de Rou*, ed. Holden, vol. 2; English translation Burgess, 220

[109] Thomas N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 293; 385-391.

[110] Tilliette, “*Troiae ab oris*,” 12.

[111] Paul Ricœur, *De l’interprétation. Essai sur Freud.* (Éditions du Seuil, 1965.)

and Elizabeth S. Anker's recent volume on these method wars identify analytics such as diagnosis, allegory, reflexivity and contingency in the critical toolkit, resulting in a field built on "chronic negativity" with cynical postures towards its objects of study and a pathological language of doubt and uncertainty issuing from the subjects wielding the tools. Yet they do not disavow these tools epistemologically; rather Anker and Felski offer the possibility that they are no longer convincing to society as worthwhile endeavors, that.it is no longer the case that "...a stance of negativity and opposition is sufficient to justify the aesthetic or social importance of literature..."[112] I bring this period of methodological self-doubt up in the context of Benoît's work for two reasons. First, as it suggests that the overwhelming contestation of the propensity for one text's study of Troy to reveal the truth over another is not necessarily the result of the late antique and medieval sources' relationship with deception and fraud. Rather, seen under the light of a close reading, Benoît's stance is also a result of conflicts that periodically arise when the place and function of textual and literary criticism become entangled with historical and social concerns. Second, that those conditions were present in the 12th century, and once again argue for Benoît's stance towards his sources not as a historian searching for an accurate image of the past, but as a critical close reader.

As Kramnick wrote, in-sentence quotation--weaving another's words into my own--creates a "third space" of interpretation.[113] This is not meant as "intersubjectivity in the received sense, or as shared or overlapping subjectivities" in which new meaning emerges from the coexistence of heterogeneous thought, mine or another's.[114] Rather, it really is a physical space as a craft production where language itself as the matter makes up that space and engages in patterns. The stretching-out of the source provided by vernacular translation is the very occasion where language can betray assumptions, suppositions, worries, fears, or contingent associations with the original language being worked on. What the *Troie* allows for is a space--and a sizable one at that!--to open up the strands of duplicity and forgery accompanying the tradition of Troy. Whereas Geoffrey of Monmouth's engagement with Troy allowed for a revival of Trojan lineages, Benoît grappled with the "narrative destiny"[115] of Troy--its annihilation--by remaining in the process of its elaboration in text, rather than exploring its afterlife. The *Troie* is less invested in ensuring Troy's continuation,

[112] Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, eds., *Critique and Postcritique* (Duke University Press, 2017), 20.

[113] Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, 40.

[114] Marjorie Levinson, "Thinking through Thinking with," *Modern Philology* 122, no. 1 (2024): 27.

[115] McInerney, *Translation and Temporality*, 87.

along the same lines as many of Benoît's contemporaries, than it is in laying bare the processes that claim to transmit the knowledge of what happened there.

Thus in Benoit's text, as in front of Dares and Dictys, we are deceived as readers; but unlike those accounts from Late Antiquity, it is not by being duped into according authenticity to a forged text, but rather by believing the overly optimistic promises of a translator. What is interesting with regards to the medieval Troy is the extent to which the underlying discourse of deception and truth-revelation does not emanate from a critical stance towards the source material as possibly wilfully misrepresenting history. That is, neither Benoît, nor the author of the *Ovide moralisé*, accuse their sources of knowingly falsifying their accounts. Instead, for Benoît, Homer was misinformed, as he was no eyewitness, and ill-guided in his portrayal of the pagan gods' intervention in mortal affairs. The *Ovide moralisé* occupies the same critical stance insofar as malice is never attributed to Benoît as an author, he is no dishonest forger. Rather, like his own accusation against Homer, he was simply misguided in his judgment on sources. Yet, as I have strived to show here, his translation plays in, and depends upon, the way textuality can explode certainty in two ways, by forcing the lifting of the veil on the illusory assurances of fidelity in transmission over time, and in questioning, through linguistic and narrative form, the extent to which a monolithic perspective on the past can be achieved in a text. In a way, the *Troie* is fighting against itself: Benoît's prologue asserts an absolute confidence in the reliability of his historiographic methodology, but the final say on epistemic certainty is suspended by the language of the romance, cut off without an answer. "Attending to" does not coincide with a resolution.

In a way, I am reminded of another controversy around forgery, this time in the 20th century around the Mara Saba Letter published by Morton Smith in 1973, purporting to transmit parts of the Secret Gospel of Mark. This letter, written in an 18th-century hand on the blank page of a 17th-century book, and whose authenticity is still debated today, is presented as having been addressed by Clement of Alexandria to a disciple named Theodore regarding a supposed extended version of the Gospel of Mark, according to which Jesus raised a man from the dead and, in a possible modern reading, had sex with him. In this letter, Clement confirms the authenticity of the Secret Gospel but invites Theodore to claim it as a forgery. Even more enticing, or off-putting, for the reader is the fact that this letter exists in only fragmentary form: right after Clement sets out the contents of the Secret Gospel, he writes: "But many of the other things about which you write appear to be and are fabrications. Now the true interpretation, also the one that agrees with the true

philosophy."[116] When the truth is about to be revealed, the fragment goes silent. This silence in the context of a possible forgery figures, in my mind, the original way deception is woven into the fabric of the *Troie*. Assuredly, authenticity has a specific stake in Christian doctrine, even more so for the inhabitants of Late Antiquity and later medieval scholars: whether a text is truly the word of God bears on our understanding of creation and the nature of the universe. Yet similar issues are in play in medieval historiography, as medieval conceptions of time, and the connection between past and present established by *translatio imperii*, lead to changes in understanding the present when events from the past are cast in a new light, reinterpreted, or in the case of a text with new material, fundamentally altered. The stakes are all the more so the same for Trojan history, as descent from Trojan lineages, beginning with Vergil's *Aeneid*, were a question of the legitimacy and identities of dynasties and populations. The *Troie* figures the cutoff fragment of Clement of Alexandria: possibly based on a forgery, promising truth through rigorous scholarship, but skirting that truth's definitive formulation once the moment arrives. The difference is that Benoît's text is complete, and it is instead in the language of the translation, rather than on a blank page, that epistemic lacunae appear.

[116] "Τὰ δὲ ἄλλα τὰ πολλὰ ἃ ἔγραψας ψεύσματα καὶ φαίνεται καὶ ἔστιν. Ἡ μὲν οὖν ἀληθὴς καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἀληθῆ φιλοσοφίαν ἐξήγησις..." Text from Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Harvard University Press, 1973), 452; English translation from Geoffrey S. Smith and Brent C. Landau, *The Secret Gospel of Mark: A Controversial Scholar,aA Scandalous Gospel of Jesus, and the Fierce Debate over its Authenticity* (Yale University Press, 2023), 30.

Chapter 3 Folding in the Outside: On (Not) Paying Attention to the Past in the *Roman d'Eneas*

According to the literary traditions that recount the lives of the Trojans, the destruction of Troy at the hands of Agamemnon and Menelaus decimated aristocratic families in the Mediterranean. In Vergil's *Aeneid*, the annihilation of entire generations risks wiping out the centers of power, beginning at the top: King Priam's family is slowly winnowed down until he himself is (impiously) killed by Neoptolemus at the altar of Zeus. Later in Italy, King Evander loses his only son Pallas in the wake of the alliance struck with the Trojan refugee Aeneas. While representations of the vivid outpouring of anguish accompanying these catastrophes have been appreciated and analyzed in Vergil and other classical authors such as Euripides in his *Trojan Women*, in the 12th-century Old French *Roman d'Eneas* this grief merges with a consideration of the ways the losses of war become inscribed into history. In the death of Evander's son Pallas, for example, loss affords the medieval narrator an occasion to stage the unfurling of history in a sensorily striking scene.

The *Eneas* recounts that Evander erected a vivid monument to his fallen son, an immense mausoleum built of marble "de cent colors" (line 6490)[1] ("of a hundred colors"), an ebony roof, and an interior overflowing with mosaics, paintings, gold, and gems. Pallas's body is placed inside a sarcophagus sculpted from "un vert prasme" (line 6517) ("emerald-colored stone") in all his regal magnificence, scepter and sword in hand. Even as the passage on Pallas's burial insists on the extravagance of the monument's architecture and wondrous furnishings, this site is meant to be *unseen*. While outwardly a marvel to behold, the mausoleum itself will not be seen again, as it was shut and sealed after its completion (line 6588-6591), perhaps because of widely-practiced funerary customs, or following the language of the *Eneas* itself, because the very existence of the

[1] References to the *Roman d'Eneas* are taken from Aimé Petit, *Le Roman d'Eneas* (Livre de Poche, 1997); see Section 1 for an more detailed discussion on the history of editions of the *Eneas*; English translations are adapted from Glynn S. Burgess and Douglas Kelly, trans., *The Roman de Thèbes and the Roman d'Eneas* (Liverpool University Press, 2021).

place is a monstrous affront to nature. This place, in fact, is rooted in failure. Its construction was realized swiftly because it was already in the works when Pallas fell: “Forment par estoit biaus li lieus / et touz ert prez li sarqueus; / illuec cuida que il geüst / li roys ...” (lines 6476-6479) (“The place was of great splendor, and the tomb was fully prepared; the king had believed that he himself would lay there ...)” The reader is reminded again of the usurpation of the site's purpose when the narrator remarks as Pallas' body is lowered into the mausoleum that “fist li roys metre son sarqueus / qu'il ot appareillié por soy ...” (lines 6513-6514) (“the king had his tomb set up there / which he had prepared for himself.”) This place is a tomb, yet one meant for someone else; it is the tomb of the father transformed into the tomb of the son, a perverted chronology that is fundamentally wrong. It is doubly sealed-up. The entrance through which Evander and the Queen exit is not the only sealed element: the opening in the dome is plugged as well, with a curious form of asphalt that can only be dissolved with a secret substance that the narrator does not name (lines 6561-657), guaranteeing (presumably) the site's eternal preservation. The perverted chronology thus attempts to further usurp the passage of time by refusing change--even the lighting inside is cast by an ever-burning lamp (lines 6579-6581), and Evander's body is outfitted with an embalming machine with golden tubes fit into his nostrils, leading to vases of sweet-smelling resins to ensure that putrefaction does not occur. The narrative gaze draws the reader’s attention towards the richness of the tomb’s appearance, but does not do so in a move to encourage reflection on the depth of history, as in what such a painting or other symbolic medium can reveal on the past or the future. Instead it identifies the present as having vanquished the passage of time.

This scene offers a prime example of two currents that characterize wider research engagements with the *Eneas* and allows me to illustrate the ways that attention as an analytical lens can uncover key features of the *Eneas* that have escaped the notice of scholars. First, it constitutes a clear “addition” when Vergil's *Aeneid* is taken to be the baseline, one of the “non-Virgilian embellishments” to the tale,[2] even a “digression” from the main story.[3] That is not to say that scholars have only read the *Eneas* as a reflection of the *Aeneid* in order to pick out inaccuracies. Many comparative readings have sought to explain the process by which the medieval translator chose to conserve or suppress passages in the *Aeneid*. This conscious design based on emendation,

[2] Raymond Cormier, “Virgil Repurposed in the Old French ‘Roman d’Eneas’,” *Carte Romanze* 3.1 (2015): 87.

[3] Francine Mora-Lebrun, *L’”Enéide” médiévale et la naissance du roman* (Presses universitaires de France, 1994), 179.

for Philippe Logié, was not a symbol of dependence but rather a liberation from the antique past through "cette rupture du cordon umbilical et cette volonté de taire l'œuvre mère."[4] This line of work is often indebted to the close and labor-intensive examination of medieval glossing of the *Aeneid*, most significantly through Servius's commentary later expanded during Late Antiquity and now known as *Servius Auctus*.[5] While it does not cast the medieval translator as a bad, misinformed reader, this inquiry nevertheless most often leads to identifying the source for particular editorial, narrative and stylistic choices in the *Eneas*, that is, asking the question "Where did the anonymous French translator find inspiration for this scene?" That work provides crucial material in identifying the constellation of influences bearing on the composition of the *Eneas*, but it fails to take stock of the multiform task that is composition, instead positing it as one fundamentally rooted in the logic of influence. My goal in this chapter is to consider the *consequences* of the romance's staging of attention, bringing in the medieval commentary apparatus affixed to the *Aeneid* as a formative environment that grounded the translator's reading.

I do so by reconsidering in part the role of visual ekphrasis in the text and how attention, a process rooted in instability and partial failure, can explain features of the Old French. The rich visuals accompanying Pallas's burial and described in over 150 lines (v. 6438-6487) of the *Eneas* resonate with other passages in the romance that feature vibrant descriptions of luxury materials and marvelous cityscapes, and these too have caught the eye of modern readers. The romance's description of Carthage is replete with embellished praise of the city's exotic materials and marvelous construction. Catherine Croizy-Naquet has identified that emphasis on beauty in the visual description of Carthage as the second main characteristic of the city in the *romans d'antiquité* (following "enclosure"), writing that the audience's encounter with the city provokes a feeling of vertigo: there is no building *not* made of marble, ivory, or precious stone, no object *not* of gold, silver, or ebony.[6] The materials can have socio-political reverberations as well: the exoticism of Carthage is wrapped up with the exoticism of its queen in the eyes of a foreign

[4] Philippe Logié, *L'"Énéas," une traduction au risque de l'invention* (Honoré Champion, 199), 160.

[5] Cf. Francine Mora-Lebrun, "L'utilisation du commentaire de Servius dans le Roman d'Eneas," in *Servius et sa réception de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, eds. Monique Bouquet and Bruno Méniel (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011) and Raymond Cormier, "An Example of Twelfth Century *Adaptatio*: the *Roman d'Eneas* author's use of glossed *Aeneid* manuscripts," *Revue d'histoire des textes* 19 (1989): 277-290.

[6] Catherine Croizy-Naquet, *Thèbes, Troie et Carthage. Poétique de la ville dans le roman antique au XIIe siècle* (Champion, 1994), 117.

audience,[7] and the luxurious cloths sold by its wealthy merchants recall Dido's shrewd cutting of an ox hide to draw the city's future borders, reflecting Dido's "political astuteness and the silken wealth that connotes it."[8] These readings emerge from attention *to* the text, bringing out the networks of signification within visual sights that are couched for a medieval reader: the history of a city, the rhetorical effects of ekphrasis as amplification, the meaning of "Carthage" in the 12th century.

My reading of Pallas's burial offers a condensed example of my approach to visual encounters more broadly in the Eneas, as well as how I engage with medieval reading practices that in particular guided and bracketed the interpretation of the *Aeneid* in the 12th century. My focus on the visual moves away from reading abundance and vividness as symbolizing opulence and instead considers ekphrasis and urban description as moments of *staged attention*, where the narrative explores Eneas's engagement (or lack thereof) in the interpretation of his surroundings. The visual in the Eneas, I argue, stages an encounter with works of art that, rather than affording for moments of historical engagement, that is, an awareness of the passage of time and the place of the self in history, instead bathe the subject within an overwhelming present. I develop this analysis through sustained parallel readings of the *Aeneid* and its medieval forms, not to identify literary origins (e.g. where did the author of the *Eneas* get this idea?) but rather to establish the grounding of a 12th-century reading of the *Aeneid* and to emphasize the *Eneas's* unique place within this literary tradition. Through this focus on the visual as marking an attentive moment, both in the *Aeneid* and the Eneas, I argue that the French translation proposes a novel approach to encounters with history, markedly different from the context of the other *romans d'antiquité* that I have treated so far. Whereas the *Thèbes* and the *Troie* anchored their narratives in relation to the savant narrator's ability to untangle and set out the terms (and in the case of the *Troie*, the truth) of the past, the *Eneas* fails to confront the past in which the telling and translation of history is grounded. The medieval Eneas does not possess the attentive gaze of Vergil's Aeneas, rather he instead possesses immediate knowledge, as he seems to perfectly inhabit his perspective of Roman hero without the need to gaze, inhabit, and reflect on the past.

[7] Aimé Petit, "Carthage, ville exotique dans le *Roman d'Eneas*," *Bien dire et bien aprandre* 26 (2008): 199-210.

[8] Jane E. Burns, *Sea of Silk: A Textile Geography of Women's Work in Medieval French Literature* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 107-108.

I will first go through the context of the *Eneas*'s composition, individualizing it among the *romans d'antiquité* and grounding it within the literary influences that bear upon the medieval interpretation of the *Aeneid*. I will then set out *how* I read *Eneas* in parallel with Vergil's *Aeneid* and the medieval commentary tradition, identifying a focus on the subject's attention to the past as the main point of entry for my analysis of the *Eneas*'s staging of history as an experience. Finally, I will use this methodological foundation to build a sustained analysis of both the *Aeneid* and *Eneas* as texts fully entrenched in modes of figuring attention to the traces of the past, but in diametrically opposed ways. While the Roman Aeneas folds in visual sights symbolizing historical experience into the process of his self-formation, the *Eneas* refuses this as a possibility by transforming attention into a process revolving around the present, bracketing off an always-already formed subject from other chronologies.

3.1 Getting sight of the medieval Aeneid

My two first chapters addressed two of the *romans d'antiquité*, the *Roman de Thèbes* and the *Roman de Troie*, both early compositions in Old French and both purporting to transmit Greco-Roman history. These two points form a line suggesting contemporary interest in antiquity; with the *Eneas* as the third point, that line spreads out to become a plane, cementing an even stronger framework holding together the *romans d'antiquité* as a unit. This pattern is alluring since the texts, with this chronology in mind, mirror the progression of history: the story of Thebes precedes Troy, whose fall then renders the tale of Aeneas possible. Yet they do not fall in that order when the dating of their composition is reconstructed by modern scholars. As we have seen, evidence internal to the text does not clearly indicate dates of composition; these have been reconstructed. There is nevertheless broad agreement that they were written between 1150 and 1165, with the *Roman de Thèbes* written first (ca. 1150), followed by the *Eneas* (ca. 1160), and finally the *Troie* (ca. 1165). The romances form a triptych of antiquity, not only sharing accounts of civilizational collapse and heroic salvation, but of the movement of time towards the present. With this chronology in mind, the *romans d'antiquité* also appear as a larger cultural project, perhaps not one centrally directed, but one that is aware of its analogical connection with the present. This perspective is further reinforced by the fact that five out of nine manuscripts of the *Eneas* include

either the *Thèbes*, the *Troie*, or both.[9] However, the *Eneas* is fundamentally divorced in its perspective of history from the other two romances, a difference belied by the shared formal characteristics and crossover manuscript history among the *romans d'antiquité*.

The *Eneas* is composed of approximately 10,000 lines of octosyllabic verse, putting it close in length to the *Thèbes*; much like the *Thèbes* as well, it is preserved in a limited number of manuscripts. Nine codices preserve the *Eneas*, of which seven contain complete copies. Two in particular have served as the basis for editions since the early 20th century and provide access to two different, yet closely interrelated families of manuscripts within the *Eneas* tradition The first is Florence Laurenziana Plutarch XLI.44, known as manuscript *A* and first edited by Jean-Jacques Salverda de Grave in 1891.[10] This codex, dated between 1201 and 1210, contains only the *Eneas*, and conserves the earliest version of the romance. A second, Paris BNF fr. 60 known as manuscript *D* and dating from the end of the 14th century, formed the basis of Aimé Petit's 1997 edition.[11] D's major departure from A is its elimination of several short contextual additions to the story, such as the episode of the Judgment of Paris which had only been alluded to by Vergil. As Besnardeau and Morine-Lebrun put it, these small changes create a version of Eneas even more certain of his trajectory than other recensions of the romance.[12] For the purposes of this chapter, I will primarily be citing Petit's edition of *D*: it has the particular feature of not just pairing the three *romans d'antiquité* together, arranging them in their historic order (Greece, Troy, Rome) but also emphasizes the hero's encounter with the visual, excising contextualizing explanations of Vergil's mythology present in other recensions of the *Eneas*. *D*, then, assembles the *romans* as a coherent unit, establishing continuity between them while also papering over the underlying divisions in the

[9] See the 2018 edition of manuscript A by Wilfrid Besnardeau and Francine Mora-Lebrun, *Le Roman d'Eneas*, for a much more thorough overview of the manuscript tradition and modern editions (pp. 8-40); also a section on reception (114-138).

[10] He later re-edited and published over two volumes in 1925 and 1929; the same manuscript was re-edited by Wilfrid Besnardeau and Francine Mora-Lebrun in 2018; cf Jean-Jacques Salverda de Grave, ed., *Eneas: roman du XIIe siècle*, 2 vols. (E. Champion, 1925-1929) and Wilfrid Besnardeau and Francine Mora-Lebrun, eds., *Le roman d'Énéas. Édition et traduction du manuscrit A* (Honoré Champion, 2018).

[11] As it is a particularly later codex, from the 14th century, its version of the *Eneas* could be objected to as not being apt for appreciating 12th-century interests in translation. As Besnardeau and Mora-Lebrun observe, however, *D* is closely associated with manuscript *G*, dated to approximately 1240, as well as *F*, copied in 1252 or 1292 (Besnardeau and Mora-Lebrun, *Le roman d'Énéas*, 14-16).

[12] Besnardeau and Morine-Lebrun, *Le roman d'Énéas*, 171 footnote 3

ways they stage the experience of history. *D* is a strong case study to show how markedly different the *Eneas*'s conception of history is from what are construed critically as its companion romances.

The *Eneas* was written during a renewal of interest in Vergil's *Aeneid*, but stands apart from the medieval reception of the Roman epic. The 12th century was a period of attentive reading of Vergil, and of the *Aeneid* in particular: around 92% of all manuscripts that only contain the *Aeneid* produced before the 13th century are from the 12th century.[13] Vergil's text, of course, did not reach the 12th century in the form of a neatly-presented Loeb edition. A broad group of commentary and glossing traditions branched out from the *Aeneid* during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages to guide readers' interpretation of the epic. Servius's commentary, in all likelihood from the early 5th century, is the most widely-adopted accompaniment to the *Aeneid* in medieval codices.[14] This work, in its medieval transmission, is in reality a composite palimpsest: Servius's original commentary was in dialogue with an earlier gloss written by Aelius Donatus, and was later expanded by an anonymous hand in the 7th or 8th century into a version now referred to as *Servius Auctus* (since it is "bigger") or *Servius Danielis*, after the scholar who identified it, the 16th-century jurisconsult Pierre Daniel. Henri-Irénée Marrou provided a particularly vivid qualification of Servius's atomistic approach to reading Vergil, "non comme on contemple de haut un vaste paysage, mais comme on admire un collier de perles tenu entre les doigts, examinant chaque grain l'un après l'autre pour sa beauté propre."[15] That is, while his primary concern was indeed to explain the language of the text, unwrapping the morpho-syntax as much as the socio-cultural references and practices encoded within it, his focus also is to bring the reader to appreciate "les vertus d'une langue vivante et accueillante."[16] For example, in Book 2 as Aeneas recounts for Dido the chaos of Troy as it fell, Servius takes care to describe the light that appeared above the face of Aeneas's son Ascanius as a portent from the gods instructing him to flee with his family, rather than fight to his death with the Greeks. Servius pays particular attention to the terms employed by Vergil, "fundere lumen apex, 2.683" ("the top shed a light"):

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[13] Birger Munk Olsen, "Virgile et la renaissance du XIIe siècle," in *Lectures médiévales de Virgile: actes du colloque organisé par l'École française de Rome (Rome, 25-28 octobre 1982)* (École française de Rome, 1985), 39.

[14] C.E. Murgia, "The Dating of Servius Revisited," *Classical Philology* 98.1 (2003): 45-69.

[15] Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Éditions E. de Beccard, 1958), 25.

[16] Monique Bouqet, Bruno Méniel and Giuseppe Ramises, "Une exégèse de l'inépuisable," in *Servius et sa réception de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, eds. Monique Bouqet, Bruno Méniel and Giuseppe Ramises (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), 10-11.

'apex' proprie dicitur in summo flaminis pilleo virga lanata, hoc est in cuius extremitate modica lana est: quod primum constat apud Albam Ascanium statuisse. modo autem summitatem pillei intellegimus. tangit autem, ut frequenter diximus, latenter historiam. item hoc quoque de igni ad Servium Tullium pertinet. nam cum Tarquinius cepisset Vericulanam civitatem, ex captiva quadam in domo eius natus est Servius Tullius. qui cum obdormisset, caput eius subito flamma corripuit: quam cum vellent restinguere, Tanaquil, regis uxor, auguriorum perita, intellegens augurium, prohibuit. flamma puerum cum somno deseruit: unde intellexit, eum clarum fore usque ad ultimam vitam. (Servius, 1946, 484-485)[17]

The "apex," properly speaking, is the wooly stem at the top of the cap of a *flamen*, that is to say its end is made with a small bit of wool, which, it is agreed, Ascanius first established as a practice in Alba. However, let us now understand the tip of the cap. It evokes, as we often say, history implicitly. This episode of fire also evokes Servius Tullius, for when Tarquinius captured the city of Vericulana, one of the captive women gave birth to Servius Tullius in his house. While the latter was sleeping, his head suddenly caught fire. When they tried to put it out, Tanaquil, the wife of the king who was learned in the auguries, forbid them, as she understood the sign. The flame was extinguished when the boy woke up: from this she understood that he would be famous to the end of his life.

[17] English translations of Servius are my own. The editorial history of Servius's commentaries is quite fractured; it was first edited in its entirety in the 19th century in Servius, *Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina Commentarii*, eds. George Thilo and Hermann Hagen, 3 vols. (Teubner, 1884-1923). This work has been substantially updated with more recent scholarship and editorial practices beginning in the mid-20th century. For the commentary on Books 1, see Servius, *À l'école de Virgile. Commentaire à l'Énéide Livre 1*, ed. and trad. Alban Baudou and Séverine Clément-Tarantino (Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2015); for Book 2, see Servius, *Servianorum in Vergilii carmina commentariorum*, ed. Edward Kennard Rand, vol. 2 (American Philological Association, 1946); for Books 3-5 see *Servianorum in Vergilii carmina commentariorum*, ed. Arthur F. Stocker and Albert H. Travis, vol. 3 (Oxford University Press, 1965); for Book 6, Servius, *Commentaire sur l'Énéide de Virgile. Livre VI*, ed. and trans. Emmanuelle Jeunet-Mancy (Les Belles Lettres, 2012); for Book 8, Servius, *Commentaire sur l'Énéide de Virgile. Livre VIII*, eds. and trans. Giuseppe Ramires and Muriel Bompan-Lafond (Les Belles Lettres, 2022); for Books 9-12, Servius, *Serviani in Vergilii Aeneidos libros IX-XII commentarii*, eds. Charles E. Murgia and Robert Andrew Kaster (Oxford University Press, 2018); Note that, while editors have, since Thilo and Hagen's 19th-century edition, endeavored to render more apparent the distinctions between Servius and Servius Auctus, I will refer to both as "Servius" throughout this chapter. Manuscripts of the *Aeneid* carried the glossing from this commentary in the margins without distinguishing the author, and often did not acknowledge the source; from the manuscripts of the *Aeneid* dated between the 10th and 13th centuries that I have examined in London, Cambridge, Paris, and Rome, while far from exhausting extant copies of the *Aeneid* from this period, I have not found a single one identifying the source of the marginal and interlinear commentary. Moreover, it is quite likely that the author of the *Eneas* did not consider the commentary available to him as attributable to one person named Servius.

Servius thus branches out, in this case, from a particular lexeme ("apex"), providing an explanation akin to a dictionary entry, and then vines out even further to a historical precedent that reverberates with the aura of prophetic revelation that dominates this passage. Servius' approach emphasizes the propensity of Vergil's dense language to rehash and let reverberate its meaning in a wider sense. Yet Servius's commentary does not simply expound the virtues of Vergil as compositional genius, unpacking the layers of meaning as the *Glossa Ordinaria* did with scripture. It is equally a manual for students learning the rules of Latin prosody, syntax, and diction; indications of where Vergil "should have used this term" (except for requirements of meter) where "we now say this," are used to cement both proper usage and Servius' authority. As Robert Kaster aptly put it, "Instead of being real objects that one tries to explain or describe historically, text and language become ciphers, assigned whatever validity or significance Servius chooses."[18]

Another tradition, born from Fulgentius working several generations after Servius at the end of the 4th and beginning of the 5th centuries, saw the words of the *Aeneid* as a figurative *integument* to be pierced by a knowing gaze. Unlike Servius's attention to expounding Vergil's language for what can be considered lexical and historical background-data bridging the gap between the words on the vellum and their meaning, Fulgentius, then, emphasized the *distance* between sign and signified, introducing figuration beneath the immediate meaning.[19] Fulgentius arrives at this reading through a carefully devised dialogue, summoning Vergil for a fictitious exchange in order to uncover the truths covered up in the text. In particular, over the course of the conversation between Fulgentius and Vergil, the *Aeneid* becomes an allegory for the ages of man. Book 1, for example, is introduced through a request from Vergil, requiring that Fulgentius first explain his understanding of the book "ut sciam me non arcaicis expromtare fabulam auribus" ("so that I may know that I am not explaining the story to the ears of a simpleton.")[20] Satisfied by Fulgentius' brief overview of several key moments from Book I, Vergil begins by revealing the actual meaning to him:

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[18] Robert Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (University of California Press, 1988), 189.

[19] Robert Edwards, "Fulgentius and the Collapse of Meaning," *Helios* 3 (1976): 17-35.

[20] Fulgentius, "Expositio Virgilianae Continentiae," in *Fabii Placiadis Fulgentii V.C. Opera*, ed. Rudolf Helm (Editio Stereotypa, 1898), 90. English translation from Fulgentius, *Fulgentius the Mythographer*, trans. Leslie George Whitbread (Ohio State University Press, 1971), 129-145.

> Naufragium posuimus in modum periculosae nativitatis, in qua et maternum est pariendi dispendium vel infantum nascendi periculum. In qua necessitate universaliter humanum voluiter genus.[21]
>
> I set out the shipwreck to parallel the danger of birth, in which there is a cost for the mother in giving birth, and a danger for the child in being born. All of humanity endures this fate.

Fulgentius' commentary makes two key interventions in the field of the medieval reception of the *Aeneid*: first, it anchors Vergil's epic within allegorical hermeneutics, certifying that Aeneas's journey speaks to a wider journey followed by all of humanity; second, it makes dialogue a form of commentary, allowing for an almost dialectical disassembly of the Latin text as Fulgentius and the shade of Vergil present parallel reading tracks and Fulgentius' short interventions allow Christian truth to appear.[22] Fulgentius significantly influenced the reading of Vergil in the Middle Ages, as his "Exposition" opened up allegorical readings of the text. Medieval copyists, however, seem to have preferred Servius's commentary, perhaps because of the immediacy of its engagement with the *Aeneid*'s language, focusing on morphology, rhetoric and style. It received widespread adoption, copied not only as a text in its own right, but often found adapted into marginal glossing of editions of the *Aeneid* throughout the Middle Ages. A commentary from the 12th-century attributed to Bernard Silvester followed along in the footsteps of both Servius and Fulgentius, adopting the former's lemma-structured approach to the text, while remaining in the latter's allegorical vision of Aeneas' journey; only surviving in four copies, however, it does not appear to have gained much traction elsewhere, perhaps in part explained by its cutting off at the

[21] Fulgentius, "Expositio," 91.

[22] That is, Fulgentius does *not* make Vergil a Christian *avant l'heure*. While discussing Book 6, Vergil explains why Aeneas, before entering the cave, must bury Misenus: "…misio enim Greco orreo dicitur, enos uero laus uocatur," ("... for *misio* in Greek means 'to be horrified,' and *enos* means 'glory,'"), Fulgentius, "Expositio" 96; the lesson being that pride must be discarded before wisdom can be reached. Fulgentius then jumps in to extend the meaning for his audience: "Cui ego, 'Certior ego hanc tuam comprobo doctor sententiam; nam et nostra salutaris diuinaque praeceptio cor contritum et humiliatum Deum non dispicere praedicat. Quae uere certe manifestaque est sapientia." ("And I said to him, 'I most certainly approve of your opinion, learned teacher. In fact, our divine doctrine of salvation teaches that God does not look down upon a contrite and humble heart. This is indeed true and manifest wisdom.'") Fulgentius, "Expositio," 96.

end of Book 6.[23] The general adoption of Servius's commentary as primary exegesis of Vergil sets out a specific kind of medieval form of attention to the *Aeneid*, one that sits with individual lexemes and clauses, picking them apart as individual speech acts that require individual interpretation, rather than the large interpretative arcs followed by Fulgentius and the 12th-century commentary attributed to Bernard Silvester. This feature of Servius will become a key element in understanding how the *Roman d'Eneas* attends to the Latin of the *Aeneid*.

Understandably, a great deal of scholarship around the medieval *Roman d'Eneas* has endeavored to uncover the ways in which the romance was influenced by this commentary tradition and most particularly in connection with Servius's wildly popular work. This research has revealed the extent to which the writer of the *Eneas* was most likely very familiar with the commentary apparatuses. Raymond Cormier wrote in 1989 that "the Old French author selectively included parts of Servius' commentary, plus other anonymous, unattached scholia, as amplification, illumination, or simply reinterpretation of Virgil's poem."[24] This Servian influence does not necessarily put a medieval divide between the *Roman d'Eneas* and Vergil's *Aeneid*: as Justin Haynes has sought to remind medievalists, Servius's scholia were "fundamentally classical," even if they are sometimes used to argue for specifically medieval or Renaissance readings.[25] It can be quite enticing to attribute the quirks (as if they were defective readings) of medieval reception to a corrupted *medieval* reading of *Aeneid* through Servius. Curiously, during the 12th century when the *Eneas* was being composed, B. Munk Olsen has catalogued a marked *drop* in the number of commentaries on the *Aeneid* being copied.[26] Other authors, such as

[23] Bernard's commentary tracks the text as though following the figuration of Aeneas' body, while of course valuing transcendence of that body for wider philosophical truths. The cutoff in Book 6, then, is almost appropriate, as Aeneas does not return from the Underworld with "a philosophical vision that makes it possible for him to effectively transcend his corporality in the course of the physical tasks that lie ahead for him." Marilynn Desmond, "Bernard Silvestris and the *Corpus* of the *Aeneid*," in *The Classics in the Middle Ages*, eds. Aldo S. Bernardo and Saul Levin (Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1990), 136.

[24] Raymond J. Cormier, "An Example of Twelfth Century *Adaptatio*: The *Roman d'Eneas* Author's Use of Glossed *Aeneid* Manuscripts," *Revue d'histoire des textes* 19 (1989): 279. He later substantially increased his estimate of the debt owed by the Old French romance to the Servian gloss, claiming that "the anonymous author has constructed virtually half of his romance of out Latin marginalia—often microscopic and illegible glosses—found in the manuscripts of Virgil's *Aeneid*; Raymond Cormier, "Inventing the Vernacular in the Gutters of Virgil's 'Aeneid': From Marginal 'Dirt' to Seminal Romance," *L'Esprit Créateur* 38.1 (1998): 16.

[25] Justin Haynes, *The Medieval Classic: Twelfth-Century Latin Epic and the Virgilian Commentary Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 189.

[26] B. Munk Olsen, "La popularité des textes classiques entre le IXe et le XIIe siècle," *Revue d'histoire des textes* 14 (1984): 177.

Macrobius and Ovid were brought in to elucidate Vergil's lyric, as writers, while keeping Servius as an authority, sought out new sources of inspiration to interpret the Roman classic.[27] In a way, a 12th-century reading can be a *parallel* rather than diachronically differentiated reading, indebted to classical texts.

I will, therefore, regularly look towards medieval reception, and most importantly Servius's commentary as it exists in the margins of manuscripts of the *Aeneid*, in order to gauge reading interests at key moments in the *Aeneid* and the *Eneas*. This move does not consider Servius as an arborescent source of inspiration, nor the *Eneas* as a conscious challenge to a dominant interpretation. Rather, it shows how the very question of historical transference is effaced within what is, perhaps, the narrative with the firmest grounding in claims for historical antecedents conferring authority to the present, Vergil's *Aeneid*. Indeed, the notion of a "medieval" versus "classical" reading of the *Aeneid* is disrupted by looking at the sources for 12th-century readers, as we have seen. When placed in the material presence of the two other *romans d'antiquité,* the *Eneas* stands out as an anti-*roman d'antiquité*, one that suppresses the awareness of depth and complexity within history. I will suggest that this shift is in part due to reading practices encouraged by *Aeneid* commentaries that shape a particular form of textual attention, which the *Eneas* then stages in the form of Eneas as (not) subject to history.

3.2 Reading the Eneas and the Aeneid, Historically

The *Eneas*'s posture towards history is essentially on the level of representation: that is, there is no journey toward or problematization of coming to know the world, of learning and changing, of discovery. Instead, that trajectory is straightforward, with Eneas seemingly aware of his path from the moment Troy falls. As the narrator remarks, even while fleeing Troy, Eneas had a plan: "En Lombardie voult aler / illuec voult Troie restorer / et la cite et les muraulz…" (lines 79-81) ("He wanted to go to Lombardy and rebuild Troy there, both the city and its walls.") This swift remark, which can easily go unnoticed so early in the romance, frames the extent to which *Eneas* radically transforms the Vergilian model of the passage of history. Vergil famously begins his epic in medias res, as the surviving Trojans arrive in Libya after a series of misadventures across the Mediterranean which will only be recounted later in Dido's palace. The *Eneas* significantly straightens out this achronological ordering, referred to as an *ordo artificialis*:

[27] Francine Mora-Lebrun, *L'Énéide médiévale*, 15.

opening on the sack of Troy and Eneas' flight, the narrative relentlessly pushes forward towards the Roman hero's marriage with Lavinia. In fact, the only jump back in time is framed in a markedly different way. Much like in Vergil, Eneas will recall the past in Dido's palace, but rather than embrace the entirety of his journey from Troy to the shores of Libya, he only recounts the method by which the Greeks won access to the city. That is, the only irruption of the past into the narrative present is the Trojan horse, which ends up serving as a Trojan horse in its own narrative context: Eneas's storytelling causes Dido to fall in love. Eneas' recounting of the past is significantly weakened from Vergil's epic; it is transformed into a lover's lament.

This transformation, then, places on the narrator the burden of framing context and history for the audience. Medieval copyists were clearly concerned with providing support for unfamiliar readers, as one manuscript of the *Aeneid* from the end of the 12th-century shows:

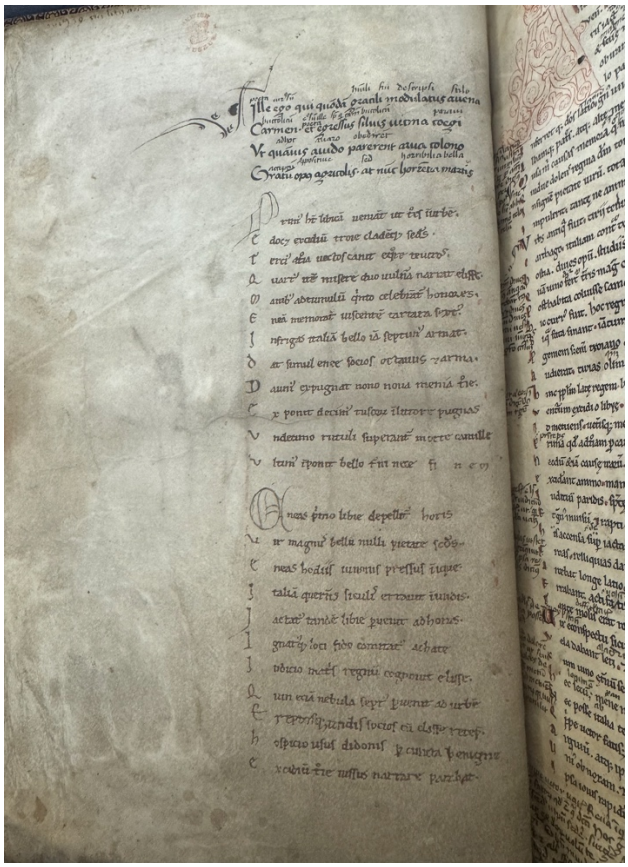


Figure 3.1 London British Library Harley 2770 1v[28]

[28] Photograph by Adam Grant.

On a folio facing the opening lines, this codex inserts two separate, popular verse summaries mistakenly attributed by medieval writers to Ovid. The first provides an overview of each book, one per line, allowing the readers entering into the material a wide view over the disordered sequence of the first three books: "Prim*us* h*abe*t libica*m* ueni*an*t ut T*ro*ies i*n* urbe*m* / Edoc*et* excidiu*m* Troie clade*m*q*ue* se*cun*du*s* / Terci*us* a T*ro*ia uectos canit eq*uo*re Teucro*s* / Quart*us* ite*m* misere duo uulne*ra* narrat Elisse...."[29] ("The first book has the Trojans come to the Libyan city / The second teaches the defeat and destruction of Troy / The third sings of the Trojans on the sea, driven from Troy / The fourth likewise recounts the two wounds of miserable Dido …") A second composition has been added after and frames the progression around Aeneas's subjective perception of the voyage, rather than summarizing the contents of each book. Instead of terminating at the end of Book 12, it loops back to Book 2, with Aeneas's arrival at Dido's palace; it thus emulates the artificial chronological order of the text in a way the first summary suppressed:

> Eneas p*ri*mo Libie depellit*ur* horis
> Vir magnu*s* bello nulli pietate s*ecun*d*u*s
> Eneas hodiis Iunonis pressus i*n*ique
> Italia*m* quer*e*ns Siculi*s* errauit i*n* undis
> Iactat*us* tande*m* Libie p*er*uenit ad horas
> …
> Hospicio usus Didonis p*er* cuncta benigne
> Excidiu*m* T*ro*ie iussus narrare parebat.[30]
> Eneas is first driven from the shores of Libya,
> A great man, second to none in war or piety.
> Oppressed by the unfair hatred of Juno, Aeneas
> Searches for Italy and wanders amid the waves of Sicily.
> Tossed about, he finally arrives at the shores of Libya.
> …

[29] Alexander Riese, *Anthologia Latina sive Poesis Latinae Supplementum*, vol 2. *Reliquorum librorum carmina* (Teubner, 1906), poem 634; English translation my own.

[30] Alexander Riese, ed., *Anthologia Latina sive Poesis Latinae Supplementum,* vol. 1, *Libri Salmasiani Aliorumque Carmina* (Teubner, 1804), poem 1.

Enjoying Dido's hospitality, liberally given,
He prepares to recount the fall of Troy as ordered.

The presence of not one but two separate framing devices that circulated with copies of the *Aeneid* attests to a particular care for providing a structure for parsing the order of events in the epic. More intriguingly, a scribal error testifies to the ease of mixing up the events of the text between poetic and chronological orders. The first line will harm rather than help lost readers: "adpellitur" (*driven towards*) was retained by Alexander Riese in his *Anthologia Latina* that serves as an edition for the poem, and clearly draws out the trajectory of Eneas's journey *from* Troy *to* ("ad") Libya. Here; the "ad" has been transposed into "depellitur" ("driven from"), making the text read as if Libya was Aeneas's place of departure.[31] The transformed prefix has Aeneas beginning his journey in Libya, rather than ending up there in Book 1.

The opening of the *Aeneid*, then, is a tricky beast as it carefully lays out chronology. In the *Eneas*, a clear chronological order is instead followed from the onset, beginning with "Quant Menelax ot Troie assise…" (line 1) ("When Menelaus laid siege to Troy ….") The romance forefronts additional context that would otherwise be lost with the shortening of the story recounted by the hero in Books 2 and 3, namely the panic of a city falling to an invading army and the decision to flee Trojan shores. Yet this structural reworking clashes with the translator's apparent concern to maintain clear points of contact with his source text. Both Vergil and the French translator project the hero's path into the future; in Book 1, he seeks to calm and reassure his party of Trojans once they have arrived in Libya "per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum / tendimus Latium, sedes ubi fata quietas / ostendunt ; illic fas regna resurgere Troiae." (I.204-206) ("Through all sorts of perils, through countless dangers, / We are headed for Latium, where the Fates promise us / A peaceful home, and where Troy will rise again.") Soon after, Jupiter soothes a worried Venus by anchoring this foreseen success into the teleology of Roman domination, "his ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono; / imperium sine fine dedi…" (I.278-279) ("For these I set no limits in time or space, and have given to them eternal empire, world without end.") The *Eneas* does none of this while maintaining narrative control over the trajectory of Eneas's future. As we have seen, the Old French announces at the opening where the Trojans are going. Yet that structural

[31] Riese, *Anthologia*, vol.1, 8.

parallel does not have symmetric consequences for the way the text constructs the unfolding of history. That is, at the opening of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas and company are in Libya; in the *Eneas*, they are in Troy. The Old French Trojan hero possesses knowledge far in advance of his Roman counterpart.

Eneas's coming to know, as a journey, is in fact trivialized, with respect to the subjective experience both of being tossed about the waves of the Mediterranean and coming to understand the paths laid out for him by the gods, which for Roman and medieval posterity constituted their own history. The major event instantiating the learning of history is, in fact, the journey to the underworld, which the Old French romance does not fail to illustrate. Anchises presents this trip as a kind of encounter with a *speculum* made flesh. The Sibyl "set qu'encore est a ester" (line 2288) ("knows what will be") and also possesses knowledge of nature and the cosmos that makes her all-knowing: "du solleill set et de la lune, / et des estoilles de chascune, / et nigremance et de fusique, / de rectorique et de musique, / dialetique et gramaire." (lines 2290-2294) ("She understands the sun and the moon, and she knows about each one of the stars, about necromancy and about medicine, rhetoric and music, dialectic and grammar.") Eneas's descent fulfills the promise made by Anchises, as the Sibyl provides precise details on the path they take, the monsters seen along the way. It also offers the romance a unique occasion to connect Eneas with his past and the future Rome whose becoming he struggles to ensure. The souls of Greek soldiers fallen at Troy flee from him, frightened at the possibility that he was sent by the Gods to punish them (2772-2779), and his Trojan ancestors file before him as well (2894). Anchises ensures the procession of the souls-to-be, the souls cleansed by their time in the afterlife who will become Eneas's future lineage (2964-3065).

The translator is particularly drawn to the propensity to forget the past that is one of Anchises's lessons in the underworld. Granted, Anchises's presentation of the cycle of the rebirth of souls in the *Aeneid* grounds the possibility of rebirth in forgetting: "has omnis, ubi mille rotam volvere per annos / Lethaeum ad fluvium deus evocat agmine magno / scilicet immemores supera ut convexa revisant / rursus, et incipient in corpore velle reverti." (VI. 748-751) ("All these, when they have rolled the wheel of time through a thousand years, will be called by God in a great assembly to the river Lethe, so that they return to the vaulted world with no memory and may begin again to desire rebirth in a human body.") This forgetting seems inspired by the Platonic eschewing of corporeality: why would the spirit, freed from the chains of materiality, seek to return

to that inferior state? Answer: it forgets the nature of embodiment. Servius makes this point in his commentary.[32] The *Eneas*'s explicit engagement with this process of forgetting happens on another level, interacting with the Latin text on this point in remarkably different ways from contemporary commentaries that, like Servius, remain invested in the consequence on the nature of the soul.

Here, Eneas learns of the necessity of leaving the past behind, well in advance of his meeting with Anchises as the Sibyl places oblivion at the crossing of the river Styx; it is this process of forgetting that seems to be called Letheum ("Lethes a nom cest oublïance," line 2587.)[33] This reworked presentation of fact, much like Eneas's knowledge of his destination, is somewhat confusing, as Eneas later meets characters such as the Greek warriors from Troy, as well as Dido, who have crossed the river yet clearly remember him. The romance sets up an at best ambiguous and at worst hostile perspective towards reflective engagements with the non-present. The past is suppressed, and the future is simply known; Eneas's encounters with material from outside his own chronological present are factual and objective, not phenomenological and subjective. The romance even restructures itself to push the narrative into a constant present—this choice can be attributed to the confusion drawn from the *Aeneid*'s original achronological ordering, as we have seen. Yet the *effects* of that narrative restructuring are to emphasize and reinforce the *Eneas*'s sealing-off of the present.

The romance's denial of historical experience to the subject, in this case Eneas, can in part be understood by examining the medieval commentary tradition around the *Aeneid*, as we have seen. The restructuring of the romance's narrative pushes the audience into a dominating present. The significance of this move can only be appreciated by means of a parallel reading of the *Aeneid*. Such a strategy can be tricky for any work of translation, as comparative reading risks introducing a model of inheritance, fidelity/deviation, or incorrect-correct readings into an analysis. It is also particularly perilous in the case of the *Aeneid* which has been *the* archetype of Latin verse since it first circulated. The "faithful/unfaithful" yardstick has been tenacious in scholarship on Vergilian translation, in fact, influencing not just analyses but most importantly the choices of works to be

[32] "si ergo purgantur et recipiunt naturam suam, cur volunt reverti? quia potant, inquit, oblivia. etiam est illud ambiguum: aut ut praeteritarum obliviscantur poenarum, aut certe ut ignarae futuri habeant desiderium redeundi in corpora, quod sine passione non fit: nam animus in quo est passio, meretur reverti." Servius, *Commentaire sur l'*Énéide *de Virgile. Livre VI*, ed. Emmannuelle Jeunet-Marcy (Belles lettres, 2012), 167.

[33] Aimé Petit translates this line as "ce fleuve d'oubli s'appelle Léthé," whereas the text fails to make the object named explicit; Petit, *Le Roman d'Enéas*, 193.

studied. Charles Martindale may have called for the classics to be recognized as events fundamentally rooted not in their historical origins but in the present moment,[34] but the approaches to *Aeneid* reception privilege texts rooted in periods considered equally as "enlightened" as modern understandings of the stakes and tastes in place in late 1st-century BCE Rome. This posturing invariably excludes medieval work, considered unenlightened by the philology and learning on Antiquity that mark later periods.

The Renaissance, beginning with Dante, marks the real point of interest for scholars of reception. There is little engagement from scholars of Virgilian reception with the ways medieval literature was influenced by the structures and meanings read in his works. In his 2021 volume on Vergil's influence on 12th-century literature Justin Haynes has faulted recent reception work for focusing solely on comparison with the text that we have now constructed, through editing and reading practices, as "the" Vergilian *Aeneid*, "ignoring the way in which the original author's (and readership's) interpretation might differ from our current understanding of the same work."[35] Such a posture results in scholars passing over Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* and Alain of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*, among others, as relevant to understanding medieval engagement with Vergil. Jean-Yves Tilliette's conclusion from the mid-1980s, "…il me semble que le nom de Virgile…joue plutôt le rôle de référence absolue, transcendentale, si j'ose dire, que de modèle précis à suivre…," continues to hold sway over medieval reception work: do not look for real translations of Vergil here.[36] Susanna Braund and Zara Martirosova Torlone's 2018 collection, *Virgil and His Translators*, also omits medieval adaptations and translations—only Dante is treated in one chapter.[37] Only two chapters of the 1997 *Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, edited by Charles Martindale, treat medieval receptions of Vergil, although only tangentially through the well-known commentary of Servius from Late Antiquity, and once again Dante, under a chapter entitled "Virgils, from Dante to Milton."[38] Between Servius and Dante, it seems that nothing of

[34] Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[35] Haynes, *The Medieval Classic*, 4.

[36] Jean-Yves Tilliette, "L'influence de l*'Énéide sur l'épopée latine du XIIe siècle*," in *Lectures médiévales de Virgile. Actes du colloque organisé par l'École française de Rome (Rome, 25-28 octobre 1982)* (École française de Rome,1985), 139.

[37] Susanna Braund and Zara Martirosova Torlone, eds., *Virgil and His Translators* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

[38] Charles Martindale, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

interest was written. Joseph Farrell and Michael Putnam's 2010 edited volume, *A Companion to Vergil's Aeneid and its Tradition*, likewise skips nearly a thousand years, moving from Augustine and Dares and Dictys to, once again, Dante.[39]

The focus on the Renaissance and corresponding sidelining of the medieval is due, I think, to the *Aeneid*'s intervention in the nascent historiography of the early Principate under Augustus. Aeneas's historical consciousness is a placeholder for the historical consciousness of the Romans, and exactly *what* that historical consciousness was, has attracted great attention. In a schematic analysis of 20th-century Vergilian scholarship, W.R. Johnson famously characterized two schools: the "light" or European reading, and "dark" or Harvard reading. For these two schools, the epic either brings us out of "the mindless, amoral jungle into the clear sunshine of the Augustan enlightenment," or "creates a *concordia discors* that is clearly wrong for a celebration of *Roma Aeterna* and evades any possible kind of good resolution to the conflicts the poem mirrors."[40] This dialectic has since been dismantled, especially by Duncan Kennedy who explored the possibility for a symbol to be equivocally "pro" or "anti"-regime, writing that "Power is successful insofar as it manages not so much to silence or suppress as to *determine the consumption* of the oppositional voice within its discourse,"[41] although there has been pushback more recently attempting to bring the political back into the conversation.[42] Beyond the operation of recovering Vergil's intent, then, there is the bare fact that Vergil's work seems to speak to a transhistorical anxiety over dictatorship, freedom, and literary production. The teleological posturing that couches the *Aeneid* in the socio-political which travels within it across time often becomes polluting as it seeps into studies of medieval receptions of classical works whose writers, while closer in time and culture to Vergil, are dismissed by modern critics, even today, as nonetheless less able to comprehend these monuments of Greco-Roman antiquity. In essence, this trend reflects the tenacity of the

[39] Joseph Farrell and Michael C.J. Putnam, eds., *A Companion to Vergil's Aeneid and its Tradition* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

[40] W.R. Johnson, *Darkness Visible: A Study of Vergil's 'Aeneid.'* (University of Chicago Press, 1976) 9, 11.

[41] Duncan F. Kennedy, "'Augustan' and 'Anti-Augustan': Reflections on Terms of Reference." In *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus*, ed. Anton Powell (Bristol Classics, 1992), 41.

[42] Elena Giusti has more recently sought to recenter the debate around the ways that readings of the *Aeneid* depend on drawing historical and poetic analogies within the poem that are "complicit with the practice of interpreting past events according to a totalitizing interpretation of history" that oppressive regimes seek to entrench; cf. Elena Giusti. "Did Somebody Say Augustan Totalitarianism? Duncan Kennedy's 'Reflections,' Hannah Arendt's *Origins*, and the Continental Divide over Vergil's *Aeneid*," *Dictynna* 13 (2016): 1-19; 12).

"faithful/unfaithful" yardstick for assessing translation, and perhaps the enduring interest in exploring the political valences of a text which are more salient for reception in the Renaissance, a period whose self-fashioning has so strongly fixed in cultural perceptions its own cultural struggles with despotism and rebirth.

What kind of intervention can those funny medieval writers make in deep political questions of which they were unaware and ill-equipped to engage with? Braund and Martirosova qualify the *Eneas* as "an important text," but one that only "rejigs the material to reflect contemporary concerns."[43] Their terms, "rejig" and "contemporary concerns," characterize a lexical field widely employed by scholars who read the Eneas and ignore the intertemporal habit of reading a text through the lens of contemporary concerns, as if modern readings of the *Aeneid* are incapable of "rejigging" the eternal epic monument. Thus frameworks such as "anachronizing" and "updating" explain medieval vernacularization as first and foremost rendering classical material comprehensible. Sometimes, the two processes go hand-in-hand, as amplification and exegesis of religious and political themes are seen to engage in dynasty-building discourse at the behest of the author's assumed Angevin patrons,[44] despite the absence of a patron either named or alluded to. To be clear, medievalists are keen to recognize vernacular literature as an autonomous cultural site for literary production demonstrate an empirical interest in sifting out "what is Virgil" from "what is not": as Aimé Petit rightly wrote, the failure to take stock of the *Eneas* by refusing to compare it to the *Aeneid* in its entirety, both in structure and content, "risque d'imputer au romancier des éléments figurant en fait dans l'épopée latine, et l'on occulte toute une part du travail de l'adaptateur en pleine Renaissance du XIIème siècle."[45] While comparative readings, in which my research participates, are key to understanding the *romans d'antiquité*, there is nevertheless a risk of engaging in an underlying assumption, that of using the comparative reading while remaining complicit in the narrator's rhetoric of didacticism to explain a teleological project behind all differences between the two texts, be they explained under the heading of clarifications, anachronisms, innovations, or other forms of intentional "modifications." That is, assuming that

[43] Braund and Martirosova Torlone, *Virgil and His Translators,* 1.

[44] Raymond J. Cormier, "Indications d'oralité dans l'expression poétique du 'Roman d'Eneas'," *Romania* 133, no. 531/532 (2015): 312

[45] Aimé Petit, "De l'hypotexte à l'hypertexte. L'Énéide et le roman d'Énéas," *Bien Dire et Bien Aprandre* 4 (1986); 59

the unique features of the text arise from the medieval "modernizing" the classical text.[46] In short, to conclude that "To reach his audience more effectively, the adaptor has transfigured many characters and situations into a medieval context."[47] What is at issue is not the use of *adaptation* as a term—the *romans d'antiquité* after all are not presented as original stories, although the *Eneas* does not wear the mantle of a translation—but rather that the network of corollaries that grow out of that term is allowed to grow and take over reading of the *Eneas*.

The *Eneas* is a text with its own origin, qualities and trajectory. Indeed, Stephen Harrison reminds us that the *Aeneid* itself was already a work of reception, as the descent to the underworld does more than present a Roman future, but also figures "a parallel journey of the *Aeneid* through the history of its own genre of epic."[48] As an autonomous work, it participated in the shift in vernacular culture from a preference for epic to that of romance and a concurrent ideological shift towards "an ideology in which love and sexuality regulate the bellicose tendencies of the medieval aristocratic male."[49] Even within *Aeneid* reception it has been recognized as making unique claims and proposing readings unavailable to Roman audiences of Vergil's epic. Daniel Poirion suggested that the extended development of the seduction between Eneas and Lavinia—the latter essentially absent from the *Aeneid*—can be read along the lines of a binary model of error and rectification, echoing in contrast with the earlier failure to consummate a relationship with Dido.[50] With regards to its intervention in historiography, the *Eneas*'s genealogies and lineages presented by Anchises to Eneas in the underworld in fact create a rupture within history: while the framework is essentially the same as in the *Aeneid*, the writer of the medieval romance, unlike Vergil, was very much aware of the future of Rome. By repeating the same notion of unbroken genealogy, the romance ends up "tragically reincarnat[ing] the same mistake," that is, dreaming that

[46] Arianna Punzi, "Il *Roman d'Eneas* o la riscrittura dell'*epos*. *Francofonia* 45 (2003): 47

[47] Raymond J. Cormier, "A Twelfth-Century Humanist Reinvents Virgil," *Mediaevistik* 26 (2013): 150.

[48] Stephen Harison, "Vergil's metapoetic katabasis: the underworld of *Aeneid* 6 and the history of epic," in *Virgilian Studies: A Miscellany dedicated to the memory of Mario Geymonat (26.1.1941-17.2.2012)*, ed. Hans-Christian Günther (Bautz, 2015), 171

[49] Simon Gaunt, "From Epic to Romance: Gender and Sexuality in the *Roman d'Eneas*," *Romanic Review* 83, no. 1 (1992): 1.

[50] Daniel Poirion, "De l'*Énéide* à l'*Eneas*: mythologie et moralisation," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 19, no. 3 (1976): 213-229.

contemporary political structures are "the final resting place" of power.[51] My comparative reading operates on parallel lines: by looking at the *Aeneid* as well as its commentary tradition, I do not seek to identify sources, inspiration, or normative readings, but rather explore how a set of practices converge in the *Eneas* that rips a fundamentally historically-conscious narrative outside of history, and call into question a subject's ability to integrate into their formation historical experience.

3.3 Attending to History

The *Eneas*'s unique erasure of the past as something to be experienced arises from the way the romance stages attention, and it is necessary to step back and take a measure of the *Aeneid*'s construction of the subject as formed by history in order to understand the *lack* of attentiveness to this experience in the *Eneas*. I will first consider how Aeneas attends to images of the past and the future in the *Aeneid*, before shifting to the *Eneas* in order to read corresponding scenes—the murals on the walls of Dido's palace, the Sibyl's writings, the shield gifted to him by Venus—as marked by an absence of attention to the past.

A great many of Aeneas's encounters with the pasts of the people and places along his journey do not figure in the romance. This blankness projected onto the world around him, as if it had just come into existence rather than coming to be in the dense mesh of the past, gestures towards a fundamentally different mode of recounting history through the *Eneas*. On the surface, the encounter with the Sibyl bears similarities to the *Aeneid*—the golden bough is sought and found, the entrance to the underworld is crossed, the tortures of the damned and delights of the just are discovered, the procession of the souls takes place. Yet when we look at what surrounds the Sibyl in Vergil, we begin to see how history unravels in the two texts in vastly different ways, and in particular with diametrically opposed consequences on the formation of the subject. The encounter with the Sibyl is a rare and unique occurrence in the romance where Eneas attends to his past and future in order to understand moral and cosmological truths, beyond the coming progeny and empire which legitimize his struggle. That rarity is due to the striking lack of representations of the past instantiated within Eneas's world, features which were fundamental to the formation of Vergil's Aeneas.

[51] Zrinka Stahuljak, "Future's Phantoms, or Reincarnations of the Parricidal Past in the 'Roman d'Eneas,'" *L'Esprit Créateur* 40.1 (200): 23.

Indeed, representations of history fill the *Aeneid*, and if there is a point in common in the functioning of the Sibyl in Vergil's epic and the medieval romance, it is the extent to which her mode of teaching echoes the road of coming to knowledge elsewhere in the text. In Vergil, she characterizes the learning process; in the *Eneas*, she functions as an exception. The Sibyl is first mentioned in Book 3, as Aeneas and company stumble across Priam's son Helenus ruling over a rebuilt Troy on the island of Chaonia. Helenus, having consulted Apollo in order to help Aeneas to foresee the challenges which await him, delivers a prophecy:

> insanam vatem aspicies, quae rupe sub ima
> fata canit foliisque notas et nomina mandat.
> Quaecumque in foliis descripsit carmina virgo,
> digerit in numerum atque antro seclusa relinquit.
> Illa manent immota locis neque ab ordine cedunt;
> verum eadem, verso tenuis cum cardine ventus
> impulit et teneras turbavit ianua frondes,
> numquam deinde cavo volitantia prendere saxo
> nec revocare situs aut iungere carmina curat;
> inconsulti abeunt sedemque odere Sibyllae. (III.443-452)

> … you will meet a prophetess who in her frenzy chants the future and commits it to leaves with marks and signs. Whatever verses the virgin priestess scratches on leaves she arranges in order and stores in her cave. There they remain in their numbered ranks. But if the door is opened and a light breeze disturbs the soft leaves and scatters them, she does not bother to gather them up as they fly through the cave, does not care to arrange them again and order the verse, and so those who inquired receive no advice and learn to hate the Sibyl and her shrine. (68)

Helenus's presentation of the Sibyl is far from reassuring: *insanam*, the Sibyl is quite literally un-sound. The possible madness of her prophecies is not at issue: rather than their content, it is their mode of communication that destabilizes their legitimacy. They are scratched out (descripsit) on an unstable surface, in fact a surface that is plural and mobile—the leaves can preserve a message

but can also efface it, while leaving an alluring yet illusory trace on their surface. Her visitors do not leave with hatred because her message has misled them; a 12th-century copy of the *Aeneid* specifies that "insani dicuntur poetae quod non locuntur nostro spiritu sed divino" ("poets are called made because they do not speak with our [mortal] mind, but with the divine").[52] Rather, their frustration is born from the leaves flying apart, becoming disassembled, in attempts to attend to the message and piece it together. Yet the Sibyl later becomes a trusted source of wisdom in Book VI—the difference is that she is present to speak with Aeneas about the scenes before him in the underworld. Her speech, then, is the vector of knowledge transmission, not her writing.

Messages left behind, scratched or layered onto surfaces, are in fact epistemologically problematic from Aeneas's perspective. The Sibyl's are problematic because of their impermanence—but it is also the frustration of trying to put them back together, of attending to what, ultimately, attention cannot clarify. This pitfall of the visual is illustrated strikingly in Book 1. Dido's Carthage is still actively being constructed, and Aeneas is in awe at the marvels around him; the wonder he feels ("miratur" I.486) is nevertheless displaced by the arresting effect of the murals adorning Dido's temple to Juno. "Constitit et lacrimans" (he stopped and cries), he is plunged back into the battles of Troy, seemingly reliving them as the epic carefully represents the hero scanning through the panels thoroughly: "…animum pictura pascit inani / multa gemens, largoque umectat flumine vultum." (I.464-465) ("…he fed his soul on empty pictures, sighing, weeping, his face a flood of tears.") The Trojans routing the Greeks, Achilles chasing the Trojans, Troilus carried away dead, the Trojan women beating their breasts as they mourn in the streets—and even his own self is represented fighting the Greeks. There is continued interest in seeing in this image the emergence of Roman imperial historiography for a savant audience, as the mosaic ends on the emergence of Aeneas as a triumphant Trojan moving forward to dominate the Italic confederation, "a notional *aition* of the future Roman victory."[53] Yet this scene fundamentally stages attention: he is so drawn in by this vivid representation that he misses Dido's entrance, "Haec dum Dardanio Aeneae miranda videntur, / dum stupet obtutuque haeret defixus in uno…" (I.495) ("While Aeneas beheld these wonders, while in amazement he is stuck in one fixed gaze…") Aeneas misses the arrival of a woman in the form of a goddess because of these images,

[52] Cambridge, Peterhouse 158, 70r.

[53] Alexander Kirichenko, "Virgil's Augustan Temples: Image and Intertext in the *Aeneid*," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 103 (2013): 75.

and is only ripped from his frozen contemplation by the arrival of his comrades. He is amazed by the artifice, but does not provide any revelation of its possible meaning. Aeneas attends to the image, but it does not guide an unequivocal reception of the past—Servius steps in here to fill that void—and, crucially, while the story of the fall of Troy is depicted in full color on the walls of Juno's temple, Dido requires Aeneas's tale to provide the full picture.

Aeneas's affective connection with the wall reveals, then, its fundamental connection with the prophecies of the Sibyl. Representations on a surface are inefficient to provide an autonomous, unequivocal reading of history, and both the leaves and the murals require an oral addition. That principle extends to the present of the narration, as Aeneas is routinely distracted by images which he feels he must attend to, but fails to understand. Aeneas has, perhaps, failed to understand what he sees in Dido's temple, which diminishes faith in his interpretive abilities. Furthermore, the viewing at the temple demonstrates that "while understanding works of art is a deeply engaging and emotional activity for people, it is also easy to make mistakes or to fall short while doing it."[54] Yet as we have seen in Chapter 1, failure is inherent to attentive engagements; these scenes with Aeneas do not, I believe, indict his reliability as a viewer, but rather explore the experience of the viewing, rather than the conclusions that flow from it. Before encountering Dido's palace, he is compelled, even instructed, to attend to an even more lively visual scene on the outskirts of the city. A beautiful woman, who is in fact his mother Venus in disguise, calls out to him; the charade does not last long as Aeneas shows himself to be an effective "reader" of reality: "namque haud tibi vultus / mortalis, nec vox hominem sonat …" (I.327-328) ("Your face is hardly mortal, and your voice does not sound human.") Venus does not drop the act immediately, however—she instead engages with the second part of her son's response, in which he asked her (as an all-knowing goddess) to tell him where the Trojans have landed. In other words, he was able to tell from superficial signs—the splendor of her face, the timbre of her voice—that she was divine, but not which divinity she was. Nor could he tell from the landscape and bush around him, inferring from topography and botany, where he was.

Aeneas's gaze is continually emphasized as short-sighted, needing a second partner to add a layer of discourse on top of the sights before him. Within the space of the same conversation, Venus cuts short her son's lament and continuously chastises him for his despair—we learn that

[54] Deborah Beck, "Ecphrasis, Interpretation, and Audience in Aeneid I and Odyssey 8," *American Journal of Philology* 128.4 (2007): 540.

Aeneas is perhaps a somewhat attentive "reader," but does not take in all that the visual scene before him presents. His mother instead must guide his gaze to specific signs to show him what must be "read," and what his attempt to attend to the world around him has missed. She announces that his comrades, whom he believed dead, are in fact alive, and their ships intact; what is more important is how she knows such information. Her keen sense of augury is the source, and she draws Aeneas' gaze to share what is in her field of vision, to the scene before her, the perspective that should have affected Aeneas:

> aspice bis senos laetantis agmine cycnos,
> aetheria quos lapsa plaga Iovis ales aperto
> turbabat caelo; nunc terras ordine longo
> aut capere aut captas iam despectare videntur. (I.393-396)
>
> Observe the serenity of those twelve gliding swans. An eagle, Jove's bird, swooped down from above and disturbed their flight in the open sky, but now they are flying in a long line again. Some have landed, and you can see the others looking down for a good place to alight. (14)

The returning swans are analogous to the returning sailors, as is obvious to any experienced gazer. Venus's call to attentive interaction with the surroundings seeps out of the text and into medieval reading practices as well, as medieval readers sought to attend even more closely to the visual signs. Servius is essentially an attendant to Venus, here, as he comments on these lines, going deeper into how the inference moves from the birds themselves to the conclusion about the Trojans' survival.[55] The *Aeneid*, then, does not manifest literary representations of images and visuals as straightforward modes of encoding wisdom. "Vision and cognizance do not always

[55] "Cycnos nauibus comparat, aquilam tempestati. In auguries autem considerandae sunt non solum aves, sed cantus, ut in oscinibus, quia nec omnes nec omnibus dant auguria, ut columbae non nisi regibus dant, quia numquam singulae volant, sicut rex numquam solus inedit ; unde in sexto *maternas agnouit aves* per transitum ostendit regis augurium." ("Venus compares the swans to the ships, and the eagle to the storm. Moreover, in the auguries we must consider not only the birds, but their flight as well, for one type (*praepes*), and their song, for another (*oscen*), since not every bird provides an augury for every person. Doves, for example, give them to no one but kings, since they never fly alone, just as a king never proceeds alone. Thus in the sixth book when he says 'he recognized his mother's birds,' he shows in passing a king's augury.") Servius, *À l'école de Virgile. Commentaire à l'Énéide Livre I*, X.

occur concurrently,"[56] indeed, but that cognizance here is somewhat of an afterthought, that is, it is not the result of a contemplative Aeneas arriving at the answer. Visuals can be illusory in their signification, as the writings of the Sibyl, or needing layered speech, as the paintings on Dido's walls or the augury given by Venus.

While the representation of images in the *Aeneid* has caught the eyes of scholars, they have most often focused on the way ekphrasis can encode and symbolize an ideologized, or instead subverted, historical matrix. Paintings and apparitions, then, specifically value visual forms of knowing, challenging the rhetoric of orality. Thus Alden Smith sees in the plethora of images and vision in the *Aeneid* evidence of late Republican cultural shifts leading towards the decline of rhetorical schools, asserting that Vergil's characters are principally motivated by sighted objects and that the visual, over rhetoric, allows for a synchronizing historiography bringing together past and future into a meaning-making coexistence.[57] Indeed, images possess an ability to layer both signification and commentary in a duality that language may struggle to contain. In this line of thought, contemporary Romans would have understood layered historical irony in the images of Trojan history on the walls of the temple to Juno in Carthage, as "since this is Juno's temple the murals celebrate rather than lament the Fall of Troy."[58] A knowing audience therefore may ponder "whether the cruel and grasping Carthaginians" truly could provide resolution for Aeneas and his Trojans.[59] The synchronism achieved by images operates outside of history as well—images can become fractal-like, allowing for jumps in scale to occur within the poem, rendering the experience of history itself more vivid as when the rivers of sweat covering Turnus's body mirror the river he plunges into for salvation.[60]

Yet many scholars focusing on ekphrasis have failed to account for Aneas's place specifically in unfurling these images' meaning, often seeking to instead decrypt the clues left behind by Virgil, as in the case of what is, perhaps, the most famous passage in the epic, the shield

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[56] Riggs Alden Smith, *The Primacy of Vision in Virgil's* Aeneid (University of Texas Press, 2005), 28.

[57] "This tension between sight and speech reflects the time when Virgil composed the *Aeneid*, a period situated between the waning influence of the art of rhetoric in the Roman Republic and the waxing influence of images in the new empire." Alden Smith, *The Primacy of Vision*, 3.

[58] James J. O'Hara, *Death and the Optimistic Prophecy in Vergil's* Aeneid (Princeton University Press, 1990), 183.

[59] Nicholas Horsfall, "Dido in the light of history," *PUS* 13 (1973): 7

[60] Gregory Hutchinson, "Space in the Aeneid," in *Virgilinian Studesi: A Mischellany dedicated to the memory of Mario Geymonat (26.1.1941-17.2.2012)*, ed. Hans-Christian Günther. (Verlag Traugott Botz, 2015).

given to him by his mother in book 8. Crucially, Aeneas is not the exegete—rather, the shield, "non enarrabile textum" (VIII.625) is scanned, analyzed and described by the narrator. Just like the encounter with Dido's murals, Aeneas is transfixed as he attempts to attend to the rich heterotopia of history decorating its surface:

> expleri nequit atque oculos per singula volvit
> miraturque interque manus et bracchia versat
> terribilem cristis galeam flammasque vomentem
> …
> hastamque et clipei non enarrabile textum. (VIII. 618-625)

> He could not satisfy his eyes as they moved from one part to another. He was lost in wonder as he turned each piece over in his hands and cradled it in his arms: the flaring helmet, with its threatening crest…the spear, and the shield's ineffable design. (210)

Aeneas is disposed to reflection, introspection, almost disconnection from his surrounding when confronted with meaningful visuals—he understands the monument before him, somewhat, but becomes lost, "miratur," as he attends to its depth and texture. Suzanne Akbari's insights on ekphrasis in the tombs of the *romans d'antiquité* feel equally applicable in this case, as the shield serves a "specifically temporal function," like many other images in the epic whereby one rich illustration fixes a "view of history that departs from the linear form of narrative." These breaks in the narrative bring in contemplation of past for the reader as they not only provide ekphrasis, but in particular go through descriptions of scenes that are clearly stated as pertaining to history and leave the interpretive conclusion in suspense.[61] The shield is covered with clear scenes of "res Italas Romanorumque triumphos" (VIII.626) ("the future of Italy and Roman triumphs"), Ascanius's offspring, Romulus and Remus, the rape of the Sabine women and the overthrow of Tarquinius Superbus. The amount of history is overwhelming and the richness of its surface has been questioned for its structural unity, revealing an underlying uncertainty in what it really

[61] Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "Ekphrasis and Stasis in Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la mutacion de fortune*," in *The Art of Vision: Ekphrasis in Medieval Literature and Culture*, eds. Andrew James Johnston, Ethan Knapp and Margitta Rouse (The Ohio State University Press, 2015), 185.

means,[62] possibly mobilizing ekphrasis to engage in the kind of "cryptic wordplay" that has been read as necessary under the political conditions of the Augustan principate.[63] In fact, much like the Sibyl's words, the material on the shield is mixed together—there is so much depicted, as recounted by the narrator, that it is nearly impossible to image so much so closely ordered, separated, and represented on such a small space.

The shield turns the legibility of history into a circular cycle of signification in which "seeing texts or images as real translates into the conversion of reality to match the representation."[64] Aeneas's viewing is an absorption of models that are then meant to be projected into reality as Platonic ideals, a process modelled within the shield itself by the numerous "viewers" embedded within the illustrated scenes. Yet, what brings legibility to the shield is the narrative supplied by Vergil. Aeneas's part, in these moments, is to be frozen in contemplation, almost "stuck" as a subject absorbing a new perspective: "talia per clipeum … miratur rerumqe ignarus imagine gaudet." (VIII.729-30) ("He marveled at such things on the shield … and while he did not know the events represented, he delighted at their representation.") Servius is essentially uninterested in understanding the nature of subjectivity in his comment on the presence of Aeneas in the murals at Carthage, which instead hinges on the historical or moral inferences, writing that "…aut latenter proditionem tangit, ut supra diximus, aut virtutem eius vult ostendere: nimiae enim fortitudinis est inter hostium tela versari…"[65] ("This either touches implicitly his treason, as we said above, or he wishes to show his courage: it is, indeed, an act of extreme courage to be among the enemies' arms…") Yet other medieval readers *did* catch on to the first-person experience of history as a salient line to explore. A 13th-century copy of the *Aeneid* ventriloquizes Aeneas' conversation with Venus to explore her son's entry into the conversation, commenting his address to her, "o—quam te memorem virgo?" (I.327) ("Oh, how should I address you maiden?") in a gesture to the reader:

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[62] S.J. Harrison, "The Survival and Supremacy of Rome: The Unity of the Shield of Aeneas," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 87 (1997): 70-76.

[63] Pramit Chaudhuri, "Naming Nefas: Cleopatra on the Shield of Aeneas," *The Classical Quarterly* 62.1 (2012): 223-226.

[64] Andrew Feldherr, "Viewing Myth and History on the Shield of Aeneas," *Classical Antiquity* 33.2 (2014): 299.

[65] Servius, *À l'école de Virgile. Commentaire à l'Énéide Livre 1*, 288-289.

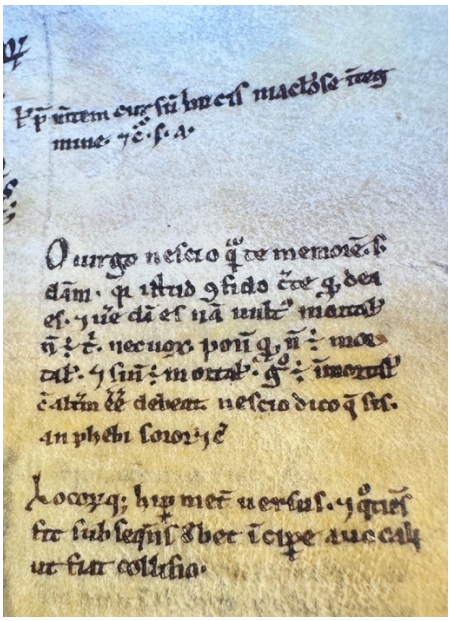


Figure 3.2 Paris BNF NAL 707, 37v[66]

O uirgo nescio q*uam* te memore*m*. S*ignificat* dea*m*. Q*uia* istud *confide* cer*te* *quod* dea es. *Et* u*er*e d*e*a es nam uultus mortalis non est tibi. Nec uox [potens?] quae non est mortalis … nescio dico quae sis.

O maiden, I don't know how to address you (meaning as a goddess). Since I know this for sure, that you are a goddess. And you are indeed, for your face is not mortal, nor your [powerful?] voice which is not mortal … I do not know, I say who you may be.

The wonder and confusion of Aeneas in front of the marvel is captured in the marginalia here, as a non-Servian gloss projects the reader into the hero's confusion at the sight of his mother. The way this experience creates a certain form of knowing through subjectivity is not explicitly explored, but the door opened by Vergil into Aeneas-as-subject is walked through here. The jumbled structure of the note, less elegant than the flow of the verse, is due in part to the grammatical simplification of the Latin text that it surely seeks to provide. Yet the clue is still there, that the best explanation of such a scene is to project oneself into Aeneas's place.

[66] Photo by Adam Grant.

3.4 Attending to the World, Reading the World

The moment of attending, the moment of absorbing those meanings, is problematized. In order to return to the *Eneas* and appreciate the extent to which the relationship between the subject's formation and attention is so enmeshed within historical experience, I turn to French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's work on what he called the "pli" ("fold.") With this concept, he traced out the porosity of a subject in contact with, and formed by, encounters with the world. In his monograph on the German polymath Gottfried Leibniz, *Le pli. Leibniz et le baroque*, Deleuze developed a particular posture towards the development of the subject that interrogated the extent to which the subjective, and thus internal, is separate from an objective reality, or an external. The subject, for Deleuze, is quite literally *shaped* by encounters along their trajectory with events and practices creating "inflection points." These are the "véritable atome,"[67] the basic building blocks of the subject, rather than static, internalized properties. These "inflections" create "folds" in reality, generating specific perspectives—that is, a *fold* constructs a perspective later occupied by a subject. This point is crucial: Deleuze argues for perspectivism, he reifies the perspective, the point of view, as something that has supremacy over the subject. The latter merely inhabits a perspective, rather than the perspective being a quality possessed by or inherent to it. As he writes, "sera sujet ce qui vient au point de vue, ou plutôt qui demeure au point de vue."[68]

This reversal of the traditional hierarchy between the subject and one of its traditional defining points, individual impressions and opinions, inevitably leads to a breakdown between the subject and the surrounding world. For Deleuze, these are intrinsically linked, not just in their essence, but insofar as they are codetermined in a structure problematizing the interiority/exteriority duality. It is not that the subject is constituted by their interactions with the surrounding environment, but that the subject is a byproduct of the perspectives created by all of the "folds" encountered, in other words, "le monde crée des sujets en se pliant"[69] That fold, of course, is not a physical folding of space—it is more like a city which offers visitors particular predetermined vistas over a monument, that is, perspectives predetermined by the space. Those characteristics of the space are the "inflections" Deleuze credited to new practices and discourses,

[67] Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli. Leibniz et le baroque* (Les éditions de minuit, 1988), 20.

[68] Deleuze, *Le pli*, 27.

[69] Camille Chamois, 2025. "Les plis de l'être. Les modes de subjectivation chez Deleuze," in *Deleuze aujourd'hui*, eds. Camille Chamois and Thomas Detcheverry (Presses universitaires de France, 2025), 77.

creating "folds" that turn a straight line into complex curves. As in optics, this curvature projects lines of sight emerging from its convex or concave surface, converging on one point, the perspective. That "folding" is thus the representation which the subject makes of the world around them: "On dira que ce qui est plié est seulement virtuel, et n'existe actuellement que dans une enveloppe, dans quelque chose qui l'enveloppe…"[70] That envelope is the "soul," "Aussi est-ce l'âme qui a des plis, qui est pleine de plis. Les plis sont dans l'âme et n'existent actuellement que dans l'âme"[71] That is, Deleuze is still in the realm of self-representation—the first half of his analysis dispossesses the subject of a fundamental characteristic, their interiority, by postulating the extent to which it consists of incorporated elements of the exterior "folded" into a point.

Yet in his second line of attack, the fold also denies the world its characteristic of exteriority. If a wide sheet of paper represents the universe, then subjects are spots where that paper has been crumpled, with folds layering upon themselves, one from each encounter, sometimes unfolding and reshaped. The "world" itself is a virtual representation held within those subjects, just as a subject is a point of folding: "…le monde entier n'est qu'une virtualité qui n'existe actuellement que dans des plis de l'âme qui l'exprime …"[72] If a fold is caused by some event, the "inflection," then it is the incorporation of these folds into one place that creates the "âme ou le sujet."[73]

The issue is not one of just marking the boundary between interiority and exteriority or of questioning the extent to which the seeming expressions of the subject's interiority are in fact emanations of an external episteme. Deleuze is interested in "la manière dont un sujet se rapporte à lui-même."[74] What the analytic of the fold reveals, rather than a physical description of the process that plays out as a subject moves forward in time and encounters change and novelty (no one is getting crushed by folded space) is the extent to which two key endpoints of Western epistemology are perilously unstable and mutually imbricated. First, subjects inhabit perspectives, rather than the other way around, and are refraction points of the outside, rather than formed, knowing observers interacting with phenomena separate from them. Secondly, "the world" is not

[70] Deleuze, *Le pli*, 31.

[71] Deleuze, *Le pli*, 31.

[72] Deleuze, *Le pli*, 32.

[73] Deleuze, *Le pli*, 32.

[74] Chamois, "Les plis de l'être," 81.

an ontologically real space, rather a virtual representation constructed as perspectives pile up to converge into a point that is a constituted subject. That moment of encounter with a new social practice, or more appropriately to the *Aeneid* and the *Eneas*, a new representation of history, does not impart information. Rather, the experience is "folded into" the subject temporarily occupying a given perspective. This process changes not just their perspective but, more crucially, the world so far virtually constructed in their mind.

The *Aeneid*, then, continually represents this process unfolding for a subject in continuous change as he comes into contact with vast moments of change and as he inhabits new spaces projecting novel perspectives. Aeneas struggles to contend with the representations around him that come to clash with the world as it is virtually represented within himself. The folds that constitute Aeneas-as-subject twist and turn when confronted with goddesses, signs, and frescos projecting novel perspectives on his own past. These are non-trivial moments of experience for the subject, and Aeneas's habit of freezing in place during moments of attention when he experiences difficulty incorporating the sights before him, attests to the Deleuzian principle that "l'âme est l'expression du monde (actualité), mais parce que le monde est l'expression de l'âme (virtualité)."[75] The oral accounts of Aeneas, Venus and the Sibyl are less explanative than fundamentally generative—they form part of Aeneas's encounters to construct "the world" of the *Aeneid*.

With this perspective in mind, we can now appreciate the extent to which the French translation has effaced the depth of the world conferred to it by the layering of historical experience onto points encountered by the subject. In fact, Eneas seems less an inhabitant of perspective than an actor wound up from the beginning and going through preset actions and procedures. Dido's palace provides a striking illustration of this quality of the romance. The city is not experienced through Eneas's eyes. Its description is instead provided through a narrative objectivity that imparts an aura of eternal fact on the space instead of an encounter with the unexpected and marvelous. The narrator emphasizes the quality of the buildings, the materials that were used to construct them, the richness of the fabrics offered for sale in the market. Yet, when it comes to the images at the temple, now transformed into Dido's palace, figuration seems to give way to splendor: the praise of Dido's craftsman erecting the buildings and of merchants trading in exotic

[75] Deleuze, *Le pli*, 37.

silks invites the audience to equally value the craftsman of the verse.[76] Gone is also an encounter with the paintings of history—instead, the palace has a different set of panels on its walls: "painz est a or de toutes pars, / bien y sont mises les .VII. ars, / le ciel, la terre et la mer / et quanque hom set porpenser." (lines 432-435) ("…the palace was decorated with golden paintings, representing the seven arts, the heavens, the Earth and the sea, and whatever else man could imagine.") These images are acclaimed for their opulence, not for the *marvel* produced in the viewing subject or for the attentive pausing they provoke. Eneas's gaze is, in fact, essentially parallel with the descriptive objectivity provided by the narrator:

> Eneas entra ou palays:
> onc en si bel ne entra mais;
> esgarde l'or et les paintures,
> le maistre dois et les faitures,
> et les grapes et la merveille
> d'oysiaus qui erent en la treille ;
> perçut que celle ert moult cortoise
> qui ert dame de tel richoise. (lines 690-697)

> Eneas entered the palace, he had never entered any other palace more beautiful than it. He looked around at the gold and the paintings, the table of honor and its decorations, the grapes and the marvel of the birds in the vines. He could tell that the lady with such wealth was very *courtoise*.

Instead of causing Eneas to inhabit a moment of pause, attention, absorption, the paintings furnish essential data points supporting a clear conclusion: Dido is "cortoise" and wealthy. There is no introspection or weighing of past experiences against the present; here, the present becomes the issue at hand. History has been flattened out in favor of present sights.

[76] Croizy-Naquet, *Thèbes, Troie, et Carthage*, 121.

Indeed, the points where the narrative is invested in a kind of ekphrasistic turn towards an ever-vivid present, characterized by noise rather than signification. The shield recedes from view—there is no story on it, rather an undescribed "moult bone eleverure" (line 4545) ("very fine relief") adorns it along with precious stones and metals. This is, in fact, the domination of the aesthetic over the signifier. Attentive contemplation is trivialized as a mere reaction to beauty and luxury, not an encounter with a perspective carrying consequences on the subject's self-representation and their virtual construction of a surrounding world. Here, Eneas "loves" his weapons, gifts from Venus and Vulcan, "n'est merveille s'il les ama" (line 4641) ("it is no wonder that he loved them"), with the marvelous encounter receding into the background as an unremarkable outgrowth of aesthetic appreciation.

In a telling scene, the dinner between Eneas and Dido is dominated not by visuals, but by noise—a marvelous vining plant made of gold creeps up the wall behind Dido's seat at the table, with hundreds of precious stones hanging from it like grapes. Equally wondrous are the mechanical birds, also of gold, which fly and sing when the wind blows as well as whenever Dido is present:

> onques ne finent de chanter
> al asseoir ne au lever,
> ne nuls oysiaus n'i est en pais :
> touz en retentist li palays,
> quant il chantent, hom n'i ot goute. (lines 482-486)

> They never cease their singing, from when she sits down to when she gets up, nor are any of the birds at rest. The palace resounds with them: when they sing, you can hardly hear anything.

Their singing is deafening, as the palace resounds ("retentit") with their birdsong. Yet that song is not a story, that is, it is not rationalized into representation, exegesis, or discourse layered onto the present to place it in dialogue with a Trojan future or past. It is instead an ever-droning chirping—"onques ne finent de chanter," they never cease their singing—that drowns out other modes of signification. Their effect on the subject is measured as privation, "hom n'i ot goute," one could

hardly hear. What they give is a negative, "goute," an adverbial transformation of a substantive into a negator. Dido's palace has transformed an attentive encounter not just with history, but with the subject's self, into an aesthetic overwhelming of the senses that drowns the subject's thought in an unescapable present.

Where the *Eneas* does indeed join contemporary medieval reading practices is in the privileging of detailed attentive reading. In a way, the *Eneas* jettisons the Roman Aeneas's gaze towards himself, his own history and his own world, and incorporates the reader's gaze onto another surface, that of the text. A marginal comment from an early 13th-century copy of the *Aeneid* illustrates this shift. While Aeneas marvels at the murals in Juno's temple, he sees a stark depiction of the fate of Hector: "ter circum Iliacos raptaverat Hectora muros / exanimumque auro corpus vendebat Achilles." (I.483-484) ("And now Achilles has dragged Hector three times around the walls of Troy and is selling the lifeless body for gold.") Servius' attention to the text is a remarkable divorce from the described horror of a lifeless body dragged behand a chariot and auctioned off to the highest bidder. He instead draws out ambiguities in Latin adjectival declensions with two alternative endings in the nominative:

> EXANIMUM exanimus et exanimis dicimus, sicut unanimus et unanimis, inermus et inermis. ergo pro nostro arbitrio aut secundae erunt declinationis, aut tertiae; sed a tertia ablativum singularem in i mittunt, quia communis sunt generis. exanimis autem est mortuus, ut hic indicat locus, exanimatus vero timens ut "exanimata sequens inpingeret agmina muris.[77]

> LIFELESS we say "exanimus" (*lifeless*) as well as "exanimis," just like "unanimus" and "unanimis" and "inermus" (*defenseless*) and "inermis." Therefore in our opinion they will either be second or third declension, but in the third declension they have an "i" in the ablative singular since they are neuter. "Exanimis," in any case, means dead, as this passage shows, but "exanimatus" [panicked] means fearful, as in "[when Achilles] pursued the panicked [exanimata] Trojan soldiers driving them into their walls …

[7777] Servius, *Commentaire sur l'Énéide de Virgile. Livre VI*, 45.

One word overtakes the narrative as Hector's body recedes from view and grammar comes to the fore: *exanimus*—or is it *exanimis*?—displaces the object it describes, a preview of the move away from historic experience that the romance *Eneas* achieves, albeit not through grammar. Aeneas's "ingentem gemitum … pectore ab imo" (I.485) ("a deep groan … from deep in his chest") is not a point of contact with this scene. A medieval scribe chose yet another route, instead pondering, quickly, what this scene truly meant.

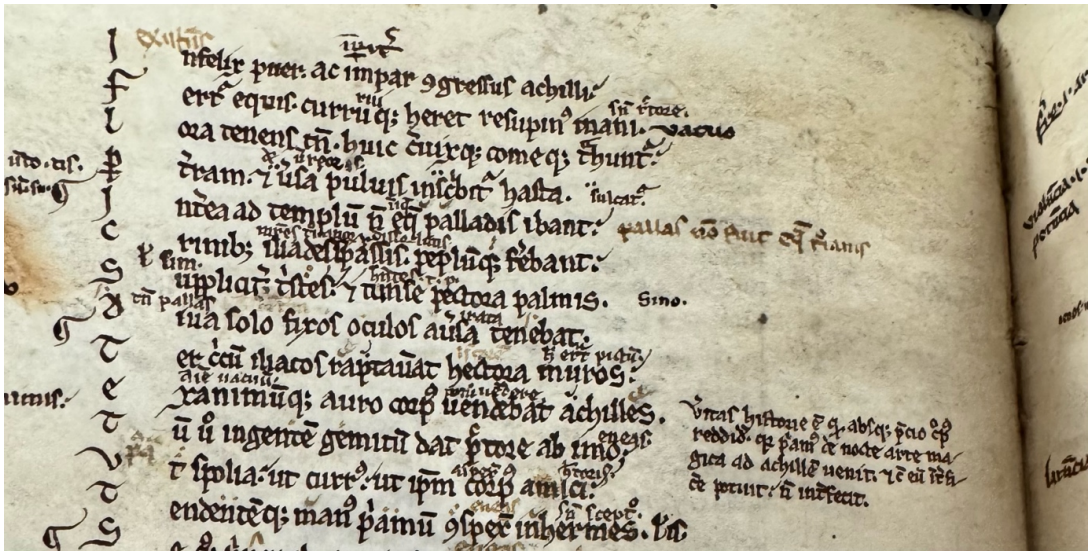


Figure 3.3 London British Library Harley 2534, 36v[78]

> Veritas historie est quod absque precio corpus reddidere quia priamus de nocte arte magice ad Achillem uenit. et cum eum interficere potuit non interfecit.
>
> The truth of the story is that they gave back the body for nothing because Priam appeared before Achilles at night through magic, and while he could have killed him, did not kill him.

The engagement is intertextual, connecting this scene with Hector to another explaining *why*, in the end, Hector's body was not reclaimed through ransom. The interpretation of this moment of self-reflection is historicized or, through linguistics, almost scrubbed of its weight on the subject's formation. The text itself becomes the point of self-reflection, as it displaces the subject. In what may sound like a paradox, the images in the text are flattened, while the text itself is invested with depth. As we shall now see, the medieval tradition set up the *Eneas,* as a

[78] Photograph by Adam Grant.

translation, to be the site of folding of the hermeneutic practices surrounding the *Aeneid*, rather than Aeneas, himself, as a folded subject.

3.5 Another Fold in the Fabric of History

What is a history text if it is removed from the past which it proposes to recount or when it privileges the richness of a narrated present over the depth of a historical subject's awareness of their movement through time? The *Eneas* denies that temporal connection superficially, as the markers of inheritance, study and revelation that characterize the *Thèbes* and *Troie* are wholly absent. There is no recognition of Vergil's authority, or claim for an *Aeneid* in translation; the previous work is not mentioned. More fundamentally than this erasure of the text's origin in time is the denial of experience and events that allow Eneas to be a fully constituted subject, bearing his own relationship to and in fact construction of the surrounding world. Eneas appears to exist outside of the course of events, intersecting with the plane of history only at the present moment. He knows from the moment of their escape from Troy that he will lead the Trojans to Lombardy one day, and he recounts for Dido the entry of the Greeks into Troy in the Trojan Horse, but those experiences—the paths taken to come to know the past, present, and future—have been transformed into quantifiable bits of empirical statements: "We will go to Lombardy." The *Eneas*'s instantiation of Eneas's knowledge—never experienced, always pre-internalized—in fact tracks Deleuze's own extension of his theory of the *pli* in an interview which he gave several years later, evoking televised media:

> D'abord, ils montrent souvent le début ou la fin, tandis qu'un événement même bref, même instantané, se continue. Ensuite ils veulent du spectaculaire, tandis que l'événement est inseparable des temps morts. Ce n'est même pas qu'il y ait des temps morts avant et après l'événement, le temps mort est dans l'événement, par exemple l'instant de l'accident le plus brutal se confond avec l'immensité du temps vide où on le voit arriver, spectateur de ce qui n'est pas encore, dans un très long suspens. L'événement le plus ordinaire fait de nous un voyant, tandis que les médias nous transforment en simples regardants passifs, au pire en voyeurs.[79]

[79] Gilles Deleuze. 1990. *Pourparlers. 1972-1990* (Éditions de minuit, 1990), 218.

While not taking place on a screen and without the corporate motives lying behind the growth in televised news from the 1980s since, the Old French *Eneas* transforms not just the Roman hero, but the audience as well, into the kind of *voyeurs* that Deleuze criticized as isolated from the "temps morts" that subtend true experience. It is not the spectacular that is criticized—the theory of the *pli* relies on the spectacular, as the perspective is the idealized notion, rather than the subject themselves. Instead, to show only the "spectaculaire," in this instance, is to isolate the most salient feature of an event, which for Deleuze, in the case of network news is its beginning or end. For Eneas, those salient features which are most visible are the fabrics of Carthage, the paintings in Dido's palace, the stones and exotic materials in Pallas's and Camilla's tombs. As Michael Putnam observed "Virgilian ekphrasis both brings time to a standstill and energizes its context."[80] What is lost is the "dead time" of staring at them, the passage from encounter to interiorization, in other words, the real encounter with the inflection.

Very much in line with my first chapter, which endeavored to show how modern technological disruptions of attention had, if not medieval antecedents, then at least medieval analogues, this chapter on the figuration of attention questions modernity's monopoly on the devaluation of the long emptiness of visual attentive engagement. The *Aeneid*, in fact, ends on the subject frozen in fear and driven to madness by visualized images. Vergil describes the paralysis that grips Turnus in his final combat, a duel with Aeneas, as the stuff of nightmares:

> ac velut in somnis, oculos ubi languida pressit
> nocte quies, nequiquam avidos extendere cursus
> velle videmur et in mediis conatibus aegri
> succidimus; non lingua valet, non corpore notae
> sufficiunt vires nec vox aut verba sequuntur (12.908-912)

> In dreams, when night's weariness weighs on our eyes, we are desperate to run farther and farther, but collapse weakly in the middle of our efforts. Our tongue doesn't work, our usual strength fails our body, and words will not come.

[80] Michael C. J. Putnam. 1998. "Dido's Murals and Virgilian Ekphrasis." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 98 (1998): 246.

Turnus is overcome by images of his past, he is gripped as "…tum pectore sensus / vertuntur varii" (XII.914-915) ("shifting sights spin through his head"), looking at the forces before him, the cities against him, and "cunctator metu letumque instare tremescit" (XII.916) ("frozen with fear, and the sights of his own death, trembling.") He is frozen, fixed in place: *instare* is the verb to end the illustration of sight in the *Aeneid* on, as it accompanies this experience throughout. Aeneas, as well, having heard Turnus' pleas for mercy is called to pause:

> Aeneas volvens oculos dextramque repressit;
> et iam iamque magis cunctantem flectere sermo
> coeperat… (XII.939-941)
>
> His eyes looked around and his right hand paused; he began to be more and more won over by Turnus's words …

Here, the *cunctantem* does not describe the result of sight, but of Turnus' words, though Aeneas does indeed pause at what he sees: Pallas's belt worn by Turnus as a trophy. The violence of such a sight far surpasses whatever logic Turnus attempted to encode in his language. Enraged at this reminder of Pallas, which much like the temple of Juno plunges him back into a past weighing upon him, Aeneas buries his sword in Turnus' chest.

The Old French *Eneas*, however, rationalizes Eneas's actions through speech--rather than Vergil's Turnus controlled by violent images in his head, the narrator explains why the country is lost, Eneas will win, and why he must fight him. As Turnus explains, "Li dieu ne veullent, ce m'est vis / que jamais aie cest païs: / aus Troïens l'ont tout donné, / vous en serez desherité" (lines 9697-9700) ("The gods do not want—I can tell—for me to have this country: they have given it all to the Trojans, you all will be disinherited.") He later states an appeal for mercy, which is rejected by an angry Eneas (here struck by the sight of Turnus wearing Pallas's ring), although he explains his motivation: You have requested mercy, ceded all of your inheritance to me, and I would have forgiven you, but the reminder of Pallas is too much (lines 9841-9848). Rather than a mad fury, Eneas provides a reasoned, itemized list of grievances. Eneas's past does indeed subtend those grievances, but the madness caused by a reminder of Pallas' death instead gives rise to a rationalized motivation for the audience to filter Eneas's chaos through. The moments of pause

and suspense, the "dead time" of the event located by Deleuze at the heart of visual experience, is pushed aside to highlight, in a striking similarity to Deleuze's denunciation of mass media, the beginning and the end: you tried, but you have lost, and now your dead body will lie here.

The paradox of my claim is that, while simultaneously aware of history as a model for interpretation, the *Eneas* suppresses the very experience of history, and flattens out all of time into an eternal present whose topography is populated by unambiguous statements, rather than moments that lead to reflection and therefore a change in the subject's relationship with the world. Both lead to the same outcome, but only the latter implicates the self in the world. It is not that history as a notion is dispensed with or that time does not exist in the *Eneas*; in the Eneas tradition historical figures can be used to provide *exempla*, as the inclusion of Paris in some manuscripts provides: "…un double d'Enée, mais un double négatif don't il s'agit de ne pas répéter les erreurs destructrices à la fois modèle et contre-modèle…"[81] The functioning of *exempla* relies on typology, which is rooted in awareness of historical differences and in which the previous prefigures (or contrasts with) the latter. Scholars have, in fact, located an acute awareness of history, especially textual history, in the manuscript *D* of the *Eneas* which has served the basis for this chapter's analysis. In his 1997 edition, Aimé Petit saw the traces of a translator paying "une incontestable attention à la source latine," even if that attention also admitted "une réelle indépendance."[82] Invention did not preclude remaining attentive to the text's past. While *D* deleted a selection of material from outside of the *Aeneid* that had entered the *Eneas* tradition, it also re-imported perspectives that were earlier absent, such as Cupid disguised as Ascanius; for Besnardeau and Mora-Lebrun, *D* evinces a "désir d'un retour au texte de l'*Énéide*."[83] There is, then, a reading that sees this particular recension of the *Eneas* as a "return to the source," a historical consciousness of the difference between Aeneas past and Eneas present, almost as if the translator finds himself gazing at the folds in the story of Aeneas and works through the change this perspective brings to his understanding of the Roman hero's journey.

If there is experience in the *Eneas*, it is instead one that is more intellectually contemplative than it is self-reflective and this is of the proper mode of loving. The greatest shift in the form of the story, between the *Aeneid* and the *Eneas*, is not in the deletions or insertions, anachronisms

[81] Mora-Lebrun, *L'Énéide médiévale*, 181.

[82] Petit, *Le Roman d'Enéas*, 30-31.

[83] Besnardeau and Mora-Lebrun, *Le Roman d'Eneas*, 14-15.

and replacements, but instead in a presence responding to a worrying absence, namely, Lavinia. Although famously mute and absent from Vergil's work, the burgeoning love between her and Eneas takes up nearly a third of the Old French romance. This presence, accompanied by extended dialogues on love, seduction, and lineage has been understood to make the *Eneas* a kind of *speculum* of dynastic learning; that is, it teaches how dynasties become perennial and sets up resonances between episodes in the romance (Dido, Camilla, Lavinia) to offer *exempla* of success as well as models of failure. Christiane Marchello-Nizia has advanced this reading, suggesting that "La principale préoccupation d'Énée, ce n'est donc plus la *pietas*, c'est le désir de fonder un lignage."[84] Through this lens, a teleological or overwhelmingly present authorial intention has shaped the romance—perhaps a scribe seeking to educate his patron on dynastic politics—without looking to what this recurrent operative procedure of alternatively failing and succeeding production and reproduction does within the text. The *Eneas* is, in fact, concerned by contact with the other in its very conception—translation itself is often theorized in linear terms like dynasties, with a source text engendering its various offspring, although unlike Ascanius they are often chastised as being unfaithful to their progenitor. Less hierarchically, less arborescently, translation can be said to be, at minimum, an encounter with an outside—an artefact from another culture or time—that attempts to bring it within, to assimilate it. As I have signaled so far, the *Eneas* struggles with that process *within* the text, and separates radically Eneas from the outside, nearly making him an isolated subject. However, the text itself, as a translation, engages in that process of folding that it denies Eneas. The struggle towards love between Lavinia and Eneas is a struggle towards genesis of the new from the different.

Deleuze may never have explicitly written a theory of translation, yet his overall methodology—posing questions setting in motion lines of flight and transformations—can speak to the way translation engages in its own work. "What is the story of Aeneas?" was essentially in the mind of the Old French translator, the answer to which readers since have been trying to perceive. Much like a subject's encounter with reified perspectives as they are inhabited over time, translation "may be called an art of approach to an outside involving a repetition with a difference," as Barbara Godard saw the overlap between translation and Deleuze.[85] The text, in this model, is

[84] Christiane Marchello-Nizia, "De l'*Énéide* à l'*Eneas*: les bons attributs d'un fondateur," in *Lectures médiévales de Virgile. Actes du colloque de Rome (25-28 octobre 1982)* (École française de Rome, 1985), 257.

[85] Barbara Godard, "Deleuze and Translation," *Parallax* 6.1 (2000): 187.

the Deleuzian subject, as change and becoming are at its center. The outside, the other, this one perspective that is the source text, rather than rendered instrumentally into a more apt vehicle for communication is instead always involved in a process of differentiation. Language and meaning, no longer are channeled towards the criterion of accuracy; rather, the singularity o the differentiating event, forms the lens by which language and meaning are examined. That is, "the fold, then, replaces the abyss-in-need-of-a-bridge as a model for translation."[86] The Deleuzeian fold exposes the myth of an eternal other, that there is a static, underlying text lying there on the pages waiting to be translated.

The *Eneas* explores deeply the love of Eneas and Lavinia as crucial to bringing intelligibility to the journey from Troy, through Carthage, to Italy. Yet folded into this teleology is a critique of the dream of a guaranteed future, of a state of things enduring as they currently seem. As Eneas prepares for his final assault on Laurentium, he orders constructed a monumental structure across from the city. This castle is to dominate the view of the Latin citizens so as to terrify them at every point in the city. Its size is astounding, holding 1500 other tents within its grounds; it is, however, revealed to be a tent: its fabric is surrounded by wooden scaffolding framing it, holding it up artificially to make the structure taut and resembling of stone. The ruse works, as the inhabitants of Laurentium are driven to despise their king who has chosen to wage war with a people capable of building such a castle in one night. There is, of course, the problem of its actual usefulness, which the narrator does not hesitate to identify: "Assez fu tost mis li chastiax / ne fu pas fors, mais il fu biaus" (lines 7393-7394) ("The castle was quickly put up; it was not strong, but it was beautiful.") Its outside beauty belies its inner weakness. What is perceived as a monument is instead an empty model, referring to an absent outside that has been fundamentally differentiated through its unique moment of materialization.

This scene is not the only disconcerting shot taken against permanence and preservation—as we have already seen, Pallas's tomb reflects a worrying anxiety about the effects of the passage of time and attempts to delay its effects. Another tomb goes further. In the course of a battle with the Trojans, Camilla, chief of the Amazonians allied with Turnus, falls. Turnus releases her body to be carried back to her city for burial in an elaborate mausoleum that rivals Pallas's in size and luxury. In the center of this burial space hangs a lamp from a long chain, filled with magical oil

[86] Godard, "Deleuze and Translation," 191.

capable of burning for all of eternity. That chain was placed in the beak of a golden dove perched atop a column instead of being bolted to the ceiling. As if the endurance and atemporality of the statue itself was unreliable, an additional mechanism was put into place. A marble archer stands at the opposite side of the tomb, his arrow notched and ready to be shot at the dove is she ever lets go of the chain and thus plunges the sepulture into darkness. As the narrator says, "a .i. soffle fust tout perdu" (line 7778) ("in one breath, everything would have been lost.") The monument, erected to preserve the unpreservable (a decaying human body), is itself at risk of transformation, differentiation, as the supposed permanence of the golden dove does little to ensure that its weakening beak may overtime slacken enough to release its charge and bring darkness to Camilla's eternal glory. The whole place is one gasp away from failing at its one goal, to survive unblemished.

The Castle of Eneas is the only kind of castle that could have emerged from the territory in which it was implanted, not just the topography of the space but in its time as well. This fortress has taken the bases of a castle and folded them into the necessities and needs of the present moment. Likewise, the *Eneas* has folded into itself accumulated senses of the Aeneas story, which is not atemporal but rather moving and differentiating. For this reason it is the anti-*roman d'antiquité* as it refuses to remain anchored to the myth of an ever preserved past. The tomb of Pallas typifies this breakdown of the course of time. History, in this place, is folding in on itself: the father buries the son, relegating to the past what was meant to be the future. Yet Evander then tries to fold that event back in on itself, preserving the burial in an unchanging eternity so that, one day, he will die before Pallas' body begins to rot. The *Eneas* emphasizes this struggle against the depths and complexities of history through Pallas' burial, all the while labeling the tomb in the most anodyne, straightforward presentation: a golden plaque setting out in simple terms that "An cest tombel gist ci dedenz / Pallas li proz, li biaus, li genz / qui fu fiz Evander le roi: Turnus l'ocist an un tornoi." (lines 6554-6557) ("In this tomb here lies Pallas the brave, the handsome, the noble, who was son of Evander the King: Turnus killed him in a tournament.") In essence, the surface narrative of the tomb belies the complex bending of encounters with history that lie beneath. This tomb, at least, can carry a label: as for the Eneas, there is no attachment to the *Aeneid*, unlike the *Thebaid* of the *Thèbes* or Dares and Dictys of the *Troie*. There simply is not for this romance, a place where this past, the past where *Aeneid* exists whole and preserved, to be experienced.

Conclusion: Vernacular Literature, Attention, and the Digital Catastrophe

Ray Madoff, a professor at Boston College specializing in tax law and policy, recently appeared on the April 17th edition of the *Ezra Klein Show* hosted by the New York Times. It is essentially a trope now that some medievalists will find some contemporary statement or issue to shoehorn their research into a relevant debate on 21st-century society that finally *proves* the actuality of the medieval in discourse today. But that is not what I want to do here. Madoff is particularly invested in the inequalities that have come to distort the American tax system, thereby creating a new kind of aristocratic class largely free from the financial burdens that fall on any individual who depends on wages for a living. This issue is far removed from the *romans d'antiquité* that I have covered here, which fail to express an opinion on the estate tax, investment gains or the definition of a taxable event. *However*, her comments immediately brought to my mind—really, bear with me!—two paths that I have traced out for understanding the *romans*. First, not in the way she frames the issue of tax reform, but rather how she expresses a lack of hope in the ability for scholarship to effect real world change. As she says:

> People controlling massive amounts of wealth have tremendous power in our society. I understand that in some fantasy world, a powerful enough wealth tax will be enacted to make a sufficient enough dent in the wealth of the wealthiest people, where it is brought down to a level where they no longer have this power.
> However, from where I sit, that just looks like a fantasy world. That's not going to happen.[361]

Her pessimism somewhat pulls the legs out from under the preceding hour-long analysis of how the wealthiest members of America dodge the principle of contributing to the public finances that most of us respect. What is the point in engaging in critique if that critique is unable to effect the

[361] Ezra Klein, host, *The Ezra Klein Show*, podcast, New York Times, April 17, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/17/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-ray-madoff.html.

kinds of sustained shifts in discourse that can lead to quantifiable and significant changes in the ways society is structured? Why study a subject academically if the results of the analysis are discarded and ignored?

This is where Madoff makes a comment that is, while perhaps widely shared by the general public, at least surprising for a tax attorney. She recommends a particular book for listeners—*Crossroads* by Jonathan Franzen—not for its subject matter, but for the ways by which it, as she states it, "presents people's internal psychological drama."[362] Rather than an academic treatise, it is fiction, to which she is particularly attracted at the moment, that is during the collapse of the neoliberal political order of the end of the 20th century. This attraction is due to the fact that "Fiction … is just a fantastic place to live, to explore things other than the world that we're living in."[363] Fiction is a counter reality that is "other than," without being total alterity. As she states it, Franzen's writing is compelling precisely because it "is so real." It is that *resemblance* to the actual world that allows fictional works to explore the current political moments in parallel, bringing other modes of analyzing and understanding society to bear on the current moment.

As we have seen, such a perspective has often run through perceptions of the *romans d'antiquité*, as ways of exploring sociopolitical crises projected onto parallel planes of existence, that of Greco-Roman antiquity. This is a mimetic theory of literature, a term which I borrow from German literary scholar Erich Auerbach. Auerbach conceived of Western literature as a consistent through-line leading towards the representation of reality, with "emancipation" events over the past 2500 years that liberated writers from certain procedures and styles that hindered the possibility for complex literary depictions of the world. As he wrote in his famous chapter on medieval literature, "The Knight Sets Forth," "A self-portrayal of feudal knighthood with its mores and ideals is the fundamental purpose of the courtly romance … the portrayal abandons the nebulous distance of fairy tale and gives salient pictures of contemporary concerns."[364] I do not bring up this quote to set up an "aha!" moment where I indict scholars for conforming too closely to a mid-20th century expansive framing of western literature. In any case, the *romans d'antiquité*

[362] Ezra Klein, host, *The Ezra Klein Show*, podcast, New York Times, April 17, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/17/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-ray-madoff.html.

[363] Ezra Klein, host, *The Ezra Klein Show*, podcast, New York Times, April 17, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/17/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-ray-madoff.html.

[364] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis:The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton University Press, 2003), 131.

do indeed, as we have seen, intersect with political thought in a way that can be considered a fictional negotiation of contemporary concerns, a projection into the literary of sociopolitical orders that reflect the world-as-is.

Medieval readers themselves had no issue historicizing the literature from their own past as fundamentally shaped by and reflective of contemporary political concerns. The 12th-century saw the development and evolution of a particularly useful, and relatively new, textual apparatus employed to present Latin texts inherited from classical antiquity. Termed *accessus ad auctores* by modern researchers—"presentations of authors"—they came in a variety of forms, and could be affixed after the *incipit* in a manuscript in order to guide reading practices, presenting the identity of the author, the genre of the text, a summary, as well as more detailed literary and formal analyses.[365] Many of the manuscripts of the *Thebaid*, in fact, were accompanied by *accessus* to the author Statius, with whom a medieval reader may have been unfamiliar.[366] During the 12th century, a new, extensive *accessus* to the *Thebaid* appeared, which in over 800 words laid out details of Statius's life, his motivation for composing the epic, a summary of its material and plot, and tools for interpreting it: an exegetical Swiss Army Knife for the uninformed reader. Most intriguingly, the *accessus* states that Statius had a hidden motive in the *Thebaid*. Rome of his time was full of violent, civil conflict, and Statius wished to bring the Romans back from the brink. However, "quum imperator Domitianus ut sue iniquitates liberius augerentur, edictum fecerat ne aliquis poeta aliquem nobilem Romanum publice reprehenderet, historiam Romanam assumere non audens"[367] ("he didn't dare take up Roman history, since the emperor Domitian, who wanted to increase liberally his unfair powers, published an edict according to which no poet could criticise any Roman member of the nobility publicly.") He therefore wrote on a parallel plane apart from the Roman present, that of the Greek past, and in particular the destruction of Thebes, to provide

[365] On *accessus*, see Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Scholar Press, 1984); Stephen Michael Wheeler, ed., *Accessus ad auctores: Medieval Introductions to the Authors* (Medieval Institute Publications, 2014); and Marjorie Curry Woods, "Accessus through Accessus: Gateways to Learning in a Manuscript of School Texts," in *Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages: Interpretation, Invention, Imagination*, ed. Andrew Kraebel, Ardis Butterfield, and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 24-41.

[366] As Harald Anderson has noted, nine of the earliest thirteen manuscripts of Statius' various works contain commentaries, and after the tenth century, "most manuscripts include an *accessus* of some sort;" the *Thebaid* appears to be the first text by Statius to have received an *accessus*. Harald Anderson, *The Manuscripts of Statius,* vol. 3 (Harald Anderson, 2009), 1.

[367] Anderson, *The Manuscripts of Statius*, 11.

an "exemplum" ("model") for the Romans to follow. The *accessus*, in order to justify this interpretation, goes on to inform the reader that Statius was influenced by the death of Lucan, who had several decades before been forced by Nero to commit suicide for writings interpreted as critical of the emperor.[368] It is not just to teach history that Statius wrote the *Thebaid*, according to this *accessus*, but to avoid the kind of mutual hatred that led the Argives and the Thebans to destroy each other in civil war. Even the sources of this *roman d'antiquité* project a mimetic map onto a text as an interpretive tool.

I bring up this perspective, not in a desire to discredit, but rather to consider *how* we can read the projection of the world-as-is into a text, which in this dissertation, I sought to do from another angle. Crises can be read *into* literature just as solutions can be read *out* of a text, as the *accessus* to the *Thebaid* shows—it is both a symptom of Roman social disorder as well as a palliative attempt to cure it (whether Statius succeeded goes unmentioned.) Fiction plays its role as a "fantastic place to live," as Madoff put it, to explore an issue. However, Madoff as well as this *accessus* are particularly concerned with one kind of a crisis, a sociopolitical one; in the case of Madoff, the socioeconomic consequences of fiscal regimes that favor the rich in the present of our "tech bro" economy. There is another crisis that has been pointed to as well, one that is outside the indicators of economic analysis: the breakdown of cognitive skills caused by digital media. In this dissertation, I have focused on *this* crisis, in the background, and perhaps committed my own mimetic sin by considering how vernacular literature engages and stages attention in novel ways. I write "in the background" not because I have a hidden motive, but because I have not explicitly stated how essentially *all* of the research I reference in my three chapters on attention—how to define it, how to talk about it, how to model it, how to train it—is born from an acute concern for the way society is currently losing control of a key cognitive ability that makes us able to inhabit the world. I do not suggest that vernacular or Latin literature in the 12th century are parallels to iPhones—that would be a wildly silly and frivolous claim—but rather to think about how this recent concern for attention can offer new ways for approaching vernacular literature.

I would like to end on a *medieval* author interested in the way developing technologies shape attention, rather than a modern critic absorbed in the present. Vincent of Beauvais, writing

[368] "Quod uiderat per effectum Lucani qui concisis uenis utriusque brachii iussu eiusdem imperatoris occisus est quod uitium Cesarem aliquando notasset." ("He had seen this with what had happened to Lucan, who was killed under the orders of that same emperor by cutting open the veins of both of his arms, because he had at some point found a fault in Nero [*Caesar*].") Anderson, *The Manuscripts of Statius*, 11.

an *apologia* to his monumental work on the immense *Speculum Maius* around 1250, felt that "There is such a multitude of books, and time is so short, and such weakness in memory, that the mind cannot contain on an equal footing everything that has been written down."[369] Vincent's solution to bring together a vast tradition of textual learning into a condensed compendium affording easy access to the key parts of the most necessary and useful texts. There is also a certain bitterness that seems to have come up during his work as well, as he then adds that another defect in codices had been nagging at him, not just the daunting accumulation of texts, parchment, commentary and other:

> Siquidem faciendi plures libros nullus est finis, et curiosi lectoris non satiatur oculus visu nec auris impletur auditu. Ad id ipsum quoque provocavit me plurimum falsitas, vel ambiguitas quaternorum, in quibus auctoritates sanctorum adeo plerumque mendaciter a scriptoribus vel notariis intitulabantur cum scribenatur, ut que sententia cuius auctoris esset, omnino nesciretur, dum verbi gratia, quod Augustini vel Hieronimi vel Crisostomi forsitan erat, ascribebatur Ambriosio vel Gregorio aut Ysidoro vel e converso, aut verborum aliqua parte dempta vel addita vel mutata sensus auctoris corrumpebatur: sic et de dictis philosophorum aut poetarum, sic et de narrationibus historicorum fiebat, dum unius nomen pro alio sumebatur vel dictorum veritas similter evertebatur.[370]

> But since there is no end to writing a host of texts, and the eye of a curious reader is not satisfied with what it sees, nor a curious ear by what it hears, I was quite pushed to this task as well by the falsity, even the obscurity, of the quires in which the authoritative works of the saints were quite often falsely attributed by writers or copyists when they were written, to the point that it could not be discerned at all which opinion was from which authority, for example, what was by chance from Augustine or Jerome or John Chrysostom, had been ascribed to Ambrose or Gregory or Isidore, or the other way around. Or, since some part of their work had been removed or added, or otherwise changed, the author's meaning was

[369] "Quoniam multitudo librorum, et temporis brevitas, memorie quoque labilitas non patiuntur cuncta, que scripta sunt, pariter animo comprehendi…" English translation my own; for the Latin, see Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken, "Geschichtsbetrachtung bei Vincenz von Beauvais," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 34.2 (1978): 465.

[370] Von den Brincken, "Geschichtsbetrachtung bei Vincenz von Beauvais," 465-466.

> corrupted. So it was for the words of the philosophers and the poets, and for the historians' narratives, to the extent that someone's name was placed for another's, or the truth of the words was similarly deformed.

Vincent's programmatic approach to the *Speculum Maius* combined synthesis with emendation: the material that was urgently needed to ensure the spiritual, intellectual and moral education of his medieval audience was not only spread out among a wide swath of disparate texts, but those latter texts themselves contained mistakes and falsehoods that rendered the straightforward task of simply reading all of them quite pointless. A reader going straight to a source available to them, instead of turning to Vincent's *Speculum*, risked being led astray by error-ridden material accumulated over centuries of copying and transmission. Attending to them was useless, the way they had become amassed became unruly, and the fact that *just anyone* may read them, one without the discerning abilities of Vincent, made those texts quite dangerous. That mass of texts needed a specialized attending to, one that Vincent provided for the mass of readers.

Medieval texts, when we look at them, offer their own modes of figuring attention not just in disinterested, theorized ways, but in terms that as we see with Vincent, can be expressed with the kind of exasperation a user of the internet can understand today. The *romans d'antiquité* in particular navigate issues of attending to information, as they lay out stakes in the set of (often deficient) authorities available to current readers, claim themselves to be ideal models of spreading wisdom, and do so through novel forms of textuality that engage with the public's attention in innovative ways. That these romances are *translations* is testimony to their innovation as a mode of connecting with attention: they are carrying over into a new medium an object from the outside, shifting the ways by which it is perceived. At bottom, they question what it is to attend to the past, and how that past should be attended to. That, I think, is the major innovation of the *Roman de Thèbes*, the *Roman de Troie* and the *Roman d'Eneas*.

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