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The Perversion of Virtue: a Case Study of Statius’ Hippomedon

Introduction

Hippomedon is perhaps the most minor of the seven heroes of Statius’ *Thebaid*. At no point do we learn of his parents and we only briefly hear mention of his wife.\(^1\) It is not until Book 6 that he in fact speaks.\(^2\) This perhaps reflects Hippomedon's peripheral place in Theban mythological literature before the *Thebaid*. He is not mentioned in the *Iliad*, unlike the other heroes,\(^3\) but is by Athenian tragedians only briefly and with very little description.\(^4\) The purpose of this paper is to show the importance of Hippomedon because he underscores a major theme of the *Thebaid*, the irrelevance and perversion of moral virtue in the world of the poem.\(^5\)

It is very easy to see Hippomedon in the *Thebaid* merely as an exemplum of *furor* and *impietas* (‘fury’ and ‘impiety’), a straightforward recapitulation of the major themes

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2 6.656.
5 Scholars have noted this about other characters. For example, Coroebus: see Ganiban, *Statius and Virgil*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 9–17; and also Dymas: see Pollmann, ‘Statius’ ‘Thebaid’ and the legacy of Vergil’s ‘Aeneid’’, *Mnemosyne* 54 (2001), 20–21.
of the epic. He is introduced in Book 4 bearing a shield depicting the Danaids killing their husbands/cousins, connecting him with the poem's theme of fratricide. His *aristeia* in Book 9 involves not only the tragic slaughter of the youth Crenaeus but also an impious wrestling match with the river, Ismenus. Hippomedon reenacts many of the deeds of Achilles, Turnus and even Capaneus in the *Thebaid*, and can be seen as a negative exemplum of *impietas*.

Perhaps even more disturbing is the extent to which Hippomedon is a good character. Hippomedon shows unswerving loyalty to his friend, Tydeus. He fights at risk of his own life to defend Tydeus' corpse and he can only be removed from the battle scene by Tisiphone's deceit. Hippomedon demonstrates seemingly virtuous friendship, evoking the image of Aeneas distraught at the death of Pallas and Menelaus defending the body of Patroclus. However, given Tydeus' cannibalism, an act so impious that Athena herself must seek purification, Hippomedon's self-sacrificing loyalty is equally disturbing. It shows moving loyalty – but to a monster. Ultimately, Statius's Hippomedon reflects the disordered world of the poem, where even virtue is perverse.

**Hippomedon and *nefas***

Hippomedon first enters the narrative at 4.129 leading contingents from Pylos and Dyme. He is immediately described as *arduus* ('tall'), a word which evokes his description in Aeschylus (*Th.* 488) but also associates him with Turnus (as he is described as tall while on horseback in *Aen.* 9.53). He is compared to the centaur Hylaeus (4.139–45), an early suggestion of his bestial nature. In the simile, even the mountain Ossa fears Hylaeus (4.141), Ossa not only a place associated with centauromachy (5.261-62) but also with gigantomachy. Hylaeus then stops before the river, Peneus (144–45), a river with Stygian associations. The implication is that

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6 Klinnert identifies Hippomedon's major characteristic as 'impulsivität': Klinnert, 'Capaneus-Hippomedon', 122.
9 Kytzler also links this description here with the two Tiburti in the catalogue of the *Aeneid* (7.670–77) and sees this as an anticipation of his fight with Asopus: Kytzler, B. 'Imitatio et Aemulatio in der Thebais des Statius' *Hermes* 97 (1969), 228. On how this scene anticipates Hippomedon in the rest of the *Thebaid*, see Klinnert, 'Capaneus-Hippomedon', 79–87.
10 See, for example, Ver. G. 1.281–82.
11 *Il.* 2.751-55.
Hippomedon is a terrifying monster like the centaur Hylaeus, and the giants, and all of impious Thessaly.\textsuperscript{12}

Disturbingly Hippomedon bears the image of the Danaids on his shield at 4.131–35

\begin{verbatim}
    umeros ac pectora late
    flammeus orbis habet, perfectaque uiuit in auro
    nox Danai: sontes Furiarum lampade nigra
    quinquaginta ardent thalami; pater ipse cruentis
    in foribus laudatque nefas atque inspicit enses.
\end{verbatim}

A flaming shield holds his shoulders and chest broadly and the night of Danaus lives wrought in the gold. The fifty guilty rooms glow with the black lamp of the Furies. The father himself standing at the bloody doors praises the \textit{nefas} and inspects the swords.

This passage immediately evokes the memory of the baldric of Pallas described just as Turnus kills him \textit{Aen}.10. 495–99,

\begin{verbatim}
    et laeuo pressit pede talia fatus
    exanimem rapiens immania pondera baltei
    impressumque nefas: una sub nocte iugali
    caesa manus iuuenum foede thalamique cruenti,
    quae Clonus Eurytides multo caelauerat auro... 
\end{verbatim}

And having said that, he crushes the dead Pallas with his left foot taking the heavy weight of the belt and the \textit{nefas} printed on it: in one wedding night, the fouly slaughtered band of young men and the bloodied rooms, which Clonus the son of Eurytus had carved in much gold.

The descriptions of the two items have a number of verbal matches.\textsuperscript{13} What is more significant is the extent to which Statius embellishes the image. Their rooms glow.

\textsuperscript{12} On the \textit{impietas} of Thessaly, see Lucan, 6.381ff. Thessaly is the origin of war (395ff.) where the first warhorse was born and where money was first forged, money being the genesis of greed.

The Furies are present, and the father himself inspects his daughters’ swords. While the baldric of Pallas is carved (caelauerat), the image on Hippomedon’s shield is so lifelike that it is alive (nox uiuit). Hippomedon’s shield is not merely Vergilian; it is hyper-Vergilian, an extreme depiction of nefas.

Scholarship has variously interpreted the symbolic meaning of the baldric of Pallas. It could be a sign of Turnus’ nefas and murderous rage. Turnus is descended from the single innocent Danaid, Hypermnestra, and his connection to the baldric may point to his inheritance of the criminal character of Danaus. Other scholars have noted that this would make little sense given that it originally belonged to Pallas, whose death is the epitome of pathos. Consequently the image may not be a symbol of nefas but of untimely tragic death. Pallas and Turnus are both youths who die before the promise of adult life could be fulfilled. Whatever the symbolic value that the image of the Danaids has in the Aeneid, it has a much more ominous and terrifying presence in the Thebaid. Even Hippomedon’s Nemean horse is terrified of it (4.137). The shield of Hippomedon much more graphically depicts the slaughter of the sons of Aegyptus and the image, far from evoking pathos as it does for Vergil’s Pallas, is a source of terror and an ominous foreshadowing of Hippomedon’s bloodlust in the rest of the Thebaid. This image of Hippomedon’s shield is then immediately followed by a simile comparing him to Hylaeus, one of the centaurs who

14 This detail perhaps comes from Luc. 7.560 where Caesar inspects his soldiers’ swords for blood during the battle of Pharsalia. Like Danaus, Caesar too is guilty of inciting kin-killing (7.550–51).
15 Works of craft are often “alive” in Statius: Theb. 1.547, 2.216, 4.169; Silv. 1.1.48, 1.2.155. Art is so realistic that it could be thought to speak (Theb. 2.216, Sil. 4.6.20f.) Parkes also notes the expression used in Virgil and Propertius: Parkes, Thebaid 4, at 132–3. This further reinforces why Hippomedon’s shield causes terror. It is as if the night of Danaus is physically present and alive in the world again. It is ironically and perversely too an image of death which lives in Hippomedon’s shield.
18 Similarly Capaneus bears images of the Hydra and giants (4.166ff.) which anticipates his theomachic and monstrous nature in Book 10. On how Hippomedon inspires fear around him, see Parkes, Thebaid 4, on 141–3. Parkes makes the excellent point that Statius seems to suggest that Hippomedon terrifies even his own troops (4.142–3), very reminiscent of how Hannibal too terrified his army (Sil. 1.252), though chronology is obviously uncertain.
fought against the Lapiths, associating him with their anger and violence.¹⁹

In fact, Hippomedon himself may be descended from Danaus. Various mythographers make Hippomedon the brother or nephew of Adrastus, a descendent of Danaus.²⁰ Statius in fact twice lists Danaus in the procession of Adrastus’ imagines (Theb. 2.222, 6.292) and alludes to the family connection in the festival of Apollo (1.542). Given the Thebaid’s thematic interest in familial crime and intergenerational inheritance of perverse character,²¹ Hippomedon’s pedigree is of interest. The image of the Danaids is the only allusion in the Thebaid to any family connection with Adrastus. Elsewhere, however, Tydeus implies a family connection to Atreus, asking Hippomedon to bring him the head of Melanippus ‘if there is any blood of Atreus in him’ (8.742).²² His family connection to Atreus is also implied at 9.444 where the river Ismenus tells that he will not return to Mycenae, the place where Atreus is king.²³ It is also reiterated by Juno who tells that ‘his origin is Mycenae’ (gentis origo Mycenae, 9.514). The image of the Danaids and the association with Atreus (and, consequently, Tantalus) place Hippomedon in a family notorious for kin-killing. While Hippomedon is not guilty of any fratricide, the connection to the Danaus and Atreus suggest that this is latent in him.

Hippomedon reacts violently to situations, as is shown in the events after the death of Opheltes in Book 5. Capaneus ultimately kills the snake, a sign of his impietas and his themachic impulses.²⁴ The snake is thought to be sacred to Jupiter and has shrines in the area (5.11–15). Importantly, it does not deliberately kill the child Opheltes but only accidentally and unknowingly when the snake hits him, who had

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²⁰ Soph. Oed. Col. 1317–18.; Paus. 2.20.5; Apollod. 3.6.3; Hyg. Fab. LXX.
²² However, the manuscripts are divided. Some have Argiui or Argei instead of Atrei. Nonetheless, even if we adopt Argivi, it may still have similar sinister undertones, especially given its ethnic origins from Danaus. I follow the most recent edition of Hall.
²³ Statius tends to conflate Mycenae and Argos (2.119, 10.16), though other times they are clearly separate (1.261, 325; 4.306).
been left alone by Hypsipyle (5.538–40). While Capaneus is not necessarily to know this, he explicitly states that he does not care whether the snake is sacred and in fact hopes that it does belong to the gods before he kills it (5.567–70). After the death of the snake, the nymphs and Fauns lament (5.579–82) and Jupiter only spares Capaneus so that he can punish him later (5.585–86). In a Theban context, killing snakes is particularly ominous and Cadmus is famously punished for his arguably justified killing of the snake of Mars (Ov. Met. 3.98; 4.571–75). Significantly, however, Hippomedon had already tried to kill the snake and Hippomedon is also complicit in Capaneus’ *impietas*. Hippomedon is implicated in Capaneus’ *impietas*.

Even more significantly, Statius connects Hippomedon with Turnus in this scene. Hippomedon attacks by taking a great boulder at *Theb. 5.558–62,*

\[
\text{rapit ingenti conamine saxum,}
\]
\[
\text{quo discretus ager, uacuasque impellit in auras}
\]
\[
\text{arduus Hippomedon, quo turbine bellica quondam}
\]
\[
\text{librati saliunt portarum in claustra molares.}
\]
\[
\text{cassa ducis uirtus...}
\]

With great effort he grabs a rock by which the field was divided and he throws it into the air, huge Hippomedon, with what kind of whirl boulders catapulted bounce against war barricades. The *uirtus* of the leader was in vain.

This scene recalls another passage in the *Aeneid* when Turnus pathetically fails to kill Aeneas, his last stand against Aeneas before he is wounded, and becomes completely supplicant to Aeneas, *Aen.* 12.897–901, 906–7,

\[
\text{saxum antiquum ingens, campo quod forte iacebat,}
\]
\[
\text{limes agro positus litem ut discernret aruis.}
\]
\[
\text{uix illum lecti bis sex ceruice subirent,}
\]
\[
\text{qualia nunc hominum producit corpora tellus;}
\]
\[
\text{ille manu raptum trepida torquebat in hostem}
\]
\[
\text{...}
\]

There was a great ancient rock which by chance lay in the field, the limit placed in the field to decide quarrels between lands. Hardly twelve men could bear it on their necks, with bodies like what the earth produces in men nowadays. He grabbed it with his trembling hand and hurled it against his enemy ... Then the stone itself rolling through the empty air free of the man did not cross the whole space and did not make a blow.

The scene with Hippomedon concentrates a number of words and images in the Turnus scene. The rock is a boundary marker and a great effort is required to lift it. It soars through the clear air but ultimately fails to kill its target. Ultimately both passages show a failure of heroic strength. But why might Statius connect these two characters by these two scenes? The Turnus scene is a pivotal moment in Book 12. The treaty broken, Turnus had ruthlessly entered battle and suspended heads from his chariot (12.512), and was madly full of a motley of passions (12.666–68). Just shortly before his attempt to kill Aeneas, he was attacked and weakened by one of the Furies (12.865–66). His failed attempt to kill Aeneas is Turnus’ last action under the influence of fury. By evoking this scene with Turnus just before the impietas of Capaneus, Statius associates Hippomedon with the impietas of Capaneus and the furor of Turnus, who madly fights despite knowing his death is inevitable. It foreshadows Hippomedon’s later impiety and madness.

A much clearer example of Hippomedon’s complicity in the nefas of the Theban war occurs in Book 7. The Boeotian river, Asopus, prevents the Argive soldiers from advancing and they hesitate to cross it (7.424–29). It is Hippomedon who takes charge and dares to enter the stream and incites the men to cross at Theb. 7.430–35,

\[
\text{tunc ferus Hippomedon magno cum fragmine ripae} \\
\text{cunctantem deiecit equum, ducibusque relictis} \\
\text{gurgite de medio frenis suspensus et armis,} \\
\text{‘ite uiri,’ clamat, ‘sic uos in moenia primus}
\]

26 This is not to ignore other potential intertexts. For example, Cadmus also fails to kill the snake in Book 3 with a rock (Ov. Met. 3.59–62), and throwing boundary stones occurs twice in the Iliad (Hector throws one at Ajax, 7.264, and Athena hits Ares with one, 21.403).
ducere, sic clausas oueoe perfringere Thebas.’

Then wild Hippomedon threw his horse down by a large break of the shore and, with the leaders left behind, hanging in the middle of the river by the reigns and his armour, he shouted, ‘Go men. I vow that in this way I will be the first to lead you to the walls, in this way I will break through shut Thebes’.

This scene is also a foreshadowing of Hippomedon’s potamomachia. This was already foregrounded in the proem (Theb. 1.43–44) but this scene makes clear Hippomedon’s theomachic impiety towards the river. Hippomedon taunts the river. In a provocative fashion he stands in the stream hanging from his reins to show the powerlessness of the river which forbids their crossing. This seeming test of the river god also associates him with Capaneus, the contemtor superum (‘one who shows contempt to the gods’, 3.602, 9.550) who also vows to test whether the gods are effective or not (10.847). However, even more tellingly this delay before the river also conjures up Lucan’s Caesar before the Rubicon. Lucan shows Caesar delaying as he is confronted by the image of Rome pleading for him to enter Rome only as a citizen (Luc. 1.190–92). Caesar refuses and declares anyone opposed to him an enemy and is compared to a hungry predatory lion (1.195–212). However, as he crosses the river, it gathers force and attempts to prevent his crossing, though Caesar crosses first nonetheless and his troops follow through successfully (1.213–222). Both the Argive and Roman armies are marching to undertake an impious war; both armies are prevented by an important river associated with the country’s borders; in both cases, one man leads the rest of the army over. Statius therefore presents Hippomedon as another contemtor superum, who will rage against the river soon afterwards.

27 The line gurgite de medio frenis suspensus et armis (7.432) has been variously interpreted by translators. Melville suggests ‘braced by his reins and armour’: A. D. Melville (trans), Statius, Thebaid (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). Ross translates it as ‘he held high his reins and weapons in the stream’: C. S. Ross (trans.), The Thebaid (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004). Shackleton-Bailey takes the most liberty translating it as ‘holding harnesses and arms above his head’: D. R. Shackleton-Bailey, (ed. trans.), Statius, Thebaid (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). Ross and Shackleton-Bailey both downplay the value of suspensus, which literally means ‘suspended’. Often the participle suspensus means to be suspended in mid-air or in the water (OLD, 5a; cf. Stat. Theb. 5.340) and this would be the appropriate meaning at 7.432. The meaning would then be that he is halfway in the river, held up by his reins and armour. Smolenaars suggests that it is in fact an optical allusion: J. J. L. Smolenaars, Statius Thebaid VII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), on 432. But it seems better to take it literally: Hippomedon sits tauntingly halfway in the water to show its powerlessness.

28 J. J. L. Smolenaars, Statius Thebaid VII, on 432.

29 At Theb. 3.337, Asopus is identified as the border between the Thebans and Argives.
and a figure comparable to Lucan’s Caesar.

When the Theban war finally comes, Hippomedon proves himself to be a capable and bloodthirsty warrior. He first briefly appears in the battle in a highly stylised succession of blows and deaths (Theb. 7.640–43) and is mentioned shortly in the next book during Tydeus’ aristea, morientumque ora furenti/ Hippomedon procul cet equo (‘and Hippomedon tramples on the faces of the dying with his raging horse’, 8.660–61). The image conjures up Achilles riding over corpses at Il. 20.498–99,

\[\begin{align*}
\text{ὡς ὑπ’ Ἀχιλλῆος μεγαθύμου μῶνυκες ἱπποι} \\
\text{στείβον ὁμοῦ νέκυας τε καὶ ἀστίδας.}
\end{align*}\]

So the unclenched-hoofed horses of great-hearted Achilles pressed the corpses and the shields.

The image is also reminiscent of a much more horrific scene once again involving Turnus in which Turnus throws Murranus from his chariot who is subsequently trampled by his horses at Aen. 12.532–34,

\[\text{hunc lora et iuga subter} \]
\[\text{prouoluere rotae, crebro super ungula pulsu} \]
\[\text{incita nec domini memorum proculcat equorum.} \]

The wheels rolled him forward under the reigns and yoke and the hastened hooves of the horses trample him with their rapid beat, forgetting their master.

In all three scenes, readers are presented with the gory image of bodies trampled underneath horses. Although Turnus’ chariot itself does not trample Murannus, in both battle scenes the two heroes rage across the battle scene on chariots seemingly invincible while their hapless victims are grotesquely crushed beneath horses. Hippomedon is figured as another ruthless Achilles and Turnus.

After the body of Tydeus is taken, Hippomedon becomes a raging beast, a terrifying example of furor and theomachic impietas. As soon as the corpse of Tydeus is lost, Hippomedon is inconsolable and enters the fray at 9.196–204,
at ferus Hippomedon quamquam iam sentit inane
auxilium et seram rapto pro corpore pugnam,
it tamen et caecum rotat irreuocabilis ensem,
uix socios hostesque, nihil dum tardet euntem,
secernens; sed caede noua iam lubrica tellus
armaque seminecesque uiri currusque soluti
impediunt laeuumque femur, quod cuspide fixum
regis Echionii, sed dissimulauerat ardens,
siue ibi nescierat.

Then wild Hippomedon, although he realises that his help and late fight for
the seized body would be in vain, nonetheless goes and wields his sword blind-
ly and irrevocably, hardly distinguishing allies and enemies while nothing
stops him from going. But the earth now slippery with new slaughter and the
armour and semi-dead men and the broken chariots stop him and his left thigh
which was fixed by the spear of the Echionian king, but he concealed that in
his anger, or perhaps then didn’t even know.

Hippomedon has become a character of *furor* and *impietas*, blindly killing and ig-
noring his own wounds. The scene is reminiscent of one earlier, in which Capaneus
fights Alcidamas in a boxing match in Book 6. Capaneus likewise is unaware that
he has been wounded (6.784)30 and becoming enraged attempts to kill Alcidamas,
an ally among the Argives, provoking Adrastus to order them to separate before
Capaneus insanely bludgeons him to death (6.809–812). Hippomedon too is wild
and crazed, seemingly unaware of his own wound and hardly recognising allies and
enemies.31 Key words in this passage also underline Hippomedon’s lack of reason.
He is *ferus* (‘wild’). He wields his sword *caecum* (‘blind’). He is *ardens* (‘burning’ and
‘raging’). He fights even though he knows it is *inane* (‘empty’ or ‘useless’). His blind,

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30 ‘Statius does not actually go so far as to claim that Hippomedon slays Argives’: Dewar, *Thebaid IX*, on 199f. The negative *vix* might imply that he does in fact distinguish between them, though ‘with difficulty’. However, *vix* can also mean ‘scarcely’ or ‘rarely’ and there is the possibility that Hippome-
don does kill his own troops. The image is much more horrifying than *Il*. 5.85–6 where Homer simply
tells that you could not say where Diomedes’ fighting was (contrary to Dewar, the lines 5.85–6 do not
say that Diomdedes is fighting against the Argives); Statius suggests Hippomedon almost does fight
his own troops.
animalistic rage, which hardly distinguishes enemies and allies, makes him one of the worst examples of *impietas* and places him on a similar level as Capaneus, whose rage similarly blinds him.

The ensuing battle drives them all to the river Ismenus (9.225). The *aristeia* in the river itself is an obvious allusion to Achilles and his fight in and with the river Scamander (*Il.* 21) and reveals much about the character of Hippomedon. The *aristeiae* of Achilles and Hippomedon follow after the loss of a loved one. Achilles re-enters the fray after the death of Patroclus which is eventually driven to the river; Hippomedon fights because the body of Tydeus has been taken away from him. Significantly both are exemplars of fury and madness. However, Hippomedon is able to fight against the river at least for a while whereas Achilles cannot. Hippomedon is figured much more ominously as a theomachic danger.

However, while the *potamomachia* recalls Achilles and his fight with Scamander, certain features of the scene particularly associate Hippomedon with the notion of *impietas*. Like Achilles, Hippomedon kills the grandson of a river. In Hippomedon’s case, it is much more tragic because his victim, Crenaeus, is the grandson of the very river they stand on. Statius evokes a great amount of pathos for Crenaeus, telling how he was nurtured on the very banks of the Ismenus (9.319–32). Crenaeus’ name in fact is an etymological pun since κρήνη is Greek for a spring or fountain. His name Crenaeus reinforces his connection to the river and underscores the tragic circumstances of his slaughter. In contrast to Homer’s Asteropaeus who only briefly identifies himself as the grandson of a river (*Il.* 21.157–58), Statius’ Crenaeus explicitly notes his familial connection to the river and its sacred status (9.342). Consequently, Hippomedon’s slaughter of Crenaeus in this river is much more severe than

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32 Think of the opening line of the *Iliad*, Μήνιν ἄειδε θεά Πηληίδας Ἀχιλής (‘sing to me goddess the rage of Achilles, son of Peleus’).
35 In contrast, Asteropaeus’ name belies his fluvial origin. His name means ‘star-child’.
36 Crenaeus is not the first to insist on the sacredness of Thebes. A priest in Book 7 called for a ceasefire in the name of Jupiter, Mars, Bacchus and Hercules who are associated with Thebes (7.663–8). Significantly, he is killed immediately by Capaneus who taunts him and impiously wishes Bacchus were here (7.677–9), perhaps so that Bacchus can see his priest die or perhaps so that Capaneus can fight Bacchus. Both Capaneus and Hippomedon knowingly offend Theban gods.
Achilles’. Crenaeus is directly related to the river; he warns Hippomedon that the river is sacred. The young Crenaeus dies calling out for his mother (9.350) and his death is ultimately nefas (‘evil’ 9.347).

But why is the death of Crenaeus nefas? The reader cannot ignore the realities of war. Crenaeus openly challenges Hippomedon and no warrior can afford to dismiss his opponent.37 Even Mezentius concedes to Aeneas after his son Lausus is killed, *nullum in caede nefas* (‘there is no evil in slaughter’, *Aen.* 10.901). Only in rare circumstances do heroes decline to kill their enemy, such as when Glaucus and Diomedes in Book 6 of the *Iliad* exchange gifts rather than fight because of an earlier guest-friendship between their grandfathers. In the *Thebaid*, Tydeus spares an enemy, the priest Maeon, who is to report Tydeus’ conquest to Eteocles. Hippomedon also spares one of his enemies (10.292-95), but this is hardly an act of pietas: when he kills one twin, the other begs for the same fate, but Hippomedon lets him live – a cruel torment because the twin will always mourn the loss of his brother.38 It is an act of cruel impietas, as Hippomedon boasts to the surviving twin that he will leave the corpses to pile up in the sea (9.297-301).39

However, Book 10 of the *Aeneid* provides a good point of comparison. There is a significant difference in Hippomedon’s slaughter of Crenaeus and Aeneas’ slaughter of Lausus. Aeneas is touched with pity after the death of Lausus, refuses to despoil the body and promises that Lausus will receive proper burial rites (*Aen.* 10.824–30). Hippomedon, however, leaves the body of Crenaeus to drown in the river so that

37 See also Harrison who wonders also why Turnus’ taking of the sword-belt at 10.497 is nefas: Harrison, ‘The Sword-belt of Pallas’, 227.
38 The scene recalls a similar pair of twins in Book 2 who die together at the hands of Tydeus and piously close one another’s eyes (2.643). Hippomedon denies the two brothers this pious end of life but lets one survive. Lactantius Placidus also makes an important observation at 9.600 that *e contrario ait Vergilius* (‘Vergil says on the contrary’), when Aeneas kills the brother of one of his victims who pleads for mercy (*Aen.* 10.600). Hippomedon is Aeneas’ antithesis: he kills the twin who piously wants to die alongside his brother; Aeneas, however, kills the brother who impiously and unheroically begs for his own life. This intertextual inversion confirms Hippomedon’s impious nature. Furthermore, Juhnke notes how this passage is the inverse of Lycaon (*II.* 21. 33–135) who begs for life but whom Achilles mercilessly kills. In poetic irony, ‘Achilleus ist nach Patroklos’ Tod grausam durch Schonungslosigkeit, Hippomedon übt verfeinerte Grausamkeit – durch Schonung’: Juhnke, *Homerisches in römischer Epik flavischer Zeit*, 31.
39 Dewar notes that burial in the *Thebaid* is associated with pietas. Impious characters such as Eteocles and Creon refuse to bury the dead, while noble characters such as Hopleus and Dymas, Argia and Antigone risk their lives to bury the dead. See Dewar, *Thebaid IX*, on 297ff. We might also be reminded of Sulla piling up corpses in the Tyrrenian sea (Luc. 2.210)
Crenaeus’ mother must wade through the corpses to find it (9.365–70), just as Achilles had left the body of Asteropaeus to be nibbled by fish (Il. 21.201–4). However more than this, the river Ismenus tells how Hippomedon boasts over Crenaeus and wears his armour: tumidus spoliis et sanguine gaudes/ insontis pueri (‘arrogantly you rejoice in the spoils and blood of an innocent boy’, 9.442–43). This actually seems much more like Turnus when he takes the belt of Pallas, ovat spolio gaudetque potitus (‘he rejoices in his spoil and boasts to have gotten them’, Aen. 10.500), an act which is responsible for his death at the end of the epic. Turnus will not so much regret killing Pallas, but will rather wish he had left Pallas untouched, that he had not despoiled him. He will regret that he wore Pallas’ armour as spoil (10.504). Crenaeus is only a boy. This is a complete contrast to Asteropaeus who is the best of the Paeonians (Il. 21.207) but more like the young Pallas. Hippomedon kills him and then takes his armour as spoil. In sum, Hippomedon has killed the son of a nymph in a sacred river, and this is not unexpected in a war. But he has demonstrated no piety in response. The nefas is the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of Crenaeus and Hippomedon’s cavalier spoliation of the body, taking and wearing the armour for glory, exactly as Turnus did to Pallas.

As a final demonstration of Hippomedon’s impietas, Hippomedon’s last words demonstrate a total lack of piety at 9.476–80, where Hippomedon taunts the river with the slur of Theban effeminacy. Hippomedon’s words to the river are quite different to Achilles’. When Scamander urges Achilles to leave the river, Achilles agrees to leave the river but only when he has driven the Trojans to the walls (Il.

40 Dewar claims that Hippomedon does not strip Crenaeus’ armour: Dewar, Thebaid IX, on 9.442. While Statius does not narrate Hippomedon taking the spoil, this does not mean that Ismenus is lying or being ‘semi-metaphorical’. Hippomedon does not take Crenaeus’ shield (see 9.358), since he has his own shield, but he may have taken some other armour of Crenaeus as a trophy (just as, for example, Euryalus greedily tours the camp taking various items from an array of Rutulian victims, Aen. 9.359–65). Why doubt Ismenus’ words at face value?
41 Harrison argues that wearing the spoils is an act of nefas, and other characters such as Euryalus and Camilla are also killed in the end by a desire to wear spoils. Turnus should instead have dedicated it to the gods: Harrison, ‘The Sword-belt of Pallas’, 228–229. Lyne, however, argues that it is not so much taking spoils but delighting in it that is wrong, R. O. A. M. Lyne, ‘Vergil and the Politics of War’, Oxford Readings in Vergil’s Aeneid. ed. S. J. Harrison. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 326–7.
42 Similarly, taking Achilles’ armour also earns contempt for Hector (Il. 17. 204–6, 472–3, 18.82–3). Lucan too criticises Curio who is won over by a desire for spoils (4.820).
43 As Dewar notes, Crenaeus’ miraculous riding of the water (9.324–5) should have proved to Hippomedon that he is protected by the river: Dewar, Thebaid IX, 119.
When Scamander decides to drown him, Achilles immediately calls upon Zeus (Il. 21.273). He wishes only that he could die in more glorious circumstances (21.279–80). At no point does Achilles malign the river. Hippomedon is also quite different to Silius Italicus’ Scipio who similarly faces the violent river Trebia in Book 4 of the Punica. The Trebia rages against Scipio not because of any wrongdoing of his but because of Juno’s pleading (Pun. 4.573–74), an act of treachery which Scipio believes deserves punishment (4.643–44). However, when the Trebia overpowers him and nearly drowns him, Scipio piously prays to the Roman gods that they allow him to face his enemy and to suffer a death which he ‘could show to his countryland and brother’ (quam patriae fratrique probem 5.675). Where Achilles prays only for a glorious death, Scipio prays for a glorious death that does honour to his brother and country, a perfect example of pietas. Hippomedon’s words, however, only taunt Ismenus. Hippomedon mentions Ismenus’ association with Bacchic rites as a slur on his manliness. However, in the case of Hippomedon, the words are addressed to a god, an act of brazen impietas.

**Amicus Hippomedon**

While the last section discussed Hippomedon as a duplicate Achilles/Turnus/Capaneus and figure of impietas, this section will show his pious nature as a loyal friend. When Tydeus’ body is in danger of being spoiled, Hippomedon is confronted by a platoon of warriors following Eteocles, an intimidating group whom neither Minerva or Mars would have spurned (9.88–89). Hippomedon, however, stands strong against them like a cliff which barraged by waves fears neither sky nor ocean (9.91–94). Immediately Hippomedon is figured as a brave, immovable force against

44 ‘To Scamander’s complaints Achilles had replied rather courteously and respectfully that he would willingly comply did not a higher duty compel him to fight until he had slain Hector… Hippomedon on the other hand utters gratuitous taunts’: Deward, Thebaid IX, on 476.
45 Scipio is not an uncomplicated exemplar of pietas: Tipping, “Virtue and Narrative in Silius Italicus’ Punica” in A. Augoustakis (ed.), Brill Companion to Silius Italicus (Brill: Leiden, 2010), 193–218. In this passage, however, he is a model of pietas against the river Trebia.
46 Much like how Capaneus taunts the Thebans (7.679), and Parthenopaeus later (9.793–800).
47 Lovatt has also argued for a more positive reading of Hippomedon: H. Lovatt, Statius and Epic Games, 123–8. Caiani too notes that Hippomedon and Capaneus recall the tragic end of Mezentius and are also exemplars of friendship in Books 9 and 10: Caiani, ‘La pietas nella Thebaide di Stazio: Mezenzio modello di Ippomedonte e Capaneo’, Orpheus 11 (1990): 260–76.
48 This is an allusion to Il. 13.127–28 where the two Ajaxes are surrounded by squadrons of troops. In Statius’ Thebaid, Hippomedon appears entirely alone against the Thebans and it is not a Hector that he is confronting but the impious king Eteocles himself.
a Theban force that is strong enough to entice Minerva and Mars into battle.

Hippomedon is dedicated to protecting the body of Tydeus, demonstrating the virtue of friendship. Even when Eteocles and his companion cast spears at him, piercing his shield and toppling his helmet (9.104–9), he is stalwart, as Statius describes him at 9.110–15,

\[
\text{ipse nec ire retro, nec in obuia concitus arma exilit, inque eadem sese uestigia semper obuersus cunctis profert recipitque, nec umquam longius indulget dextrae motusque per omnes corpus amat, corpus seruans circumque supraque uertitur.}
\]

He does not go back, nor does he jump up hurling himself against the advancing arm but opposed from all sides constantly advances and retreats in the same tracks and does not indulge his right hand but in every motion loves the body and keeping the body turns around and above it.

Hippomedon is the model of a cool and calm rational fighter. He is not overwhelmed by anger or fear but fights strategically, advancing, retreating and turning to protect Tydeus’ corpse. As Lovatt observes, the image of Hippomedon as a cliff facing the ocean is reminiscent of Mezentius (Aen. 10.693–96).\(^49\) Quite differently, however, Hippomedon is fighting out of \textit{pietas}, perhaps like Mezentius at his tragic end.\(^50\) Hippomedon in fact has radically changed from how he was introduced in Book 4 where he leads his squadrons and teaches them ‘a love of \textit{virtus}’ (\textit{uirtutis amorem}, 4.128). Where Hippomedon had previously prized a love of military strength, now his “love” is for Tydeus’ body (\textit{corpus amat}).\(^51\) However, Hippomedon's love is different to filial piety; it is maternal and incompletely different from his earlier love of \textit{virtus} as 9.115–20 shows,

\(^{49}\) Lovatt, \textit{Statius and Epic Games}, 120.


\(^{51}\) Here the word means more literally ‘keep close to’ but this should exclude verbal echoes with \textit{amor}.
imbellem non sic amplexa iuuencum
infestante lupo tunc primum feta tuetur
mater et ancipiti circumfert cornua gyro;
ipsa nihil metuens sexusque obita minoris
spumat et ingentes imitatur femina tauros.

Not like this does a mother who has first given birth embrace her weak heifer and while the wolf stalks it watch her heifer and turn her horns around in a doubtful circle. But when she is no longer afraid and she forgets her lesser sex, she froths and even though she is a cow imitates great bulls.

While the mother timidly embraces her heifer and looks around doubtfully before finally summoning her protective instincts, Hippomedon is not fearful but circles around the body fending off enemies. However, while the simile primarily shows Hippomedon's lack of fear in the face of menacing opponents, it also associates him with maternal pietas. He loves the corpse of Tydeus, protects it, not like the timid mother cow but, by implication, like a fearless mother. This is an allusion to Homer: Menelaus is compared to a mother cow after the death of Patroclus (Il. 17.4) and goes to protect the corpse of Patroclus. Statius also uses a similar simile later: when Dymas is found with the corpse of Parthenopaeus, he chooses neither to fight nor to beg for his life, like a mother lioness who rather than attack hunters close-by chooses to stay with her brood and protect them (10.405–19). This is a significant intratext. Both Hippomedon and Dymas are attempting to rescue the corpse of a fallen hero and both are associated with animal mothers who fear for their children. Risking his life to recover the corpse of his comrade, Parthenopaeus, and choosing suicide rather than betray his country by divulging their military plans (10.435–38), Dymas is the paragon of pietas. Consequently, Hippomedon's care for the body of Tydeus shows not only a maternal love but intratextually later links him to one of the standout exemplars of pietas in the whole Thebaid.

Hippomedon's pietas is not merely maternal, but also paternal. His dedication to his friend Tydeus is intertextually comparable to Aeneas and his love for Pallas, al-

52 Juhkne notes a number of similarities and differences between Hippomedon’s defense of ‘Tydeus’ body and Menelaus’ defense of Patroclus’: Juhnke, Homerisches in römischer Epik flavischer Zeit, 133. Hippomedon, however, easily resists his enemies unlike Menelaus who is forced to retreat (17.108–13).
though this itself is deeply troubling too. When Leonteus seizes Tydeus’ right hand, Hippomedon cuts off Leonteus’ hand and tells him at 9.137–39,

\[ \text{hanc tibi Tydeus,} \]

Tydeus ipse rapit; post et confecta uirorum
fata time magnosque miser fuge tangere manes!

Tydeus, Tydeus himself takes this from you. And after the fates of men have been finished, be afraid and miserably flee from touching the great spirits of the dead!

The language immediately recalls Aeneas’ last words to Turnus at 12.948–49,

\[ \text{Pallas te hoc vulnere, Pallas} \]

immolat et poenam scelerato ex sanguine sumit.

Pallas, Pallas kills you with this wound and exacts punishment from such criminal blood.

In both cases, the two warriors adopt the persona of their dead comrades. Aeneas re-embodies Pallas and Hippomedon Tydeus. Hippomedon even replicates Aeneas’ syntax, with the repetition of the name and fronting of the pronouns \textit{hic} and \textit{tu} to the start of the sentence. Aeneas’ words to Turnus are hotly contested in the scholarship,\textsuperscript{53} and perhaps we too may see Hippomedon’s loyal defence of Tydeus as complicated and problematic. In a way, Hippomedon embodies friendship better than Aeneas: whereas Aeneas famously hesitates, feels pity at Turnus’ pleas and only acts when filled with overwhelming rage, Hippomedon acts quickly merely with his friend Tydeus in mind. The scene is not complicated by the motley of emotions that Aeneas experiences; in a way he is a simplified reinstatiation of Aeneas. Given, however, Hippomedon’s monstrous character and his loyalty to this cannibal, this

Vergilian intertext may be very troubling, reminding us of the very best and worst of Aeneas in an even more damning context. Only the impious Tisiphone can draw Hippomedon away from the body of Tydeus. The Thebans could never have managed this since Hippomedon is like a tall city which easily bounces back catapulted missiles (9.144–47). Hippomedon’s unswerving loyalty ultimately requires Tisiphone to intervene, Tisiphone who is the agent of nefas and impietas throughout the narrative. At 9.148–53 she is explicitly identified as impia (‘impious’) and has impius ignis (‘impious fire’)

sed memor Elysii regis noxasque recensens
Tydeos in medios astu subit impia campos
Tisiphone: sensere acies subitusque cucurrit
sudor equis sudorque uiris, quamquam ore remisso
Inachium fingebat Halyn, nusquam impius ignis
uerberaque, et iussi tenuere silentia crines.

But remembering the Elysian king and weighing up the injuries of Tydeus, impious Tisiphone comes up cunningly into the middle of the camp. The armies sensed her and a sudden sweat ran on the horses and men, although she had fashioned herself with her appearance relaxed in the image of Inachian Halys, nowhere was her impious fire and whips, and her hair kept silence at her bidding.

Lines 148 – 149 recall Tisiphone’s traditional role as the punisher for criminal action, the one who exacts τίςις (‘revenge’). Tisiphone will ensure that the Thebans gain the body of Tydeus as punishment for his cannibalism in Book 8. But this is not really why Tisiphone wishes to punish Tydeus. Tisiphone herself shares responsibility in Tydeus’ anthropophagy.54 Tydeus was content only to look at the head of Melanippus, but Tisiphone drove him to go further (8.758–59). Pluto had ordered her to incite evil (8.65–68). Now Tisiphone is impia and has impius ignis (and again impia at 9.173). Her role in the Thebaid is not one of justice but of malevolently inciting impietas. Tisiphone later actively prevents pietae and later drives the goddess Pietae from the battlefield when she begins to dissuade soldiers from war (11.482–96). Tisiphone’s arrival in Book 9, as Hippomedon lovingly protects the body of Turnus,

underscores his *pietas*. His *pietas* is so great that *impia* Tisiphone must stop it.

Significantly, Tisiphone does not coerce Hippomedon. This is very different to Turnus in *Aeneid* 7, who is roused to anger by Allecto in pyrotechnic splendour after he refuses to listen to her counsel (*Aen.* 7.452 – 62). Nor does Tisiphone attempt to infect him with *impietas* as she does with Polynices and Eteocles in Book 1 (124 – 30). Hippomedon feels fear (9.156) but this is the limit to her psychic impact on him. Consequently rather than suppress his *pietas*, Tisiphone redirects it as she tells him that Adrastus has been captured and urges Hippomedon to bring succour (9.157–65). Only then does Hippomedon reluctantly leave the corpse of Tydeus, entrusting it to his comrades but still constantly looking back in case he should be required (9.168–70). Hippomedon is described at this point as *unanimi desertor amici* (‘deserter of his friend of one mind’, 169). The adjective *unanimus* underscores Hippomedon's *pietas*. Its etymology would suggest a meaning ‘of one mind’. He is of total self-abnegating loyalty to his friend and only deserts him because he believes that Adrastus is in danger. Klinnert ultimately suggests that Hippomedon's display of loyal friendship is without any moral aspect but it is clear in the passages that Hippomedon is presented as a moral hero, defending Tydeus' body and attempting to rescue Adrastus is an act of virtue and *pietas* that threatens to destabilise Tisiphone's impious tyranny in the cosmos of the poem.

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56 Juhnke notes a number of epic antecedents: Allecto's transformation of Turnus (9.151–74), Apollo's intervention to prevent Menelaus despoiling Euphorbus (1970–2), Juturna's deceit of Turnus leading him away from battle (12.614–6), while old Adrastus' isolation is also reminiscent of Nestor at II. 8.78f. See Juhnke, *Homerisches in römischer Epik flavischer Zeit*, 134–5. Statius combines these epic images to present a noble image of Hippomedon who fights for his dead companion's corpse, stays even though isolated, and leaves only to save his king, who is old and vulnerable.
57 Statius often uses the word to describe close, loving familial relations. For example, it describes the Theban subject preparing for war thinking of his *unanimum parentem*, 'dear father', and lamenting for his sons (4.353–55). Menoeceus uses the adjective *unanimus* to describe his relationship to his brother, Haemon (10.727). Statius also uses it in the *Silvae* to express the close relationship between husband and wife (5.1.176) and friends (5.2.155). In the latter case, this close friendship is comparable to that between Pylades and Orestes, and Achilles and Patroclus. However, the adjective would also seem to be a calque of the Greek ὑμόφρων and its related verb ὑμόφρωνέω, which describes the ideal relationship between a husband and wife (*Od.* 6.183).
Conclusion

In his *De Amicitia*, Cicero through the persona of Laelius explains that friendship requires virtue. When defining *amicitia*, he tells *Sed hoc primum sentio, nisi in bonis amicitiam esse non posse* (‘but first I do not think that friendship can except exist between the good’, *Amic*.18). This reiterates Socrates’ words in the *Lysis*, ὃ ἀγαθός τῷ ἀγαθῷ μόνος μόνῳ φίλος, ὃ δὲ κακός οὔτε ἀγαθῷ οὔτε κακῷ οὐδέποτε εἰς ἄληθῆ φιλίαν ἔρχεται (‘the good man is only friend to the good, and the bad never comes into true friendship with the good or the bad,’ 214.d.5). A bad man, Socrates reasons, would only be bad to another person and so is incapable of friendship. Friendship presupposes virtue. It is not about mutual profit, because a true friend is only proved in hard times, as Cicero quotes Ennius, ‘a certain friend is discerned in uncertain circumstances’ (*amicus certus in re incerta cernitur*, *Amic*. 64). Such a friendship built on mutual benevolence even in adversity ‘would make almost one out of two’ (*efficiat paene unum ex duobus*, Cic. *Amic*. 81).

However, Hippomedon’s friendship, a friendship which lasts beyond Tydeus’ death and for which Hippomedon risks his life, a friendship ‘of one mind’, is disturbing. Hipommedon demonstrates laudable virtue, loyalty despite risk to himself, but it is in the service of a cannibal. He is ‘of one mind’ with a monster. He ostensibly demonstrates praiseworthy virtue, but it is profoundly perverse. Statius has intertextually and intratextually drawn on a significant number of characters to portray Hippomedon. He is another Achilles, another Turnus, another Capaneus, and the opposite of pious Scipio. Yet on the other hand, he is also another Aeneas avenging his despoiled friend and another Menelaus defending the corpse of a fallen friend. He is the exemplum of friendship, yet he is hardly one of Cicero’s *boni* nor Socrates’ ἀγαθός. At the end of Book 9, we are left with an example of perverse friendship, a man who shows exemplary loyalty after the death of his friend, a cannibal, and insanely fights until his impious battle against a god. Hippomedon’s ambivalent moral status is a sign of the disordered cosmos of Statius’ poetic world, where moral virtue is to be found in a broader story of evil and monstrosity and in characters who are ultimately furious and impious.

59 Similarly disturbing is that Tydeus too is presented as an exemplar of friendship (*Theb*. 1.474–7; cf. 9.68)