

# Replacing Sacrifice

## *A Proposed Transposition of V. Fl. 2.329-331*

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Textual corruption plagues the transition, in Book 2 of Valerius Flaccus's *Argonautica*, between the conclusion of the Lemnian massacre and the Argonauts' prolonged sojourn on Lemnos. Noted cruxes are lines 317-318, which obscure the precise details of the *vates* Polyxo's origins that we would most like to know;<sup>1</sup> 322, where a missing word in Polyxo's speech could be incidental or vital;<sup>2</sup> and 328-332, where two swift narrative shifts hamper our full understanding of the precise sequence of events. It is this last passage, which Liberman calls a *locus intricatus*,<sup>3</sup> that I tackle in this note.

First, the context:

dicta placent, portatque preces ad litora Graiis

Iphinoe; nec turba nocens scelerisque recentis

signa movent, tollitque loci Cytherea timorem.

protinus ingentem procerum sub nomine taurum

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<sup>1</sup> What exactly is Polyxo's relationship to Proteus and, seemingly, to Pharos? Exactly who was it that drove over the sea in a seal-drawn chariot? What creature or god—if any—hides behind the manuscripts' *caete* or *taetae*?

<sup>2</sup> The *codex Carrionis* reads *hospita*, simply labelling the Argo as a guest to Lemnos, whereas Summers 1894, 72 conjectured *fatis* to fill the manuscripts' lacuna, highlighting the gods' agency in the ship's arrival.

<sup>3</sup> Liberman 1997, 61<sup>b</sup>.

deicit, insuetis et iam pia munera templis      330  
 reddit et hac prima Veneris calet ara iuvenca.  
 ventum erat ad rupem, cuius pendentia nigris  
 fumant saxa iugis coquiturque vaporibus aer.  
 substitit Aesonides atque hic regina precari  
 hortatur causasque docens ‘haec antra videtis      335  
 Vulcanique’ ait ‘ecce domos: date vina precesque.  
 forsitan hoc factum taceat iam fulmen in antro;  
 nox dabit ipsa fidem clausae cum murmura flammae,  
 hospes, et incussae sonitum mirabere massae.’  
 moenia tum viresque loci veteresque parentum      340  
 iactat opes. mediis famulae convivia tectis  
 expediunt; Tyrio vibrat torus igneus ostro.  
 (V. Fl. 2.326-342)

337 taceat γ c\*] iaceat *Parrhasius* (*Lieberman*)

[Polyxo’s] words find favor, and Iphinoe bears their supplications shoreward to the  
 Greeks; the harmful mob and signs of recent crime don’t unsettle them, and Cytherea lifts  
 the region’s fear. Immediately, s/he<sup>4</sup> fells a huge ox in the name of the chieftains, and  
 now s/he returns pious gifts to disused temples, and the altar of Venus is warm from this  
 first heifer. They had reached a crag, whose overhanging rocks smoke from black ridges,  
 and the air is baking from the emissions. Aeson’s son came to a halt; and here the queen

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<sup>4</sup> The subject of *deicit* and *reddit* is one of the debated issues; see below.

urges him to pray, and explaining the reasons, she says, “You see these caverns and—  
behold!—the home of Vulcan: give wine and prayers. Perhaps even now a completed  
thunderbolt is silent in this cavern. The night itself will give proof, guest, when you  
marvel at the murmurs of trapped flame and the sound of the pounded molten metal.”  
Then she boasts of their walls and the strength of the region and the ancient wealth of  
their parents. Attendants hasten to prepare banquets in the midst of the hall; the fiery  
couch glimmers with Tyrian purple.<sup>5</sup>

If we go strictly by the transmitted text, there is a wrenching transition between Iphinoe’s  
embassy to the Argo and the scene of sacrifice and ritual renewal, followed in turn by an equally  
abrupt transition between the sacrifice and the sudden halt on what must be the (supposedly)  
volcanic Mount Mosychlus,<sup>6</sup> during a tour of the island that seems already to be underway.  
Editorial opinions on this sequence differ sharply—some scholars argue that the harshness of the  
two transitions is in keeping with Valerius’s “habitual brevity”;<sup>7</sup> some propose a lacuna  
following 2.328 or 2.331;<sup>8</sup> some propose transposing 2.329-331 to a later point in the passage;<sup>9</sup>  
and some claim that the problems are due to the unfinished nature of the epic.<sup>10</sup> While the last

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<sup>5</sup> All translations are my own. The text, except as specified (and with orthographic adjustments), is that of Liberman 1997.

<sup>6</sup> While Lemnos was, throughout antiquity, believed to be volcanic, it in fact has no volcano; the island may well, however, have demonstrated other types of volcanic activity. On Lemnos’s (purported) volcanism or lack thereof, see especially Burkert 1970, Forsyth 1984, West 2017.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Spaltenstein 2002, 397: “la brièveté habituelle de Val. suggère que rien ne manque”; cf. Harper Smith 1987, 148: “excessively elliptical style.”

<sup>8</sup> See the critical apparatus *ad* 2.329-331 in Liberman 1997, and see further Giarratano 1904, 19 *ad locc.*

<sup>9</sup> Liberman 1997, 61<sup>b</sup> (“*locus transponendus totus post 339 uel 345 uidetur*”), although he rejects this proposal (198 n. 95) out of a desire to keep what he believes is a stichometric allusion to *Aen.* 1.166 at V. Fl. 2.332, before either of the two points proposed for the transposition. Accepting a one-line lacuna after 2.317 and a two-line lacuna after 2.328 would, however, allow Liberman to have both the transposition and the allusion, although there is equally no guarantee that a lacuna here would be a short one.

<sup>10</sup> Schenkl 1871, 17, followed by Poortvliet 1991, 189-190. On the epic’s questionable state of completion, see the main theories summarized in Zissos 2008, xxvi–xxviii and Pellucchi 2012.

option is always possible and on some level irrefutable, critics' ready mobilization of the *ultima lima* argument to explain away any apparent inconsistencies frequently closes off valid, meaningful, and more interesting possibilities—and even if the epic is not finished, there is no guarantee that the problems of any particular passage are really due to that purported “first draft” status.

Here, the precise argument used to argue for the text's unfinished nature is alternatively the clearest proof of textual corruption—namely that although the three-line scene of sacrifice (329-331) appears to be internally intact, it is absolutely impossible to determine from the transmitted text who serves as the subject of *deicit* (330), *reddit* (331), and *calet* (331) and therefore who actually performs the sacrifices and restores gifts to the temples. Syntactically, the subject should be Venus herself, dependent on *Cytherea* at 2.328;<sup>11</sup> to avoid this obvious unlikelihood (although it has been implausibly defended by Köstlin 1889, 657), editors who object to a transposition or a lacuna either emend *sub* to *dux* (following Pierson) or try to explain the lines as they stand without recourse to Venus. Apart from Schenkl and Poortvliet, who claim Jason as the subject on the grounds that Valerius would have made this clearer when he returned to editing the passage (thus this is equivalently an argument for a lacuna, albeit not a lacuna of already-written text), the majority of this last group argue that the implied subject should be Hypsipyle, even though she has not been mentioned for twenty lines. Although Spaltenstein 2002, *ad loc.* claims that this is perfectly intelligible from context, it is not intelligible from the Latin, and in fact the only structurally and syntactically logical subject, other than Venus, would be Iphinoe (mentioned at 2.327) or, possibly, Polyxo (the primary subject of 2.316-325).

A second problem is that, following the transmitted text, it is left unspecified which god

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Schenkl 1871, 16; Poortvliet 1991, 189 *ad* 329ff.

receives the sacrificed bull.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the fact that Venus seems an unlikely recipient given the distinction created between the two sacrifices, Harper Smith aptly points out that the division between male and female animals suggests sacrifice to both a male and a female god.<sup>13</sup> It therefore seems probable, based on a comparable passage of Apollonius and given the proximity of multiple references to the god, that the divine recipient of the bull is Vulcan:

αὐτίκα δ' ἄστυ χοροῖσι καὶ εἰλαπίνῃσι γεγῆθει  
καπνῷ κνισήεντι περίπλεον· ἔξοχα δ' ἄλλων  
ἀθανάτων Ἥρης υἱὰ κλυτὸν ἠδὲ καὶ αὐτήν  
**Κύπριν ἀοιδῇσιν θυέεσσι τε μιλίσσοντο.** 1.860  
(A.R. 1.857-860)

And straightway the city rejoiced in dances and banquets, filled full with the smoke of sacrifice; and foremost beyond the other immortals, **they propitiated the famous son of Hera and Cypris herself with songs and sacrifices.**

While a reference to Vulcan could certainly be lost in a lacuna,<sup>14</sup> I would instead support a transposition of the sacrifice to immediately following Hypsipyle's discourse on the *antra Vulcani*, during which she bids the assembled company to perform a sacrifice (*date vina precesque*, V. Fl. 2.336). This transposition would result in the following text:

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<sup>12</sup> A lesser mystery of the lines is whether *hac ... iuvenca* should be taken to imply an earlier (and lost) mention of the heifer. Poortvliet 1991, 190 recognizes the oddity but assumes that it "must be one of the *pia munera* just mentioned."

<sup>13</sup> Harper Smith 1987, 148; likewise, Spaltenstein 2002, 398.

<sup>14</sup> Spaltenstein 2002, 398 dismisses outright the likely possibility of Vulcan because he is not named as the recipient in the text.

ventum erat ad rupem, cuius pendentia nigris  
 fumant saxa iugis coquiturque vaporibus aer.  
 substitit Aesonides atque hic regina precari  
 hortatur causasque docens ‘haec antra videtis                      335  
 Vulcanique’ ait ‘ecce domos: date vina precesque.  
 forsitan hoc factum taceat iam fulmen in antro;  
 nox dabit ipsa fidem clausae cum murmura flammae,  
 hospes, et incussae sonitum mirabere massae.’  
**protinus ingentem procerum sub nomine taurum** 329  
**deicit, insuetis et iam pia munera templis** 330  
**reddit et hac prima Veneris calet ara iuvenca.**  
 moenia tum viresque loci veteresque parentum                      340  
 iactat opes.  
 (V. Fl. 2.332-339, 329-331, 340-341)

With this transposition, the recipient of the bull becomes obvious, as Hypsipyle has just spoken of making an offering to Vulcan at his cavern on Mount Mosychlus; and elsewhere in Valerius, *protinus* always looks back to what precedes it, in explicative fashion, as it now would here. The sacrifice to Vulcan therefore becomes an obvious complement to the subsequent sacrifice to Venus, as in Apollonius’s epic.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the restored order of sacrificial activities is now

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<sup>15</sup> The anonymous reviewer suggests that such a dual sacrifice would also make sense based on the altars’ apparent physical proximity to each other, citing *contra Veneris stat frigida semper / ara loco* (2.98-99). While this is a possible interpretation of *contra*, and certainly beneficial to my argument, no commentator addresses the word, and translators seem universally to take *contra* as “conversely” (e.g., “But ...” [Mozley 1936, Barich 2009]; “Mais ...”

logical: first Hypsipyle invites the Argonauts to join her in the ritual (*date vina precesque*, 2.336); then the sacrifice occurs (2.329-331); and then the sacrificial meat is consumed (*sacris dum vincitur extis / prima fames*, 2.347-348).

Liberman thinks that the resulting transition from *tollitque loci Cytherea timorem* (2.328) to *ventum erat ad rupem* (2.332) would “still be brutal,”<sup>16</sup> but it is *less* brutal than the current abuse of *protinus* as a marker of scene change. Admitting a small lacuna would solve this lingering problem of abruptness, if deemed truly necessary;<sup>17</sup> and while it is true that a lacuna on its own could also solve the problem of the missing subject of *deicit* and *reddit*, which is naturally the reason a lacuna has been proposed in the past, relocating the sacrifice diminishes the need for an improbable lengthy lacuna, if one is required at all.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, Liberman’s other (similarly rejected) proposal of transposing the lines to follow 2.345—thus placing them immediately prior to the sacrificial meal—would not adequately solve the two mysteries that prompt the transposition. Only moving the lines to follow 2.339 can do so, as I hope to have shown here. In short, this transposition provides a reasonable (and syntactically allowable) subject for the action;<sup>19</sup> it restores a recipient of the bull-sacrifice;<sup>20</sup> and it allows the line-initial *protinus* to function as it does everywhere else in the epic, retaining a cause-and-effect link with what precedes.<sup>21</sup>

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[Liberman 1997]; “Mais ... en revanche” [Soubiran 2002]; “Dagegen ...” [Dräger 2003]; “Invece ...” [Caviglia 1999]; “En cambio ...” [Río Torres-Murciano 2011]); the TLL does not include this passage under *contra*.

<sup>16</sup> Liberman 1997, 197 n. 95: “la transition ... reste brutale.”

<sup>17</sup> Additionally, a three-line lacuna would allow Liberman his stichometric allusion (see n. 9), although I am not especially convinced of its reality.

<sup>18</sup> I have no particularly compelling explanation for the lines’ dislocation, nor for a lacuna if one exists. For the original omission of 2.329-331 that presumably led to the transposition, the anonymous reviewer proposes an instance of homoeoteleuton due to the similar endings of *taurum* (2.329) and *parentum* (2.331).

<sup>19</sup> As noted above, most scholars want to read Hypsipyle as the implicit subject, in any case.

<sup>20</sup> The offending *hac*, meanwhile (see n. 12), sits more easily in its revised context as an emphatic deictic.

<sup>21</sup> In addition, the temporal progression *protinus ... iam ... tum* that is hereby established finds a certain precedent in Cels. 5.26.26b: *neque protinus post cibum, neque iam inflammatione orta, neque cum in superioribus partibus plaga est* (“not immediately after dinner, nor now when an inflammation has arisen, nor when there is a blow on his upper regions”).

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