

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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EKPHRASEIS IN SILVER LATIN EPIC

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I. Previous research and aims of the dissertation

Until the middle of the 20th century *ekphraseis* were not part of the literary analysis: those were treated as functionless ornaments of the epic texts. In the past six decades – from the expression becoming a modern literary term until now – a great amount of studies have been written about the *ekphraseis* of ancient literary works. However, as I know, nobody tried yet to write an extensive analysis of the passages interpretable as *ekphrasis* of silver latin (AD 14–117) epics, such as the *Ilias Latina*, Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, Statius' *Thebaid* and *Achilleid* and Silius Italicus' *Punica*, using the same criteria.

This analysis was necessary on the one hand to get an opportunity to observe relationships and lay tendencies relating to the treating of *ekphraseis* by the epic writers of the period, on the other hand because nobody has yet studied the majority of the shorter descriptions applying literary aspects: these passages are mentioned mainly only in the commentaries in the epics, and are there analysed only in linguistic or stylistic way.

Furthermore, to the proper election of the passages to analyse, it was also necessary to (re)define *ekphrasis*.

II. Methodology

After collecting the passages fitting into the new-coined definition of *ekphrasis*, the next step was analysing them by applying the same criteria, and the prior questions were always why the given picture or object is chosen and described and what its function is in the poem. Further aspects of the analysis were the viewpoint of the *ekphrasis*, the interpretation of the viewer's reaction and whether the description alludes to the lifelikeness of the described object. Concerning the picture descriptions it was also an aspect if the theme of the picture is mythological or historical. Regarding the shield descriptions it was examined too if the representation on the shield fulfils some function of ancient shields, like alluding to family or geographical origin of the wearer or terrify the enemy. A further aspect was if the *ekphrasis* has a proleptic function or is a so-called „inverted self-reflection“ i.e. it presents an inverted story compared to that of the character related to the representation.

Philological problems of the passages were taken into consideration only if those had any importance of the interpretation.

III. Results

One of the important results is the creation of a new definition of *ekphrasis* according to which *ekphrasis* is a literary text or passage which is a description of something real or fictitious included at least in two of the categories of representation, picture and art. The advantage of this definition is that it can handle the descriptions of graphical representations and buildings (which were counted as *ekphraseis* previously, too) together.

It is also an important statement, that *ekphrasis* can be considered one of the main characteristics of an epic, if it is assumed that *ekphrasis* was already used in oral poetry and if the main characteristics of an epic are which can be originated from the oral tradition.

The most important result of the dissertation is not a conclusion that can be summarized in a few sentences but the same criteria analysis of the passages mostly ignored by the former studies, and therefore the demonstration that every single *ekphrasis* has its own function in the text of the epics.

My most important statements about the analysed *ekphraseis* are the follows:

The shield description in the *Ilias Latina* is the most original part of the epic and its main purpose is to glorify Nero.

Pompey's imaginary tomb is there in the *Pharsalia* for the narrator can enumerate the general's glorious acts. The description of Iuppiter Hammon's temple serves to emphasize the stoic ideals,

whereas the presentation of Cleopatra's luxurious palace is to condemn the luxury.

In the epic of Valerius Flaccus the pictures decorating the ship, Argo forecast Jason's tragical marriage and the conquest of the sea and the barbaric nations. The picture on the shield of Phalerus expresses the wearer's helplessness. In the case of the cloak of Castor and Pollux the purple colour highlights their importance, and as they are twins the duality is an important motif of the description. The narrator describes Canthus' shield to stress this hero's significance and the pictures on the shield hint that Canthus is safe on the sea and the mainland is dangerous for him. Jason's cloak recalls Hypsipyle's loyalty. The depictions on Cyzicus' goblet shows both the past and the future but both the king of the Dolionians and Jason misinterpret the meaning of these images. The reliefs on the doors of the Colchian temple represent partly future events beyond the plot of the epic, but Jason does not understand the sense of these either. The descriptions of armours in the catalogue of Perses' army have chiefly the function of indicating the origin.

The description of Adrastus' goblet in Statius' *Thebaid* is also characterized by the motif of duality, that alludes that the epic has two protagonists, and the pictures foreshadow the death of Tydeus and Polynices. The descriptions of the statues of the seven kings of Argos can be paralleled to the seven chiefs of the epic. The Sphinx on Polynices' sword signifies his origin. The visualization of the story of the Danaids on Hippomedon's shield forecasts the hero's death in the water, like the depictions on Capaneus' armour

allude to his death. The conquered Python on the shield of Amphiaraus is related to the divination. On the shield of Parthenopaeus, there can be seen his mother Atalanta. On one hand, it shows his origin, on the other hand the masculine mother hunting with arrows can be opposed to the girlish boy who dies from arrows. The narrator itself admits the proleptic function of descriptions in the description of Opheltes' coverlet. The presentation of the statues of the ancestors carried at the Nemean Games is the extension of the description of the statues of the Argolic kings. The depiction of Mars' palace can be compared with that of Harmonia's necklace because both are related to the outbreak of the war. The representation of the rape of Europa on Crenaeus' shield can be paralleled to the pictures of the shield of Hippomedon who kills him. The pattern of the peplos given to Juno draws the attention to the women's role in the war. The description of the Sleep's dwelling can be compared with the presentation of Mars' palace, among others because both of them are related to Death. The depictions on the armours of the warriors defending Thebes have mostly the function of indicating the origin. The picture of Theseus itself on his own shield (and his double appearance by that) symbolizes that he takes over the role of former protagonists.

In the shield description of the *Achilleid* the pictures of the battles show Achilles' future, and the shield helps him to understand his proper identity because he sees himself in the pictures reflected in a wrong form (dressed like a woman).

The description of Dido's temple in the *Punica* of Silius Italicus prepares the events of war. The pictures on Bagrada's shield symbolizes that the danger can be overcome. The temple described at the reception of the saguntinian embassy can allude to the ultimate roman victory. The depictions of Theron's shield forecast the death of the priest of Hercules and also the final defeat of Hannibal. The images of Hannibal's man-made shield can represent only past events, but one can deduce from their arrangement that war must be come. The scenes relating to the description of the temple of Gades emphasize Hannibal's irreverence for Hercules. The shield of Crixus has the function of indicating the origin, it is also apotropaic and indicates the wearer's death, too – similarly to the pictures on the armour of the consul, C. Flaminius, and the description of their armours can be paralleled in many aspects. The Carthaginian viewers seeing the events of the first punic war in the temple of Liternum should realize their repeated defeat. The depiction of Scaevola's shield symbolizes the patriotism and alludes to this character's death in the form of inverted self-reflection. Hasdrubal's cloak is a man-made product that – likewise in the case of Hannibal's shield – can express that this punic chief is not supported by the gods either and the pictures on the cloak hint to his defeat. The description of Scipio's shield symbolizes chiefly the general's final glory, like the picture which is carried in his triumph and represents Hannibal's retreat.

The revealing all of these relationships contributed to a repeated rehabilitation of the silver latin epics anteriorly thought valueless and secondary to the *Aeneid*.

In addition to the individual analysis of the passages, I also enumerated some relationships and tendencies pertaining to the *ekphraseis* of silver latin epics, and it can be said that most of the *ekphraseis* are shield descriptions that are predominantly in the catalogues of the epics. According to the descriptions the pictures on the armours largely allude to the family origin of the wearer and in very few cases have the function of terrifying the enemy. The building descriptions are mostly temple descriptions, the picture descriptions frequently represent mythological scenes and the pictures are often proleptic, in most cases in the form of inverted self-reflection. We learn the reaction of the character viewing the picture if he or she is a protagonist or an important character of the epic. Very few *ekphraseis* allude to the lifelikeness. If the narrator refers to the arrangement of the picture, it is made mainly by typical pronouns or by phrases used in Vergil's *ekphraseis*. The literary patterns come logically from Homer, Vergil and Ovid, but the silver latin poets prefer adjusting the *ekphraseis* to their poems' literary purpose to following models.

IV. Relevant publications

Hercules temploma Silius Italicus Punica című eposzában. In:
ADORJÁNI ZS. - JUTAI P. (ed.), *APIΣTEIA. A Collegium
Hungaricum Societatis Europaeae Studiosorum Philologiae
Classicae IV. országos konferenciáján elhangzott előadások.*
Budapest 2009, 106–111.

La descrizione del Tempio di Ercole. Silio Italico, Punica 3. 1–60.
AAntHung 51 (2011) 59–66.

Apolló és a Múzsák Achilles pajzsán. (Ilias Latina 880-884) In:
TAKÁCS L. (ed.), *Szöveg és hagyomány, Tanulmányok.*
Piliscsaba 2013, 67–81.