



## THE GUILT OF CADMUS THE FARMER IN STATIUS' *THEBAID*

### ABSTRACT

*Statius' Thebaid inverts the traditional positive reading of agricultural work. In the account of the founding moments of Thebes, the poet remains faithful to what is documented in the extant Greek and Roman literary material. However, as this article argues, Statius introduces two significant innovations with respect to his thematic precedents. First, Cadmus the founder is explicitly and emphatically pointed out as guilty of the internecine struggle that results from his farming. Second, he does not limit himself to sowing the soil but, previously, he plows it. The ploughing motif, although pivotal in the myth of Jason's trials in Cholchis, only appears referred to Cadmus in Ovid's Metamorphoses (3.104–5), albeit in a very succinct form. As will be examined, Statius amplifies the Ovidian suggestion, programmatically conferring negative connotations to this motif (tillage, bull, yoke, furrow, etc.) throughout his epic. Cadmus' ill-fated tillage is unambiguously presented as the origin of the curse of Thebes and as the root cause of the present fratricidal war between Eteocles and Polynices. The dire fruits which agricultural labour invariably produces in the Cadmean farmlands echo Lucanean Thessalian fields from whose furrows, contaminated by the blood of Roman combatants, grow polluted crops. The blame that Statius places on the shoulders of Cadmus the farmer, the relationship he establishes between farming and fratricidal war, and his insistence on the perverse effects of agricultural work transform mythic Thebes into an exemplar of fratricidal Rome as apt as Lucan's historical Thessaly.*

**Keywords:** Statius; *Thebaid*; foundation of Thebes; Cadmus' ploughing; execrable farmings; fratricidal war; curse

### INTRODUCTION

In Greece and Rome, agriculture represents the paradigmatic activity of the civilized man and of civilization as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the yoke, the plough and the act of ploughing have a powerful symbolic charge and are favoured metaphors, not only for the human sexual act<sup>2</sup> but also for depicting 'the growth of civilization and the establishment of order'<sup>3</sup> on a physical, civic and political level. In Virgil's *Georgics*, a rather precise link between Roman identity and agricultural activity can be found,

<sup>1</sup> C. Perkill, *The Poet's Truth: A Study of the Poet in Virgil's Georgics* (Berkeley, 1989), 27.

<sup>2</sup> As attested in LSJ and DGE, ἄρουρα, in addition to 'tilled or arable land', is the 'metaphor of a woman as receiving seed and bearing fruit'. See P. DuBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and the Representations of Women* (Chicago and London, 1988), 67 and 72, and E. Calderón Dorda, 'Tipología de los mitos de fundación en Grecia', in M. Oller, J. Pàmias and C. Varias (edd.), *Tierra, territorio y población en la Grecia antigua* (Krumbach, 2017), 2.87–112, at 100. M. Clarke, 'Thrice-ploughed woe (Sophocles, *Antigone* 859)', *CQ* 51 (2001), 368–73, at 370–3 points out that it is precisely in the tragedies on the Theban theme that we find the starkest expression of the metaphor of ploughing to refer to the act of implanting semen in a woman's body and where the powerful connection between sexual and agricultural fertility is established. See also C. Criado, 'Interdicciones jurídicas y literarias sobre el incesto. Séneca y la llegada del incesto edípico a Roma' (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> R.M. Wilhelm, 'The plough—chariot: symbol of order in the *Georgics*', *CJ* 77 (1982), 213–30, at 215.

one which had already been widely documented by authors of the middle and late Republic. The poet's emphasis on the farmer's ability to impose order on nature is constant, his task being equated to that of the soldier and the statesman.<sup>4</sup> It is also the case, however, that the ambiguities underlying the Virgilian farmer make the portrait of the countryman and his 'sacred' and virtuous ploughing activity susceptible to ambivalent interpretations. This leads to the paradox in the *Georgics* that whereas we find a farmer who is predominantly, although not exclusively, idealized, agricultural labour also functions (although in my opinion neither predominantly nor exclusively) as an allegory for the dark aspects of the ethics and politics of contemporary Rome,<sup>5</sup> still convulsed by the memory of the recent civil wars.

With the exception of the incomplete *Achilleid*, landscape is ever-present in Statius' compositions. The issue of dominating and domesticating the land is a central topic in the *Silvae*. The very soil, even when rebellious (3.1.110) or infertile (3.1.167), is ultimately subjugated through human *ars*. In his occasional poetry, Statius focusses primarily on exalting the aggrandisement of nature through architectural works and praising the magnificence and beauty of the gardens of the *uillae*,<sup>6</sup> in the design of which Man emulates the noble activity of the farmer. Although agriculture is not of special attention in the *Silvae*, the poet makes it clear that farmland is a plenteous bosom (*beato* | ... *sinu*, 2.6.67–8) that submits to the servitude of Man (*nobile* ... | *seruitium*, 2.2.108–9). In Statius' *Thebaid*, the landscape also plays an important role. It is an idyllic *locus amoenus* on which human action, contrary to what happens in the *Silvae*, has a perverse effect. Idealized landscapes are invariably disrupted,<sup>7</sup> transformed into sites of death (*loca dira*, *Theb.* 1.162)<sup>8</sup> and pollution<sup>9</sup> due to the execrable and evil acts committed by human beings, whose acts find their echo in nature.

But this is not a paper about natural scenery in the *Thebaid*. My aim is to focus strictly on the farming activity depicted therein. From the late Republic to the end of the first century A.D., the problem of large estates had grown exponentially. Despite measures adopted by the Flavian emperors,<sup>10</sup> in Statius' times, the number of small

<sup>4</sup> We might recall here Cicero's praise of ancient rulers of the Roman Republic for their dual status as farmers and statesmen (*Rosc. Am.* 51).

<sup>5</sup> I am obliged to oversimplify a tortuous issue that would itself merit a dedicated study. For a state of the art on optimistic and pessimistic readings of the *Georgics*, see L. Kronenberg, *Allegories of Farming from Greece and Rome: Philosophical Satire in Xenophon, Varro and Virgil* (Cambridge and New York, 2009), 13–15 and 132. Kronenberg offers a suggestive reading and examination of Virgil's debt to the Menippean satire in his portrait of the farmer, a man who is not always successful in mastering the chaos of nature (132–84). The moral ambiguity deriving from Virgil's acknowledgement of the destructive effects of the farmer (victim and victimizer) in his attempt to control nature has already been highlighted by Perkell (n. 1), 33–9. See also W. Dominik, 'Virgil's geopolitics', in W.J. Dominik, J. Garthwaite and P.A. Roche (edd.), *Writing Politics in Imperial Rome* (Leiden and Boston, 2009), 111–32.

<sup>6</sup> See C. Newlands, *Statius' Silvae and the Poetics of Empire* (Cambridge, 2002), 132, 156–88, 178–92 and 245, and F. Morzadec, *Les images du monde. Structure, écriture et esthétique du paysage dans les œuvres de Stace et Silius Italicus* (Brussels, 2009), 142.

<sup>7</sup> C. Newlands, 'Statius and Ovid. Transforming the landscape', *TAPhA* 134 (2004), 133–55, at 136–7.

<sup>8</sup> T. Behm, 'Landscapes in latin epic', in C. Reitz and S. Finkmann (edd.), *Structures of Epic Poetry*, vol. 2.2 (Berlin and Boston, 2019), 325–59, at 344.

<sup>9</sup> L. Micozzi, 'Aspetti dell'influenza di Lucano nella *Tebaide*', in E. Esposito and L. Nicastrì (edd.), *Interpretare Lucano. Miscelanea di Studi* (Napoli, 1999), 343–87, at 360–4.

<sup>10</sup> For the agricultural policies implemented by the Flavian emperors to alleviate the agricultural crisis in Italy, see, for example, W.E. Heitland, *Agricola. A Study of Agriculture and Rustic Life in the Greco-Roman World from the Point of View of Labour* (Cambridge, 1921), 270–93,

agricultural landowners had decreased dramatically. Large tracts of cultivated land belonged to a small number of landowners and were worked by slaves or tenant farmers,<sup>11</sup> who were hardly fit to embody the Republican and Augustan farmer-soldier ideal. In short, in Flavian times there remained no trace in the Roman Empire of the economic structure that had allowed the idealization<sup>12</sup> of agricultural labour by the elite of the Republican and Augustan authors to sound even close to reality. Nevertheless, the stoic Musonius (*flor.* 56.19) continues to argue, we must suppose with sincerity, that the best way to live according to Nature is to cultivate the land, even if the farmer does not own the land he works. At the time when Musonius was writing, Pliny expresses nostalgia for the modest and vigorous yeomen of the past in whom Cato saw the potential for brave soldiers and good citizens (*HN* 18.26). As a rich landowner, Pliny's expressions of admiration for the simple life of the old and humble peasants cannot be understood as anything other than part of a harmlessly vacuous rhetoric on which he, like many previous and contemporary authors, builds 'a fantasy of country picnics and lazy afternoons under shady trees', as M. Beard ironically describes it.<sup>13</sup>

On the contrary, Statius rejects these exalted visions of agricultural work in the *Thebaid*. He presents the sinister side of farming and, for the first time in Greek and Roman literature, Cadmus' ploughing in particular is loaded with negative implications. In this paper, I hope to show why the Flavian poet does so and how he achieves it. In the first section, I will analyse passages where, without mentioning Cadmus' agricultural labour, gods and men coincide in signalling the guilt of Agenor's son. In the second section, I will explore the reasons why Cadmus is occupied with the act of tillage in Statius' *Thebaid* when, in all extant Greek literary and mythographic material, he limits himself to sowing the teeth of Mars' dragon. In this respect, I will examine Statius' expansion of the interesting admixture of Colchian and Theban myths made by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, where Cadmus, appropriating the personality of the Colchian Aeetes and the Thessalian Jason, ploughs the soil. In fact, as I will show, Statius, with greater force than Ovid in his account of the foundational moments of Thebes (*Met.* 3.1–130), confers a key role on the bull and the yoke, prototypical images of the Colchian myth; through rewriting certain passages from Virgil and Lucan, the poet uses this imagery metaphorically to anticipate the fratricidal warfare of Eteocles and Polynices.

In the two remaining sections of the article, I will discuss the passages of the *Thebaid* in which Cadmus' agricultural work is mentioned. First, I will address the fact that, on the first occasion when Statius refers to Cadmus' ploughing (*Theb.* 1.7–8), he does so with a diction that interweaves the act of tillage, the foundation of a city and the mythic and historical fratricidal wars. Second, in the fourth and final section of the article, I will analyse the rest of the passages in which Cadmus' agricultural labour appears. In all of these, it is patent that such work is execrable. Cadmus' guilt, as I hope to show, is a

A.K. Bowman and A.I. Wilson (edd.), *The Roman Agricultural Economy: Organization, Investment, and Production* (Oxford, 2013), 1–32 and A. Launaro, 'The economic impact of Flavian rule', in A. Zissos (ed.), *A Companion to the Flavian Age of Imperial Rome* (Malden, MA, 2016), 189–206, at 198 and 202–3.

<sup>11</sup> Pliny the Elder himself warns against the dangers for the Roman economy of the formation of these vast estates (*HN* 18.19.21 and 18.35; see also, for example, *Juv.* 9.54–60).

<sup>12</sup> In this respect, it is perhaps worth mentioning Cicero's blunt assertion that the performance of paid manual labour is not an honourable practice for a gentleman, who should live off the profits of his estate (*Off.* 1.150).

<sup>13</sup> M. Beard, *SPQR. A History of Ancient Rome* (London, 2015), 440.

Statian innovation. The Theban founder's ploughing is ill-omened and will inaugurate the inveterate curse of Thebes, and will also be the reason why the polluted Theban ground, as if it were the Thessalian fields described by Lucan, is forever condemned to yield horrendous fruits. In the *Thebaid*, the ploughing motif, already stripped of Virgilian ambiguities, is unequivocally nefarious.

#### DIVINE AND HUMAN CHARGES AGAINST CADMUS

Even on those occasions when Cadmus' agricultural work is not explicitly mentioned, the characters of the *Thebaid* without exception pass condemnatory judgements on the founder of Thebes. Jupiter himself blames Cadmus in the first divine assembly. As a justification for his intention to punish the Theban people, the father of the gods adduces the criminal past of this deadly race (*gentemque profanam*, 1.232; *exitiale genus*, 1.243), predestined to evil.<sup>14</sup> Jupiter enumerates those crimes which are worthy of his punishment: the *funera Cadmi* (1.227), the death of Pentheus at the hands of his mother Agave (1.229–30; see also 3.189–90), Oedipus' incest (1.233–5), and the ungodly behaviour of Eteocles and Polynices towards their disabled father (1.238–9). Faithful to the chronology of events, the god mentions first the *funera Cadmi* which, in my opinion, refers to the death of the Earthborn who were sown by Cadmus.<sup>15</sup> Numerous scholars, though, opt for a more neutral interpretation. Thus, Heuvel attributes to this expression the broad meaning of *corpora necata*, an allusion to all the deaths that occurred in the fateful Theban family,<sup>16</sup> and Conrau-Lewis suggests that the phrase 'encapsulates allusion to the series of tragedies that they suffered'.<sup>17</sup> Although Statius borrows Lucan's diction literally when the latter mentions the death of the metamorphosed Cadmus (*uersi ... funera Cadmi*, 3.189), no scholar believes that *funera Cadmi* refers to Cadmus' death as an expiation for having killed the serpent of Mars. They claim that this atonement did not consist of the death of Cadmus but rather of his metamorphosis and that of his wife Harmonia into serpents (*Ov. Met.* 4.586–603). But perhaps more questionable is their opinion that *funera Cadmi* cannot refer to the bloodshed caused by the founder of Thebes in sowing the seed of the bloody Earthborn warriors, given that in Ovid's narrative of this mythic episode (*Met.* 3.26–130) there is no suggestion that any guilt is attached to Cadmus. Hence, they argue, the Statian Jupiter could not have referred to Cadmus' ploughing as a reason for punishing the Theban people. As we will see, it is indeed true that Ovid placed great emphasis on the reluctance of Cadmus towards violence (*Met.* 3.104–25).<sup>18</sup> Yet when we are dealing with Statius, a master of the art of variation and textual interweaving, it does not seem advisable to adopt the rationalized view of the ancient mythographers. On this point, Statius' version differs from Ovid's in that his

<sup>14</sup> For the inveterate curse that hangs over Thebes, see below, pages 219–24.

<sup>15</sup> This is also understood by J.W. Joyce, *Statius. Thebaid: A Song of Thebes* (Ithaca, 2008), 11 and L. Micozzi (transl.), *Stazio. Tebaide* (Milan, 2010), 17, who agree with the interpretation of J.H. Mozley, *Statius* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1928), 1.357. See also P. Venini, *Studi Staziani* (Padova, 1971), at 84–6 and W.J. Dominik, *The Mythic Voice of Statius. Power and Politics in the Thebaid* (Leiden, 1994), at 10–11 and 153.

<sup>16</sup> H. Heuvel, *Publii Papinii Stati Thebaidos liber primus, versione batava commentarioque exegetico instructus* (Zutphen, 1932), 146.

<sup>17</sup> A. Imhof, *Statius, Lied von Theben* (Ilmenau and Leipzig, 1885), 26 and D.R. Shackleton Bailey, *Statius: Thebaid. Books 1–7* (Cambridge MA and London, 2003), 57.

<sup>18</sup> On the innocence of Cadmus the farmer in Ovid, see below, pages 219–20.

Cadmus is seen as the perpetrator of an execrable act. It is for this reason that the priest Amphiarus advises Capaneus that, with the fratricidal war of Eteocles and Polynices, blood will again stain the meadows of the dire Cadmus (*diri ... noualia Cadmi*, 3.645).

Tydeus also adduces the culpability of Cadmus. He attributes Eteocles' impiety not only to the direct inheritance of his incestuous father Oedipus but to that of the first 'author of his blood' as well: *sic primus sanguinis auctor | incestique patrum thalami*, 2.463–4. The expression *sanguinis auctor* and its variants (*generis auctor*, *originis auctor*, *stirpis auctor*, etc.) are very common in epic,<sup>19</sup> and as such suffer from a lack of specificity. Thus there is no scholarly consensus here as to whom *primus auctor* refers. Lactantius ad loc. believes that it is Oedipus, whereas Mulder<sup>20</sup> argues that Tydeus alludes to Agenor, the cruel father of Cadmus who had prohibited his son from returning to Phoenicia if he could not find his sister Europa. Gervais<sup>21</sup> suggests that the deliberate ambiguity of the poet allows the reader to note the allusion to the malevolent Jupiter who, in Book 1, used the expression *sanguinis auctor* (1.224) to declare himself progenitor of the two cities, Thebes and Argos, whose destruction he had decreed. Although it is possible that the elliptical reference noted by Gervais does exist, I find no strong objection to the claim that *primus auctor* refers to Cadmus, given that the title of founder of the lineage legitimately corresponds to him. In fact, when King Adrastus asks Polynices what family he is from, the latter answers obliquely: *Cadmus origo patrum, tellus Mauortia Thebe, | est genetrix Iocasta mihi* (1.680–1).<sup>22</sup>

#### WHY DOES CADMUS PLOUGH IN THE *THEBAID*?

Although present in numerous epic similes, metaphors and ecphrases, agricultural work is never the primary focus of a heroic epic poem.<sup>23</sup> The ordinary activity of farming is not the kind of task that a hero is expected to perform, the three conspicuous exceptions being the Theban Cadmus, the Colchian Aeetes and the Thessalian Jason. Both in the Greek mythic version that attributes the founding of Thebes to Cadmus (considered by Berman to be more recent than the one attributing it to Amphion and Zethos)<sup>24</sup> and in the Greek Argonaut myth, the motif of agricultural work is found and involves sowing the crop of the Gēgeneis ('Earthborn') who emerge fully armed

<sup>19</sup> M. Dewar, *Statius. Thebaid IX* (Oxford, 1991), 12.

<sup>20</sup> H.M. Mulder, *Publii Papinii Stati Thebaidos liber secundus commentario exegetico aetheticoque instructus* (Groningen, 1954), 268.

<sup>21</sup> K. Gervais, *Thebaid 2. Edited with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford, 2017), 233.

<sup>22</sup> Clearly, Polynices' intention is to avoid verbalizing the name of Oedipus, his incestuous father. He tries 'to divert Adrastus' attention from his proximate ancestor Oedipus to his distant ancestor': N.W. Bernstein, *In the Image of the Ancestors: Narratives of Kinship in Flavian Epic* (Toronto, 2008), 79–80. See also N.W. Bernstein, 'Ancestors, status and self-presentation in Statius' *Thebaid*', *TAPhA* 133 (2003), 353–79, at 354 and 361–9.

<sup>23</sup> R. Buxton, *Imaginary Greece: The Contexts of Mythology* (Cambridge 1994), 79.

<sup>24</sup> D.W. Berman, 'The double foundation of Boiotian Thebes', *TAPhA* 134 (2004), 1–22, at 10 and 17–18. In contrast to Greek tragedy and to the later mythographers, in which Cadmus is presented as the founder of Thebes and the role of the twins Amphion and Zethos is limited to providing a wall for the city, Homer and the early literary tradition offer a completely different version of the legend. Here, it is Amphion and Zethos who, in addition to building the walls of Thebes, found the city; see Hom. *Od.* 11.263–5, Pherec. *FGrHist* 3 F 41d = Σ T Hom. *Il.* 13.302, and perhaps also Aeschylus in *Seven against Thebes*: on this latter point, see Berman (this note, 10).

from Mother Earth and immediately enter into mutual combat. Whereas in Greek mythology both the Colchian Earthborn warriors and the Theban ones appear to represent warlike strength,<sup>25</sup> strictly speaking, the two myths do not belong to the same mythic category; the former reflects a ritual of royal legitimation,<sup>26</sup> whereas the latter is certainly a foundation myth. From very early times, attempts were made to explain the repetition of the same episode in the two legends. Pherecydes had established the connection between them by affirming that, once Cadmus killed the serpent sacred to Ares, it was Ares and Athena who pulled the dragon's teeth from its jaws. The goddess gave half to Cadmus and the other half to Aetes, so that each could do their own sowing in Thebes and Colchis, respectively (*FGrHist* 3 F 22a =  $\Sigma$  Ap. Rhod. 3.1179). Although diverging in terms of the number of teeth given to each of them, subsequent authors, such Apollonius (3.1177–80) and Ps.-Apollodorus (1.128–9), link the two myths in the same terms as Pherecydes had done.

However, while the Colchian *Spartoi* are the result of the ploughing and sowing undertaken by Aetes and, afterwards, by Jason,<sup>27</sup> with the sole exception of a passage in Euripides' *Phoenician Women* where βαθυσπόρους ('deep sown', 669) might be said to allude, albeit in an unspecific way, to Cadmus' work of tillage, in ancient Greek literature the founder of Thebes sows but never ploughs. Only in one late Greek author, Nonnus, does he plough furrows from which battles emerge (χαροπῆς ἀρόσας πολεμητόκον ἀλλὰκα γαίης, *Dion.* 4.425). In Roman literature, Cadmus performs the specific labour of tilling the land only in Ovid (*paret et, ut presso sulcum patefecit aratro, | spargit humi iussos, mortalia semina, dentes, Met.* 3.104–5), Hyginus (*dentesque eius Minerua monstrante sparsit et arauit, Fab.* 178) and Statius (*Theb.* 1.8, 3.180–1, 4.435–7 and 11.490).

The presence of the ploughing motif in the myth of the Argonauts has a high degree of thematic motivation, since Aetes and Jason's feat of yoking the two fire-breathing bulls is a pivotal episode in the Thessalian myth. As far as the Theban myth is concerned, it is not possible to be certain whether the explicit mention of the tillage performed by Cadmus already existed in Greek literature or was a Roman innovation. Apart from the aforementioned connection established by Pherecydes between the Theban and the Colchian agricultural work, Apollonius' Colchian story already had

<sup>25</sup> F. Vian, *Les origines de Thèbes. Cadmos et les Spartes* (Paris, 1963), 166–71.

<sup>26</sup> Vian (n. 25), 176, L.J. Gernet, *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece* (Baltimore and London, 1968 [1981]), 96–7, J.-J. Goux, *Oedipus, Philosopher* (Stanford, 1993), 68–70, D. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia, 550 BC–AD 562* (Oxford and New York, 1994), 22–3, J.K. Newman, 'The golden fleece. Imperial dream', in T. Papanghelis and A. Rengakos (edd.), *A Companion to Apollonius Rhodius* (Leiden, 2001), 309–40, at 313–14, and J.A. Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, 2008), 311–17 argue that the possession of the Golden Fleece works as a talisman associated with royal power. Bremmer connects the Golden Fleece with the Hittite *kurša*, a symbol of royalty and warrior force that consisted of 'a hide with wool ... , i.e. a fleece with the long curling hair of an angora (= Turkish *Ankara*) goat still on it' that was hung on a tree or in a temple (313). Vian (n. 25), 9 and J.J. Goux (this note), 68–70 consider that the trials assigned to Jason by King Aetes, as well as those overcome by Perseus and Bellerophon, form part of the structure of a heroic myth of royal investiture. These are the military trials that Jason must undertake to regain the throne that Pelias took from him.

<sup>27</sup> Pherec. (*FGrHist* 3 F 30 =  $\Sigma$  Ap. Rhod. 3.411); Pind. *Pyth.* 4.224–9, 233–7; Ap. Rhod. 3.412, 1053, 1325, 1332, 1333–4, 1336, 1343. In Sophocles' *Women of Colchis*, the mention of the bronze-legged bulls [fr. 336 Pearson = fr. dub. 1135 Radt] points to the tillage carried out by Jason. In Euripides' *Medea*, as well as in a fragment of *Naupactica* (fr. 4 West), Jason's ploughing is inferred from the brief allusion to the act of yoking fire-breathing oxen.



an evident Theban colouring.<sup>28</sup> Regarding Roman literature, as I have just noted, it is in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* where it is first documented that Cadmus, emulating Jason,<sup>29</sup> ploughs, and indeed it is possible that Ovid was the first to introduce this motif to the Theban myth.<sup>30</sup> Whether or not this is the case, Ovid, in a more explicit way than Apollonius, establishes a close link between the two myths, as demonstrated by the existing parallels between his narration of Cadmus' tillage and its consequences (*Met.* 3.104–25), and his story of Jason's ploughing and of the birth and fight of the Colchian *Terrigenae* (*Met.* 7.121–42).<sup>31</sup> Hence, Statius, faithful to Ovid, describes the agricultural work of Cadmus (*Theb.* 1.7–8) 'through the Argonautic filter'<sup>32</sup> and, consequently, Cadmus ploughs in the *Thebaid*.

The presentation of Cadmus as a ploughman in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is in perfect consonance with the centrality that the poet confers on the bull and the yoke<sup>33</sup> (ploughs, furrows, etc.) in his account of the primeval times of the Theban house. Statius also strengthens the presence of these distinctive imageries of the Colchian myth in the *Thebaid*. In fact, the first simile of the *Thebaid* equates Eteocles and Polynices, the fratricidal sons of Oedipus, with two bullocks that resist being hitched by the peasant to the same yoke and pull in opposite directions (1.131–6) in such a way that *uario confundunt limite sulcos* (136).<sup>34</sup> Significantly, this simile inverts what Homer uses

<sup>28</sup> R.L. Hunter, *Apollonius of Rhodes: Argonautica. Book III* (Cambridge, 1989), 20 n. 88. Apollonius joined the Theban and Colchian stories, as evinced by the fact that Pherecydes is repeatedly cited in the Apollonian scholia in connection with various episodes of the Argonaut adventure and, specifically, in relation to the Theban parallel of Jason's ploughing contest.

<sup>29</sup> *ut presso sulcum patefecit aratro, spargit humi iussos, mortalia semina, dentes* (*Met.* 3.104–5); Jason: *uipereos dentes et aratos spargit in agros* (*Met.* 7.122).

<sup>30</sup> The coincidences between Ovid's and Nonnus' accounts in terms of the explicit mention of tillage raise the question of whether Nonnus used Ovid as a literary source or followed a version in which the contamination between the Theban myth and the Colchian one already existed and had perhaps been consolidated in Greek or Roman literature before Ovid. The issue of Nonnus using Ovid as source continues to be controversial today. M. Paschalis, 'Ovidian Metamorphosis and Nonnian *poikilon eidos*', in K. Spanoudakis (ed.), *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context* (Berlin and Boston, 2014), 97–122, at 97 points out that 'in recent years the argument in favor of Ovidian influence on Nonnus has weakened considerably'. In fact, some scholars suspect that Nonnus' knowledge of the Latin language was scant or indeed nil; see A.M. Lasek, 'Nonnus and the play of genres', in D. Accorinti (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Nonnus of Panopolis* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), 402–21, at 404 n. 18.

<sup>31</sup> A. Barchiesi and G. Rosati (transl. L. Koch), *Ovidio. Metamorfosi (Libri III–IV)* (Milan, 2007), 139.

<sup>32</sup> S. Briguglio, *Fraternas acies. Saggio di commento a Stazio, Tebaide I, 1–389* (Alessandria, 2017), 115. Unfortunately, I did not have access to Briguglio's commentary until the final stages of correcting this paper.

<sup>33</sup> P.J. Davis, 'The fabric of history in Statius' *Thebaid*', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, vol. 7 (Brussels, 1994), 464–83, at 475: 'the central symbol of Boeotian Thebes is of course the bull. It was a tauriform Jupiter who abducted Europa [cf. *Met.* 2.848–3.2]. It was a heifer that led Cadmus to the site of Thebes [cf. *Met.* 3.10–23] and it was by means of oxen that he ploughed the land for the sowing of the earthborn men.' On the central role of the cow in the episode of Cadmus in the *Metamorphoses*, see also G. Viehhauser, R. Kirstein, F. Barth, A. Pairamidis, 'Cadmus and the cow: A digital narratology of space in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', in P. Fogliarini, A. Ballatore and E. Clementini (edd.), *Proceedings of Workshops and Posters at the 13th International Conference on Spatial Information Theory* (Cham, 2018), 293–301, at 299.

<sup>34</sup> It is possible that, as the anonymous referee has suggested to me, Amphiarus' words to Apollo and the 'doomed' yoke before his demise (*peritura sedentem | ad iuga, 7.779–80*) evoke the same twisting of the yoke imagery that these verses of the first book document. Actually, in Amphiarus' *aristeia* that precedes these verses, his horses *ad moribunda reflantes | corpora rimantur terras, omnique per artus | sulcus et incisisque altum rubet orbita membrs* (7.760–2). The passage,

to bring into relief the unwavering friendship between Oilean Ajax and Telamonian Ajax (*Il.* 13.701–8).<sup>35</sup>

Comparisons and similes of rival bulls are frequent in the *Thebaid*. However, such comparisons, in my opinion, preserve the heroic connotations that they most frequently carry in the epic genre, except when the *primum comparandum* is Eteocles or Polynices (or both).<sup>36</sup> The Theban Bacchante predicts that Oedipus' sons will be two bulls of the same bloodline who will fight fiercely for supremacy: *similes uideo concurrere tauros: | idem ambobus honos unusque ab origine sanguis*, 4.397–8. On this occasion, Statius transforms into a proleptic metaphor the bull comparison that Virgil uses in narrating the singular combat of Aeneas and Turnus (12.715–22) which, according to broad scholarly consensus, has civil and fratricidal overtones.<sup>37</sup> Even earlier than this, in Book 2, during his exile at the court of King Adrastus, Polynices was compared to an exiled bull which, having recovered the strength of his hooves and horns, smashes oak trees with his breast and is ready to recapture his stolen meadows and herds (vv. 323–9).<sup>38</sup> And in Book 11, shortly before the fratricidal combat takes place, Eteocles is described as a bull hitherto untroubled by the exile of his adversary but who now, with the latter's return now imminent, trains himself by ripping up turf with his hooves and slashing the air with his horns (11.251–6). Given that the debt of *Theb.* 2.323–9 and 11.251–6 to the verses of the *Georgics* in which Virgil depicts a defeated bull regaining its vigour during its exile (3.229–36), and to Lucan's rewriting of Virgil (2.601–7), is well-known, I will

for which I follow the edition of J.B. Hall, A.L. Ritchie and M.J. Edwards (*P. Papinius Statius. Volume I: Thebaid and Achilleid* [Newcastle, 2007]), is not simple and I feel obliged to sidestep some of the textual problems that it presents. Nevertheless, the sense is clear: Amphiaraus' chariot is performing a horrendous form of agricultural work in that it gouges furrows (*sulcus*, v. 762) and in doing so dismembers the bodies of the dying. The scene is not new (e.g. *Hom. Il.* 20.490–9 and *Verg. Aen.* 12.329–30), but it is perhaps useful to bear in mind that the 'harvest' metaphor of the furrow or of the plough to refer to chariot tracks appears first in Statius, who uses it on six occasions, as pointed out by J.J.L. Smolenaars, *Statius Thebaid VII: A Commentary* (Leiden / New York / Köln, 1994), 362.

<sup>35</sup> Briguglio (n. 32), 211. The positive sense of the Homeric yoke imagery, however, is maintained by Statius when he describes the pain that Polynices feels when faced with the death of Tydeus, his companion at the yoke (*amisso qualis consorte laborum | deserit inceptum media inter iugera sulcum | taurus iners ...*, *Theb.* 9.82–5), and when the poet praises the joint effort of Acron and Ialmenus' son in breaking down the gates of Thebes (*quanta pariter ceruice gementes | profringunt inarata diu Pangaea iuueni*, 10.511–2).

<sup>36</sup> This occurs in 3.330–6 (Tydeus), 4.69–73 (Adrastus), 6.864–7 (the boxers in the Nemean games) and 12.601–5 (Theseus). Contrary to what I maintain here, W.J. Dominik (n. 15), 95–6 and 'Similes and their programmatic role in Statius' *Thebaid*', in W.J. Dominik, C.E. Newlands and K. Gervais (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Statius* (Leiden, 2015), 266–90, D. Hershkowitz, 'Sexuality and madness in Statius' *Thebaid*', *MD* 33 (1994), 123–47 and Gervais (n. 21), at 188 (see 189 for a bibliography on bull similes in the *Thebaid*) maintain that Statius, by means of the assimilation of Tydeus, Adrastus and Theseus to bulls, shows that 'they are tainted by their involvement in the Theban conflict' and that they have been converted into counterparts of the Theban fratricidal brothers. See also H.K.C. Tang, 'Heroic Self-Fashioning in Statius' *Thebaid* (Diss., University of Cambridge, 2019), 159–62.

<sup>37</sup> The bibliography here is abundant, and due to space restraints I will only cite the study by S. Rebeggiani, especially useful in this respect: 'Theban myth in Virgil's *Aeneid*: The brothers at war', *CLAnt* 39 (2020), 95–125. At 105 Rebeggiani claims: 'the reference to fraternal war [*sc. tu potes unanimos armare in proelia fratres*, 7.335] fashions the war in Latium as a kind of civil war, implying that Aeneas and Turnus are effectively brothers.'

<sup>38</sup> The comparison, no longer formulated as such, still underlies the words with which Polynices rebukes his brother during the single combat: *exsilio rebusque exercita egenis | membra uides* (11.550–1).



limit myself to pointing out that these last two passages allude to historical civil wars in Rome.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the images of the yoke and the bull invariably have negative and fratricidal connotations in the *Thebaid* when applied to members of the Theban house. In what follows I will show how Statius uses Cadmus' tillage to present the other side of the traditionally positive image of agricultural activity and of the act of founding a city, and that, in contrast to Ovid, he does so by programmatically condemning the founder of Thebes.

### CADMUS THE FOUNDER 'PLOUGHS WARS'

The *Thebaid* opens emphatically with the interweaving of tillage, foundation ritual and fratricidal war. In the proem, Cadmus is not a mere sower who trembles at a hidden war (*trepidum si Martis operti | agricolam*, 1.7–8); rather, he is the farmer who 'ploughs combats' in the furrows (*agricolam infandis condentem proelia sulcis*, 1.8).<sup>40</sup> If we accept Heuvel's interpretation, *Martis operti* is a genitive that depends on *trepidum*, not on *agricolam*; hence, the literal translation would be 'the farmer scared at a hidden Mars'.<sup>41</sup> All literary precedents agree in pointing out the fear of the son of Agenor at the birth of the Gegeneis. But the Statian Cadmus feels dread and knows that something *infandum* must be born when the fruit of his nefarious tillage is still hidden from him (*Martis operti*). Apart from the interesting proleptic value of *trepidum*, which at the very least shows a Cadmus who is well versed in his own mythical history, this is an example of the Statian narrative technique that Micozzi calls 'memoria diffusa',<sup>42</sup> which the poet uses when he wishes to highlight some aspect that is crucial to the content of his epic. On such occasions, the poet resorts to the repetition of the same topic in various parts of his epic, while seeking different effects and introducing variations on the version of the literary models used in those other passages in which the same motif appears. In the present case, the sense of fear that the Theban farmer has towards the nefarious fruit that emerges from the earth will reappear in subsequent passages where Statius presents the relentless return of the agricultural labour of the founder of Thebes.<sup>43</sup>

But, in addition, *condentem proelia* (1.8) offers a wording that is as ingenious as it is full of significance. It is a *iunctura* undocumented elsewhere in Latin literature, whereas the metaphor of the sowing (*serere*) of battles is commonplace.<sup>44</sup> Statius, with this extraordinary diction, plays on the polysemy of the verb *condere*. In the proem Cadmus is not only a farmer; he is, first and foremost, an ἀρχηγέτης ('a founder'), and Statius makes

<sup>39</sup> In Lucan, the reference to civil war is straightforward, since it is Pompey who, as a temporarily defeated bull, leaves Rome to regain his strength. Regarding Verg. *G.* 3.229–36, see the fundamental work of G.B. Miles, *Virgil's Georgics: A New Interpretation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), 233–5. Miles relates these verses to *G.* 4.67–90, in which Virgil explains how to proceed in the event of discord for power between two kings in a hive; in both passages, the author sees a direct reflection of Roman civil struggles.

<sup>40</sup> OLD has as the first meaning of *condo* 'to put or insert (into)' and quotes *condere semen humo* (Ov. *Pont.* 1.5.34).

<sup>41</sup> Heuvel (n. 16), 59–60.

<sup>42</sup> L. Micozzi, 'Memoria diffusa di luoghi lucanei nella *Tebaide* di Stazio', in P. Esposito and E.M. Ariemma (edd.), *Lucano e la tradizione dell'epica latina* (Naples, 2004), 137–51, at 137–8.

<sup>43</sup> See below, page 223.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. Lucr. 5.1290, Verg. *Aen.* 7.339 and Liv. 21.6.1. See Briguglio (n. 32), 117 and 292.

sure that his acts fit this status perfectly. In his foundational act of ploughing, he does not limit himself to furrowing battles; he has to ‘found’ them.<sup>45</sup> With this phrase, the reader perceives, from the very outset of the epic, the oblique historical bias of the Statian narrative. Clearly, as Markus notes,<sup>46</sup> it is easy to perceive the association of *condentem proelia* with the words that Virgil uses to anticipate the founding of Lavinium and Roma (*dum conderet urbem*, *Aen.* 1.5)<sup>47</sup> and to describe Aeneas thrusting his weapon deep into Turnus’ breast (*ferrum aduerso sub pectore condit*, 12.950).<sup>48</sup> Statius employs simultaneously the two meanings that *condere* has in these two Virgilian verses to evoke the coexistence of the ideas of foundation and destruction. Additionally, these Theban furrows recall (and reverse) the Roman mythic-historic foundation rite—fully carried out by Romulus—that involved a plough and a team of oxen tracing the furrows that marked the sacred limits of the city on which the walls would subsequently be built.<sup>49</sup> According to the testimony of Cicero, only after this agricultural labour had been carried out could Romulus *diuturnam rem publicam serere* (*Rep.* 2.5).

It can be affirmed, then, that from the very beginning of the *Thebaid*, Statius presents the founding of Thebes as an inversion of the Virgilian foundation myth of Rome, acquiescing thus to the dark interpretation of the *Aeneid* that Ovid proposes in his ‘Thebaid’ (2.836–4.603).<sup>50</sup> However, we find here a notable difference between Ovid’s and Statius’ versions of Cadmus the founder, since although in the *Metamorphoses* he carries out tillage that produces a murderous fruit, and although the story of Ovid’s Theban royal house is a succession of family disasters, Cadmus’ founding ritual is correct. The unyoked cow, whose hoofprints he follows under the orders of Apollo (3.10–23), and his act of killing Mars’ dragon (*Met.* 3.59–95), are images ‘of the wilderness Cadmus is to civilize through city foundation’.<sup>51</sup> This does not seem to be the case with the Statian Cadmus.

<sup>45</sup> Briguglio (n. 32), 117 notes that it is appropriate to bear in mind a third meaning of *condo*, ‘to be the author of’. Thus, *condentem proelia* would also function as a programmatic formulation similar to that found in Verg. *Ecl.* 6.7: *tristia condere bella* (‘to narrate sad wars’).

<sup>46</sup> D.D. Markus, ‘The politics of epic performance in Statius’, in A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik (edd.), *Flavian Rome. Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden and Boston, 2003), 431–67, at 455; see also J. Manasseh, ‘A Commentary on Statius’ *Thebaid* 1.1–45’ (Diss., University of St. Andrews, 2017), 20.

<sup>47</sup> R. Tarrant, *Virgil: Aeneid Book XII* (Cambridge, 2012), 340 also quotes *Romanam condere gentem*, *Aen.* 1.33 and *Mauortia condet | moenia*, *Aen.* 1.276–7.

<sup>48</sup> Tarrant (n. 47), 340 points out that *condere* with the meaning ‘burying a weapon in a body’ is attested for the first time in Virgil.

<sup>49</sup> Ov. *Fast.* 4.825–6; Varro, *Ling.* 5.143; Fest. 392 and 515; Serv. *Aen.* 5.58 and 5.755. Wilhelm (n. 3), 214 affirms that Virgil’s description of the act of ploughing at *G.* 1.169–75 is a eulogy of the source of Italy’s greatness, since in Roman history and myth the plough is linked to the foundation of Rome, given that the plough and the ploughman are both central in the marking out of the sacred *pomerium*.

<sup>50</sup> P.R. Hardie, ‘Ovid’s Theban history: the first ‘anti-*Aeneid*’?’, *CQ* 40 (1990), 224–35, at 229. A. Feldherr, *Playing Gods. Ovid’s Metamorphoses and the Politics of Fiction* (Princeton, 2010), 180–98 analyses how the Theban passages of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* offer direct links to contemporary Roman ideologies of power.

<sup>51</sup> A. Keith, ‘Ovidian geographies in Flavian mythological epic’, in M. Skempis and I. Ziogas (edd.), *Geography, Topography, Landscape: Configurations of Space in Greek and Roman Epic* (Berlin and Boston, 2014), 349–72, at 363; A. Keith, ‘Ovid’s Theban narrative in Statius’ *Thebaid*, *Hermathena* 177/178, *Aetas Ovidiana?* (2004/2005), 181–207, at 183. On the contrary, T. Spinelli, ‘*Crudelis vincit pater*: Oedipal paternities in Statius’ *Thebaid*’, *CJ* 117 (2021), 91–119, at 96 provides a negative reading of the Ovidian Cadmus. He holds that the Theban characters in the *Metamorphoses* have a tendency to revive the failures of their mythical founder. Spinelli explores

## CADMUS' PLOUGHING AS A CURSE

As was already the case in Greek tragedy and in Roman literature, in Statius' narrative Thebes is an ill-fated city, and familial determinism functions forcefully here.<sup>52</sup> The Cadmean 'aetiologically-minded people'<sup>53</sup> openly recognize the eternal return of the past and the historical continuity of their abominations.<sup>54</sup> Yet, in the *Thebaid*, it is precisely in the sinister role played by Cadmus the farmer in shaping the motif of the returning past and of the congenital guilt that we find a significant innovation by Statius with respect to Greek literature, and also with respect to his Roman predecessors. In the Greek sources, no character attributes the present evils of Thebes to Cadmus' agricultural work. The causes given by the Greek tragedians for the curse of Thebes are either the rancour felt by Ares towards Cadmus for having killed the serpent consecrated to the former, the monstrous origins of the Theban people, born of the dragon's teeth, Laius' disobedience to the oracle of Apollo, who had forbidden him to have children, Oedipus' incest, or his curse upon his sons.<sup>55</sup> As I noted above, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Cadmus is also not responsible for the fratricidal (*cadunt subiti per mutua uulnera fratres*, 3.123) and civil war (*nec te ciuilibus insere bellis*, 3.117) that erupts between the Earthborn warriors after his farming labour.<sup>56</sup> Contrary to Pherecydes (*FGrHist* 3 F 22a; see also Nonn. *Dion.* 4.456–63), who attributes the fratricidal massacre of the Earthborn crop to the fact that Cadmus (though driven not by bellicosity but by his terror at their birth) threw stones at them,<sup>57</sup> the Ovidian founder

how Statius uses 'the Cadmean paradigm' in the sense defined by Keith (this note [2004/2005]), 184–187 and 203, that is, the tendency of the characters of Statius' *Thebaid* (inherited from their Ovidian ancestors) to return to their origins. Keith, though, in her article, refers exclusively to 'the Cadmean pattern of exile and bestial transformation [into a snake]', not to Cadmus' foundational act.

<sup>52</sup> *mens cunctis imposta manet, Theb.* 1.227; *manet haec ab origine mundi | fixa dies bello, populique in proelia nati. | quod ni me ueterum poenas sancire malorum | gentibus et diros sinitis punire nepotes*, 3.242–5. See C. Criado, 'The contradictions of Valerius' and Statius' Jupiter. Power and weakness of the supreme god in the epic and tragic tradition', in G. Manuwald and A. Voigt (edd.), *Flavian Epic Interactions* (Berlin, 2013), 195–214, at 200.

<sup>53</sup> Davis (n. 33), 464–9 and 472.

<sup>54</sup> For endless violence as a fatal inheritance in the Theban family and the connection between past and present, see, principally, E. Kabsch, *Funktion und Stellung des zwölften Buches der Thebais des P. Papinius Statius* (Kiel, 1968), 143–60; A.-M. Taisne, *L'esthétique de Stace* (Paris, 1994), 199; A.J. Heinrich, 'Longa retro series: Sacrifice and repetition in Statius' Menoecus episode', *Arethusa* 32 (1999), 165–95; R. Nagel, 'Polynices the charioteer: Statius *Thebaid* 6.296–549', *EMC* 18 (1999), 381–96, at 388–9; Micozzi (n. 9), 359–61 and (n. 42), 145; V. Berlincourt, 'Queen Dirce and the *Spartoi*: Wandering through Statius' Theban past and the *Thebaid*'s early printed editions', in R.R. Nauta, H.-J. van Dam and J.J.L. Smolenaars (edd.), *Flavian Poetry* (Leiden, 2006), 129–45, at 139–41; Bernstein (n. 22 [2008]), 64–85; J. Bartolomé, 'El proemio de la *Farsalia* de Lucano y su recepción I', *CFC(L)* 29 (2009), 25–44, at 37; R. Parkes, 'Dealing with ghosts: literary assertion in Statius' *Thebaid*', *Ramus* 39 (2010), 14–23, at 18–20; Criado (n. 52), 196–8; Gervais (n. 21), 222 and 232–3; and Spinelli (n. 51), 91–119. N. Dee, 'Wasted water: The failure of purification in the *Thebaid*', in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Ritual and Religion in Flavian Epic* (Oxford and New York, 2013), 181–98, at 183–90 considers not only the pervasive presence of the theme of pollution in the *Thebaid*, but also the futility of purification.

<sup>55</sup> C. Criado, 'The Theban fratricidal wars. The mythic-historical approach of Ovid, Seneca and Lucan', in M. Díaz de Cerio, C. Cabrillana and C. Criado (edd.), *Ancient Epic. Linguistic and Literary Essay* (Newcastle, 2015), 140–64, at 145.

<sup>56</sup> On the innocence of the Ovidian Cadmus, see Barchiesi and Rosati (n. 31), 142–3 and Criado (n. 55), 154 n. 22.

<sup>57</sup> Hellanicus (*FGrHist* 4 F 22a =  $\Sigma$  Ap. Rhod. 3.1179), moved perhaps by an eagerness to eliminate details that conflict with reason and Greek religious sentiment, suppresses the massacre of the Theban *Spartoi*. On this, see Vian (n. 25), 25.

of Thebes in no way provokes their mutual carnage. According to the Euripidean version (*Phoen.* 931–9, 1006–18, 1062–6), he is only guilty of having killed Mars' serpent. Yet Ovid absolves him of blame. The poet presents his act as an involuntary sin or *error*, given that Cadmus is unaware that the dragon is sacred to Mars, something which, although known to the reader from as early as *Met.* 3.32 (*Martius anguis*), the Ovidian Cadmus only comes to suspect much later on, in the moments prior to his metamorphosis (*Met.* 4.571–3). Nevertheless, Cadmus' unintentional impiety will condemn all the members of the Theban family to suffer for his crime, since the vengeful and cruel gods will wreak expiation on all his children (*Met.* 4.564–70).<sup>58</sup>

Neither Seneca nor Lucan blame Cadmus for the curse that the Theban people suffer. Seneca does not even mention that the birth of the *Terrigenae* was the result of Cadmus' sowing (*aut feta tellus impio partu | effudit arma, Oed.* 781–2; see also 586–9), a fact that Lucan does succinctly point out (*sic semine Cadmi | emicuit Dircaea cohors, 4.549–50*). Conversely, Statius substantiates Cadmus' crime and, in contrast to the literary precedents, invariably associates it with his labour of tillage. He is indeed guilty of having ploughed the fratricidal Earthborn Men. From Cadmus' ill-fated agricultural labour (*omen, Theb.* 1.180 and *augurium, 1.185*), the birth of new monstrous and intrafamilial conflicts will be repeated inexorably over the course of the history of the city, culminating in the fratricidal struggle of Oedipus' sons. This is what the anonymous critic suspects when he directs stern words at Eteocles to censor him for the fact that, owing to the agreement with his brother Polynices, the Theban people must tolerate a change of king each year. He asks whether Cadmus' planting of the dragon's teeth may have turned out to be ominous for all posterity (*Theb.* 1.180–5):<sup>59</sup>

an inde uetus Thebis extenditur omen,  
ex quo ... Cadmus  
exsul Hyanteos inuenit regna per agros,  
fraternasque acies fetae telluris hiatu  
augurium seros dimisit ad usque nepotes?

This rhetorical question is also raised in Book 3. After Tydeus' unsuccessful ambassadorship for peace in Thebes, King Eteocles ambushes him, but he emerges unscathed after killing all but one of the Theban soldiers. The city, in mourning, suffers so much unnecessary death that the citizen Aletes complains to the King, listing all the occasions on which tragedy has rained down on Thebes. Specifically, he claims that the city has borne misfortune often since Cadmus sowed the Aonian furrows (*sulcos, Theb.* 3.179–83):

saepe quidem infelix uarioque exercita ludo  
fatorum gens nostra fuit, Sidonius ex quo  
hospes in Aonios iecit sata ferrea sulcos,  
unde noui fetus et formidata colonis  
arua suis.

<sup>58</sup> A. Keith, 'Sources and genres in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', in B.W. Boyd (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Ovid* (Leiden, 2002), 235–69, at 264 affirms that the series of fatal encounters of the members of the Theban family with the gods in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* dramatizes the conflict between Man and deity that pervades Athenian tragedy. On Statius' appropriation of Ovidian theodicy, see D.E. Hill, 'Jupiter in *Thebaid* 1 again', in R.R. Nauta, H.-J. van Dam and J.J.L. Smolenaars (edd.), *The Poetry of Statius* (Leiden, 2008), 111–28, at 135 and Criado (n. 52), 196–8.

<sup>59</sup> F. Ahl, 'Statius' *Thebaid*. A reconsideration', *ANRW* 2.32.5 (1986), 2803–912, at 2828.

As already occurred at *Theb.* 1.7–8,<sup>60</sup> and will occur once again in the passage that I analyse below (*fugit incepto tremibundus ab aruo | agricola insanique domum rediere iuueni*, 4.441–2), the fear of the countryfolk is mentioned in these verses (182–3). As we know, the fear and flight of farmers, pastors and indeed animals at the imminence of a prodigy or a supernatural or fateful event, as well as the monstrous fruits that arise from a soil contaminated by spilt blood, were pre-existing motifs in Greek and Roman literature.<sup>61</sup> Virgil brings up this nefarious agricultural topic precisely when he alludes to the civil battles of Pharsalia and Philippi (*G.* 1.491–7). Horace equates the pollution of the fields caused by the blood spilt in these two battles and in the battle of Actium (*Carm.* 2.1.29–31) with the pollution of the soil of Rome after the fratricide of Romulus, a fateful omen for posterity (*Epod.* 7.17–20). Also in Petronius' *Bellum ciuile*, the farmland that witnessed the civil confrontation of Marius and Sulla produces cursed fruits fertilized with blood (120.1.98–9). But it is Lucan who intensifies the tone and who uses the topic profusely throughout his epic, and more specifically in the passage in which he imprecates the Thessalian-Emathian lands for being the scene of the current civil confrontation of Pharsalia and of the future battle of Philippi (7.847–72). Terrified pastors and farmers, he asserts, will avoid these pastures contaminated by the bones and blood of Roman combatants and will flee from these fields in which polluted crops grow in the furrows (7.851–65).

The imprint of Lucan's poetic voice is once more evident in Book 4 of the *Thebaid*. The doomed agricultural labour and Cadmus' ploughing are again evoked, but in a more sinister way. Eteocles, trembling at the portents that announce a sad end to the war, urges Tiresias that Lethe's rites be carried out. The place in which the prophet prepares the *nekyomanteia* appears to be the land which was ploughed and sown of old by Cadmus (*Theb.* 4.434–42):

extra inmane patent, tellus Mauortia, campi;  
 fetus ager Cadmo. durus qui uomere primo  
 post consanguineas acies sulcosque nocentes  
 ausus humum uersare et putria sanguine prata  
 eruit: ingentes infelix terra tumultus  
 lucis adhuc medio solaque in nocte per umbras  
 expirat, nigri cum uana in proelia surgunt  
 terrigenae; fugit incepto tremibundus ab aruo  
 agricola insanique domum rediere iuueni.

Once again, the work of the Theban farmer who turns over the earth with the plough, bringing to light clods of dirt soaked in putrid blood, cannot but evoke Lucan's gloomy plain of Pharsalia, turned into the tomb of the Roman people.<sup>62</sup> The intertextuality of these verses is extensive and complex, and is not limited to verses 851–65 of Book 7 of Lucan. Statius also establishes a strong connection with other passages of the

<sup>60</sup> See above, pages 217–18.

<sup>61</sup> Micozzi (n. 9), 359–69, especially 363–7. See also R. Badali, 'Virgilio *Georg.* 1.466–88 e Lucano *Phars.* 1.522–83', in *Atti del convegno virgiliano sul bimillenario delle Georgiche* (Naples, 1977), 121–31, at 128–31. For more bibliography, see P. Esposito, 'Su alcuni miti tragici in Lucano e nell'epica flauia', in T. Baier (ed.), *Götter und menschliche Willensfreiheit: von Lucan bis Silius Italicus* (Munich, 2012), 99–126, at 115.

<sup>62</sup> L. Micozzi, *P. Papinius Statius. Thebaidos Liber IV* (Florence, 2019), 517.

*Bellum ciuile* in which Lucan rebukes all those landscapes that have witnessed civil confrontations.<sup>63</sup> All these are guilty places,<sup>64</sup> condemned to bristle with ghosts.

In a manner consistent with Statius' use of recurrent motifs in the *Thebaid* and, more specifically, in coherence with the pervasive presence of the inherited guilt in his epic, verses 440–1 anticipate the mortal duel which Eteocles and Polynices will fight in Book 11. The consanguineous war arising from the *sulcosque nocentes* (436) ploughed by Cadmus in the primordial times of Thebes will be replicated when the fight between Oedipus' sons occurs.<sup>65</sup> In effect, the ground worked by Cadmus, the farmland sown by him, the bristling imagery of the Earthborn Men rising up and the fratricidal struggle of the Sown Men will all resound in the passage of the single combat of Oedipus' sons: *stat consanguineum campo scelus, unius ingens | bellum uteri* (11.407–8).

The interpretation of verses 434–42 of Book 4 poses certain problems of textual criticism and has led to divided opinion among editors regarding punctuation. Hill inserts a comma after *Cadmo* (435): *fetus ager Cadmo, durus qui uomere primo*.<sup>66</sup> Thus, as Lactantius had already done, Hill understands that the stout farmer is indeed Cadmus. Such punctuation, and the resulting interpretation, is roundly criticized by Hall, who describes Hill's punctuation as 'disastrous'. In Hall's opinion, if a comma is used after *Cadmo*, then Cadmus becomes the subject of the relative clause which follows and, consequently, this would suppose a chronological inversion of the events. We would be faced with a Cadmus who ploughed the fields 'after his own sowing of the *Spartoi!*'.<sup>67</sup> Hence, Hall affirms that a full stop must follow *Cadmus*, given that the husbandman alluded has to be a farmer subsequent to Cadmus, one who will till the land in the future and who will return to provoke the battle of the old ghosts of the Earthborn crop. The interpretation arising from Hall's punctuation<sup>68</sup> makes good

<sup>63</sup> See *Theb.* 4.434 *tellus Mauortia ... | fetus ager Cadmo* and *Luc.* 6.395 *hac tellure feri micuerunt semina Marti; Theb.* 4.435 *uomere primo* and *Luc.* 7.848 *quo non Romanos uiolabis uomere manes?*; *Theb.* 4.436 *sulcosque nocentes* and *Luc.* 7.768 *terramque nocentem* and 7.869 *licet terras odisse nocentes; Theb.* 4.438–41 *ingentes infelix terra tumultus | lucis adhuc medio ... | expirat, nigri cum ... surgunt | terrigenae* and *Luc.* 7.768–70 *ingemuisse putem campos, terramque nocentem | inspirasse animas, infectumque aera totum manibus; Theb.* 4.438 *infelix terra* and *Luc.* 7.847 *Thessalica infelix ... tellus; Theb.* 4.439 *lucis adhuc medio solaque in nocte per umbras* and *Luc.* 3.423–4 *medio cum Phoebus in axe est | aut caelum nox atra tenet; Theb.* 4.441–2 *fugit incepto tremibundus ab aruo | agricola insanique domum rediere iuueni* and *Luc.* 1.570–2 *uenientes comminus umbrae. | quique colunt iunctos extremis moenibus agros | diffugiunt, 1.580–3 e medio uisi consurgere campo | tristia Sullani cecinere oracula manes | tollentemque caput gelidas Anienis ad undas | agricolae fracto Marius fugere sepulchro* and 7.862–5 *fugerentque coloni | umbrarum campos, gregibus dumeta carerent | nullusque auderet pecori permittere pastor | uellere surgentem de nostris ossibus herbam*. For verbal parallels and Statius' rewriting of Lucan see, especially, Micozzi (n. 62), 509, 517, 519, 521–2 and 525.

<sup>64</sup> P. Esposito, *Il racconto della strage. Le battaglie nella Pharsalia* (Naples, 1987), 107–10.

<sup>65</sup> Taisne (n. 54), 199.

<sup>66</sup> D.E. Hill, *P. Papini Stati Thebaidos Libri XII* (Leiden, 1983). Hill coincides in the punctuation here with H.W. Garrod, *P. Papinii Statii Thebais et Achilleis* (Oxford, 1906), A. Klotz (rev. T.C. Klinner), *P. Papini Statii Thebais* (Leipzig, 1973), and A. Traglia and G. Aricò, *Opere di Publio Papinio Stazio* (Turin, 1980).

<sup>67</sup> J.B. Hall, 'Notes on Statius' *Thebaid* Books 3 and 4', *ICS* 17 (1992), 57–77, at 72.

<sup>68</sup> This full stop after *Cadmo*, already proposed by C. Barth, *Publii Papinii Statii quae extant. Ad P. Papinii Statii Thebaidem animadversionum pars altera* (Zwickau, 1664), is also used by Mozley (n. 15), Shackleton Bailey (n. 17), Hall, Ritchie and Edwards (n. 34), Micozzi (n. 62) and R. Parkes, *Statius, Thebaid 4. Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford, 2012). Shackleton Bailey and Micozzi add an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence (... *eruit!*) which transforms the expression into an invective against the initiation of the pernicious practice of the war, similarly found in Tibullus 1.10.2 (*quam ferus et uere ferreus ille fuit!*).



sense, in that such a future farmer would be the perfect counterpart of the future countrymen of Virgil (*G.* 1.491–7), Horace (*Carm.* 2.1.29–31), Lucan (7.851–65) and Statius himself (*Theb.* 3.182).

Even so, Berlincourt's suggestion<sup>69</sup> that the comma before *durus* should be respected is sound, given the fact that Cadmus might plough again, and also that the *Spartoi* might truly be born again, would be perfectly coherent with the world dominated by a historical continuity of the past as found in the Statian epic. That is, if we set aside the familiar propensity of scholars to 'invoke the criterion of internal coherence',<sup>70</sup> this passage would constitute a truly oneiric and surreal scene. The appearance of the ghostly shadow of Cadmus and of the black ghosts of the ancestral Earthborn would accentuate the magical atmosphere of necromantic ritual that Tiresias and his daughter Manto are about to perform. The fear felt by the 'actual' Cadmus the founder (*trepidum ... agricolam*, 1.7–8) would remain in his spectre (*tremibundus agricola*, 4.441–2), which is on the point of provoking the chimerical rebirth and struggles of the *Terrigenae* (*nigri cum uana in proelia surgunt | terrigenae*, 4.41–2).

If this is indeed the case, then we are dealing with an anxiety dream that occurs while the dreamer is awake. It is fitting here to take into account the distinction that de Jong establishes between 'frame' or 'extra-diegetic or distanced space', that is, a location that features in thoughts, dreams, memories or reports, in contrast to the narrative space that she calls 'setting' or 'intra-diegetic space', that is to say, the location of the action itself.<sup>71</sup> A good example of this chimerical place or frame can be found in a passage by Lucan. In Book 7 of *Bellum ciuile*, after the battle of Pharsalia, the infamous victors sleep and have frenzied dreams (*somnique furentes*, 7.764). Ghosts of the citizens who died at their hands, and with whom in many cases they had blood ties (*hunc agitant totis fraterna cadauera somnis, | pectore in hoc pater est*, 7.775–6), appear to them (*umbra perempti | ciuis adest*, 7.772–3). Caesar himself, during sleep, sees monstrous shapes, the Styx, the spirits of the dead and the Tartarus (7.783–5). This seems to be, to use de Jong's terminology, an extra-diegetic space, since Caesar and his soldiers are sleeping. However, Lucan sows doubts about this and raises the possibility that the rising of the ghosts from the Thessalian fields and lands might be real: *ingemuisse putem campos, terramque nocentem | inspirasse animas, iniectumque aera totum | manibus, et superam Stygia formidine noctem* (7.768–70). The thematic proximity to the verses of the *Thebaid* that we are considering here may be corroborated by the verbal echoes. When the *Terrigenae* rise up their ghostly battle (*uana in proelia, Theb.* 4.440), Statius says that *ingentes infelix terra tumultus | ... expirat* (*Theb.* 4.438–40), words that closely mirror Lucan's diction: *terramque nocentem | inspirasse animas* (7.768–9).<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Berlincourt (n. 54), at 139, 141 and 142. See also J. Jortin, *Miscellaneae observationes in auctores veteres et recentiores*, vol. 1.2 (Amsterdam, 1732), at 242 (quoted by Berlincourt).

<sup>70</sup> Berlincourt (n. 54), 143.

<sup>71</sup> I.J.F. de Jong, *Narratology and Classics. A Practical Guide* (Oxford, 2014), 107, quoted by Behm (n. 8), 326.

<sup>72</sup> On the same lines as A.E. Housman, *M. Annaei Lucani Belli civilis libri decem* (Oxford, 1927), N. Lanzarone, *M. Annaei Lucani Belli civilis liber VII* (Florence, 2016), prefers to attribute to *animas* the meaning 'breath of air' or 'vapours' rather than 'ghost' or 'spirit', in that he considers 'breath of air' to be more appropriate for the meaning of the verb *inspiro* ('to blow into'). However, apart from the fact that *inspiro* has also the meaning of 'animate', it is difficult to disassociate *animas* from *manes* that appears in the following verse. On this latter point, see P. Roche, *Lucan: De Bello Civili Book VII* (Cambridge, 2019), 234.

Moreover, it would not be the only occasion in which the farmland produces a distressing and hallucinatory fantasy. After the decisive battle between the brothers is over, the victorious Theban people emerge from the city walls and believe that they see the ghosts of the dead combatants rising from the earth: *attoniti nil comminus ire | mirantur fusasque putant adsurgere turmas* (*Theb.* 12.13–14). Pollmann considers that the fact that the Thebans remain terrified even once the danger has disappeared proves their ‘irrational condition’.<sup>73</sup> Contrary to Pollmann, I believe that the Cadmean citizens, as befits an ‘aetiologically-minded people’,<sup>74</sup> are very conscious of the fateful consequences of Cadmus’ ploughing and thus know that they will always be condemned to suffer the torment, real or psychological, of fearing what the earth produces, whether it be terrible fruits or phantoms.

In light of the discussion above, I am inclined to argue that, as Berlincourt sustains, it is possible that what Tiresias and Manto see during the *nekyomanteia* (*Theb.* 4.434–42) is the ploughing done by the spectre of Cadmus and the phantasmagorical rebirth of the Earthborn. In either case, whether it is Cadmus himself or a subsequent countryman who carries out the agricultural work in this passage, the guilt of Cadmus the farmer and the emphasis on his sacrilegious agricultural work persist.

There is one final passage in which Cadmus’ tillage appears as a symbol of the curse of Thebes in that, once more, it is presented as the foreshadowing of the present war of Eteocles and Polynices. *pietas*, abandoned by men and gods, is pained by her impotence to prevent the imminent fratricidal confrontation between Oedipus’ sons. The fury Tisiphone is puzzled by *Pietas*’ sudden interest and reproaches her for having been absent on all other occasions when the Theban family was guilty (*Theb.* 11.487–92):

... ubi tunc, cum bella cieret  
Bacchus et armatas furiarent orgia matres?  
aut ubi segnis eras, dum Martius impia serpens  
stagna bibit, dum Cadmus arat, dum uicta cadit Sphinx,  
dum rogat Oedipoden genitor, dum lampade nostra  
in thalamos Iocasta uenit?

Tisiphone’s enumeration of the impious deeds perpetrated by the Theban family does not respect the chronology of events here. The oldest of these are, logically, the death of Ares’ serpent (v. 489) and Cadmus’ agricultural work which, in straightforward language, is described as tillage: *Cadmus arat* (v. 490).

## CONCLUSION

Contrary to what I argue in this paper, Ripoll holds that it is not appropriate to overestimate the guilt of Cadmus the farmer in the *Thebaid*.<sup>75</sup> Undoubtedly, Cadmus’ agricultural work and its consequences, the fratricidal battle of the Earthborn warriors, are not the only events remote in time that serve as a means of developing the tragic notions of the returning past and of a hereditary curse in the composition. Apart from the crimes of

<sup>73</sup> K.F.L. Pollmann, *Statius: Thebaid 12. Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (Paderborn, 2004), 96.

<sup>74</sup> See above, page 219.

<sup>75</sup> F. Ripoll, ‘De Thersite à Tacite: le contestataire anonyme du chant 1 de la *Thébaïde* de Stace’, *Vita Latina* 160 (2000), 45–57, at 49.

the Theban house that Jupiter considers worthy of punishment (1.227–43),<sup>76</sup> Harmonia's ill-fated necklace, for example, is set in relation to her own metamorphosis, to the death of Semele and to the incestuous marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta (*Theb.* 2.289–95).<sup>77</sup> Equally, the *Martius anguis* killed by Cadmus (the verbal coincidence with Ov. *Met.* 3.32 cannot be unintended) claims Menoeceus as a scapegoat (*Theb.* 10.612–14),<sup>78</sup> because he is the last Earthborn, the last descendant (10.806–7) of the warlike *gens Martia* (*Theb.* 4.556).

Nevertheless, it is undeniably the case that the passages of the *Thebaid* analysed above show that, firstly, Cadmus' guilt is a Statian innovation and, secondly, that wherever agricultural motifs appear in relation to members of the house of Thebes, such motifs (ploughing, seeds, bulls and yokes) have negative connotations 'because of their association with Cadmus and the *Spartoi*'.<sup>79</sup> The ploughing work of Cadmus is explicitly characterized as the primeval omen that foreshadows the future evils of the Theban house<sup>80</sup> and, more specifically, of the fratricidal war between Eteocles and Polynices. As I have noted, Statian Cadmus usurps the personality of Jason and, like the Ovidian Cadmus, plows the land, although, in contrast to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it is Cadmus, through this act of ploughing and sowing, who is guilty of 'founding' (*agricolam ... condentem*, 1.8) the curse of Thebes. Ovid is in fact the first author to establish an equivalence between the civil implications of the combat of the Colchian Sown Men and that of the Theban Earthborn: the fight of the Earthborn people sown by Jason (*Ep.* 6.35, 12.99–100 and *Met.* 7.141–2) is as civil and fratricidal as that of the Theban *Spartoi* (*Met.* 3.117 and 123). However, Statius, in making the most of the prototypical motif of the ghastly farmland, achieves a broader articulation of the likeness of the two mythic places (Thebes and Colchis) than Ovid had done.<sup>81</sup> As has long been recognized in the scholarly literature, Lucan had already gone further than Ovid, and, in addition to equating the two myths, considers the mythic struggles

<sup>76</sup> See above, pages 212–13.

<sup>77</sup> Davis (n. 33), 468.

<sup>78</sup> As also occurs in the Greek prototype, Eur. *Phoen.* 931–41. Whereas the interpretations of the founding myth of Thebes in Greek mythographic and literary material offered by J. Fontenrose, *Pytho: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959) and Vian (n. 25) are radically different, and led to a heated exchange between the two scholars (see J. Fontenrose, review of F. Vian, *Les origines de Thèbes: Cadmos et les Spartes* [Paris 1963], *CPh* 61 [1966], 189–92), they do agree on the role of Menoeceus as the scapegoat in Euripides; see Fontenrose (this note [1959], 61 and 316–18), Vian (n. 25), 208–10 and Bernstein (n. 22 [2008]), 174. His status as a scapegoat in the *Thebaid* is not denied by Heinrich (n. 54), 175–88, but Heinrich does, after a detailed analysis of the passage, shed light on the digressive nature of the episode of the sacrifice of Menoeceus in Statius' composition, which is not alluded to again and which does not seem to have any consequences for the salvation of Thebes.

<sup>79</sup> Joyce (n. 15), 450–1.

<sup>80</sup> To my knowledge, there is just one exception here. In Book 8 of *Thebaid*, the Theban people celebrate their victory in the battle that took place that day. They exultantly sing holy paeans to the glory of the feats of their ancestors and in praise of Cadmus' fields, pregnant with bloody war (*fetosque cruenti | Martis agros*, 8.231–2). Such optimism regarding the fateful history of Thebes has reminiscences of Pindar (*Ol.* 2.35–45, *Pyth.* 3.85–99, *Isthm.* 7.1–3, 10 and fr. 29). In fact, Pindar depicts the past of the house of Labdacus in terms of a harmonious and even healthy succession of fortunes and misfortunes. Such an optimistic perspective allows him to establish a direct filiation between Oedipus and the present-day ruler, Theron. Yet, as R. Gagné, *Ancestral Fault in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 2013), 361 notes, Pindar's depiction 'would be unlikely after the production and circulation of Aeschylus' masterpiece made the ancestral fault of Laius a dominant characteristic of that kinship line'.

<sup>81</sup> See above pages 214–15.

of the Colchian Sown Men and of the Theban ones to be equally apt as a means of explicitly establishing the analogy between myth and history, between mythic struggles and Roman historical fratricidal and civil wars.<sup>82</sup>

In reality, Lucan transfers Thebes and the tragic myths associated with the city from Boeotia to Thessaly,<sup>83</sup> the scene of the historic battle of Pharsalia but also the homeland of the other mythic cultivator of struggles, Jason. We might say, then, that Lucan's Thessaly is a landscape that has usurped Thebes as the prototypical site of fratricidal and civil war,<sup>84</sup> while, with the poet's emphasis on the dire fruits that will emerge from the earth, Thessaly acquires a strong Colchian flavour. Statius, for his part, restores to Thebes its inveterate nature as a cursed city but strengthens its curse by establishing the Cadmean farmlands (which Seneca's Oedipus still dared to describe as *Boeotios* | ... *agros uberis* ... *soli*, *Phoen.* 129–30) as a counterpart to the dire Thessalian-Colchian fields of Lucan.<sup>85</sup> Statius, by offering in his narrative a sinister undertone to the foundational act of a city and a systematic demystification of the civilizing role traditionally attributed to the agricultural labour, seems to suggest that Thebes is as appropriate an exemplar and setting to evoke the Roman civil wars as Lucan's Pharsalia and Philippi.

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<sup>82</sup> Already years ago, P. Venini, 'Echi senecani e lucanei nella *Tebaide*: tiranni e tirannidi', *RIL* 99 (1965), 149–67, at 157–67 and Ahl (n. 59), 2812 called attention to the fact that Lucan compares the mutual suicide which Vulteius' Roman soldiers carry out with the crime of the Theban *Spartoi* (*sic semine Cadmi*, | *emicuit Dircaea cohors ceciditque suorum* | *uolneribus*, 4.549–51) and also with that of the Colchian ones, whose battle is as fratricidal (*cognato* ... *sanguine*, 4.554) as that of Caesar and Pompeius (*cognatasque acies*, 1.4). See also Criado (n. 55), 146–9.

<sup>83</sup> A. Ambühl, 'Thessaly as an intertextual landscape of civil war in latin poetry', in J. McInerney and I. Sluiter (edd.), *Valuing Landscape in Classical Antiquity. Natural Environment and Cultural Imagination* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), 297–322, at 306.

<sup>84</sup> Criado (n. 55), 148–9. For Lucan's use of the fraternal struggles of the Theban house, see, among others, P. Esposito, *La narrazione inverosimile. Aspetti dell'epica ovidiana* (Naples, 1994), 121–4, S. Wheeler, 'Lucan's reception of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', *Arethusa* 35 (2002), 361–80, at 376–7 and A. Ambühl, *Krieg und Bürgerkrieg bei Lucan und in der griechischen Literatur* (Berlin, 2015), 99–112.

<sup>85</sup> See above pages 214–15.