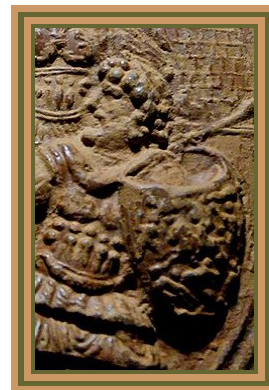


Virgil Extracts 4

*“bellum etiam pro caede boum stratisque iuven-
cis,
Laomedontiadae, bellumne inferre paratis
et patrio Harpyias insontis pellere regno?
accipite ergo animis atque haec mea figite dicta,
quae Phoebus pater omnipotens, mihi Phoebus Apollo
praedixit, vobis Furiarum ego maxima pando.
Italiam cursu petitis ventisque vocatis:
ibitis Italiam portusque intrare licebit.
sed non ante datam cingetis moenibus urbem
quam vos dira fames nostraeque iniuria caedis
ambesas subigat malis absumere mensas.”
dixit, et in silvam pennis ablata refugit.*



Celaeno, the chief Harpy, gives Aeneas and his followers a talking to. Before we even try to work out what she is saying, let's consider how she says it. I don't know if it is my imagination but I can't help wondering if Virgil puts at least one ...is in almost every line so that we can hear her hissing! Today we will translate her speech. In the second line, she addresses them as *Laomedontiadae* “[sons] of Laomedon”.¹ She hurls this name at them as a term of reproach. She is hinting that they are cheats who insult the gods like their ancestor, Laomedon. Laomedon was the king in whose reign the walls of Troy were built. The gods, Apollo and Neptune had angered Jupiter and so he sent them to serve Laomedon. Laomedon set them to work building the walls, and offered them a reward if they completed them. When the walls were finished, however, Laomedon went back on his word and would not give them anything.

*bellum etiam pro caede boum stratisque iuven-
cis,*

Laomedontiadae, bellumne inferre paratis

et patrio Harpyias insontis pellere regno?

Begin with the second line. Notice the ...ne: this a question. *Parare* is on the syllabus vocabulary list. Follow it with the infinitive *inferre* and use it again for the infinitive *pellere* “to banish” in the next line when you come to it.

*Stratis iuven-
cis* literally “struck down (i.e. slaughtered) cows”.

Insons “harmless”. This goes with *Harpyias* (!) *regno* goes with *patrio*. Both these words are on the syllabus vocabulary list.

Have a go and then look at my attempt.

¹The illustration shows the face of Laomedon from a flask from Southern Gaul dated to the late 1st century to early 2nd century AD now held in the Civic Archaeological Museum of Valle Sabbia in Gavardo (Brescia).

Sons of Laomedon, are you preparing to bring war, war even for killed bullocks and slaughtered cows and to banish the harmless Harpies from their father's kingdom?

(As it was an island it would belong to the domain of the Harpies' father, Oceanus.)

Harpyias insontis

et patrio pellere regno

Do you recognise the rhetorical structure of this line?²

accipite ergo animis atque haec mea figite dicta,

The verbs here are imperatives, commands. *Accipere* is on the syllabus vocabulary list. *Figite animis* is “lay to heart”. What should they lay to heart etc.? *Haec mea dicta*.

quae Phoebus pater omnipotens, mihi Phoebus Apollo praedixit,

Quae refers back to *haec mea dicta*. *pater omnipotens* is Jupiter – and the subject of *praedixit*.

There is a chain of prophecies going on here:

quae pater omnipotens praedixit, Phoebus, Phoebus Apollo praedixit mihi, and then in the next line *ego (Furiaeum maxima) pando vobis*. (*Phoebus* and *Phoebus Apollo* are the same god)

vobis Furiarum ego maxima pando.

Pandere “unfold”

See if you can do this and then look at my attempt.

2 Chiasmus to stress Celaeno's claim.

Therefore receive and take to heart these my words, which the Almighty Father predicted to Phoebus, Phoebus Apollos predicted to me and I, oldest of the furies, unfold to you.

(Phoebus means bright and it is used of Apollo because of his connection with the sun. The furies and the Harpies are not usually considered to be the same creatures but both are goddesses of vengeance. Celaeno is being rather unjust. Shipwrecked Aeneas and his men are starving. It would be considered that the Harpies owed them the duty of hospitality under the circumstances.)

So... what is the prophecy? There are two sentences. We will tackle them one by one.

Italiam cursu petitis ventisque vocatis: (a truly hissing line!)

Both the verbs are on the syllabus vocabulary list, as is *ventus*. *Cursus* “passage” in the sense of a sea voyage.

ibitis Italiam

Ibitis is second person plural future active of *eo*³

portusque intrare licebit [vobis].

After the main verb (which is on the syllabus vocabulary list) translate the infinitive *intrare* which is also on the list.

Translate and then check with my attempt over the page.

3, i.e. “you will go”

You seek a passage to Italy and call the winds: You will go to Italy and you will be allowed to enter the port.

(Sounds good so far but there is a sting in the tail coming up...)

sed non ante datam cingetis moenibus urbem quam

Datam “given/destined” goes with *urbem*. Reserve *ante* to go with *quam* on the next line to make *antequam* “before”. *Cingere* “to surround”. *Moenia* “city walls” or “fortifications”

vos dira fames nostraeque iniuria caedis

fames “hunger” *nostrae iniuria caedis* literally “the wrong of our slaughter” that is “the wrong done in attacking us”.

ambesas subigat malis absumere mensas.

Subigere literally “to subjugate” i.e. “to force” *ambesas absumere* translate “to gnaw and devour” *mala* “jaw”.

Try this! It is hard because it is not what you might expect...

You will not surround the destined city with fortifications before your dire hunger and the wrong done in attacking us forces you to gnaw and devour [even] your [very] tables with your jaws.

(Not a nice prophecy! However, if we fast forward to its fulfilment in Book 7 of the Aeneid it is not as bad as it sounds. When the companions land in Italy they “spread wheaten cakes under their meats.” They were short of food so when everything else was gone they began to eat the cakes also. Aeneas's son, Iulus, laughingly called out “we are eating our tables too,” and his father at once recognized the fulfilment of the Harpy's prophecy.)

dixit, et in silvam pennis ablata refugit.

Dixit at the end of a speech like this always means something along the lines of “so saying...” or “thus she spake” or even “with that...”. You can guess the other verb because you know *fugere* and also the English nouns “refuge” and “refugee”. *Ablata* “carried away”.

Try it. Then check over the page.

And so saying she fled to the forest, carried away on her wings.

(Aeneas and his friends take these sorts of things very seriously. You and I might laugh at such stuff but they have been brought up to believe talking bird-maidens. How will they react? Find out in the next lesson!)