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DRAFT - Waltharius commentary, lines 123-255

Elige de satrapis nuptam tibi Pannoniarum

Et non pauperiem propriam perpendere cures.

136. Satrap has a decidedly negative and foreign connotation in the Vulgate Bible, where it refers to leaders of the Philistines (Judges, I Kings), leaders appointed by Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel), and leaders following the evil Haman (Esther).

Amplificabo quidem valde te rure domique,

Nec quisquam, qui dat sponsam, post facta pudebit.»

139. [It seems there should be some precedent for this method of securing allegiance, but I am still looking.]

Nil tam dulce mihi, quam semper inesse fideli

Obsequio domini; quare, precor, absque iugali

Me vinclo permitte meam iam ducere vitam!

158-159. This is a particularly acute manifestation of the Germanic warrior ethos – love for the lord above all else. However, since the audience knows Walther is promised to Hildegund, and we will soon see them plotting together, it has the ring of irony.

159-160. The language here echoes *Aeneid* 4.16, which reads, “ne cui me vinclo vellem sociare iugali....” Dido says this to her sister Anna, talking about

how she might fall for Aeneas if only she had not decided to avoid “nuptial chains.” Dido goes on to fall for Aeneas, just as Walther, despite what he says, will go on to marry Hildegund. The other parallel, which will return later in the poem, is between Attila and Dido, who are the ones the hero leaves behind.

Testor per propriam temet, pater optime, vitam
Atque per invictam nunc gentem Pannoniarum,
Ut non ulterius me cogas sumere taedas.

165. It is strange that Walther refers to Attila as his father here. This phrase (*pater optime*) also appears in *Aeneid* 1.555, where it seems to refer to Jupiter. This may be an instance of religious language here as well, with Walther calling upon his heavenly Father.

Ac primus frontem festa cum fronde revinxit,
Victrici lauro cingens sua tempora vulgo, 210
Post hunc signiferi, sequitur quos cetera pubes.

209-211. The laurels mentioned here are likely a Classical reference, rather than a literal reward. The bay laurel, from which laurel wreaths are typically made, is a Mediterranean plant, and it would have a hard time surviving in most of modern-day Germany. Even then, the plant (or its leaves) would have had to be imported. Since it is unlikely that the laurels would have been practical, this is likely just another example of the Waltharius poet drawing on Classical tropes.

Iamque triumphali redierunt stemmate compti
Et patriam ingressi propria se quisque locavit

Sede, sed ad solium mox Waltharius properavit.

213-214. In his *Germania*, Tacitus wrote that Germanic towns and dwellings were famously spread out (Chapter 16). Of course, Walther and these soldiers supposedly live three centuries later, and the soldiers are Huns, not Germans, but the way the men scatter here seems reminiscent of that passage. If so, this is an example of the poet giving characteristically German traits to Attila and his people.

Illa mero tallum complevit mox pretiosum

Porrexitque viro, qui signans accipiebat

Virgineamque manum propria constrinxit. at illa

Astitit et vultum reticens intendit herilem,

224. The trope of a woman offering drink or other reward for military service to the hero is common to both Classical and Germanic traditions. In *Aeneid* 1.729, Dido offers Aeneas wine. The word used there is *implevit*, which is echoed in the *Waltharius* by *complevit*. This theme is also present in the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*. After killing Grendel, Beowulf receives a necklace and a byrnie from Wealtheow, Hrothgar's wife (l. 1215-1220). Before the contest with Grendel, Wealtheow offers Beowulf drink (l. 623-625), on his homecoming, Queen Hygd, the wife of Hygelac, also distributes mead (l. 1980-1983), and Beowulf also talks of Freawaru, Hrothgar's daughter, distributing mead. Coincidentally, Freawaru marries Ingeld, of whom Alcuin wrote to a bishop named Speratus, scolding him for listening to songs and stories of pagan heroes, writing "What has Ingeld to do with Christ?" [I am not sure what to make of the reference on the wiki to 2 Maccabees. It doesn't seem to connect either in

language or in content.]

225. It seems that *signans* must be translated as Kratz does: "...gave it to the man, who, as he took it, crossed / himself, and pressed the maiden's hand with his...." This translation is overtly Christian, but it is difficult to make sense of the passage otherwise. Additionally, Du Cange gives this definition as the first one and traces back to Tertullian, so it would likely have carried that connotation to a ninth or tenth century author or audience, especially if it were monastic.

226. [I wonder if the last two words of this line (*at illa*) are intended as a pun on Attila's name. It seems unlikely, since they are such common words, and since they also appear later in the poem once Attila is gone (l. 673).]

Walthariusque bibens vacuum vas porrigit olli

(Ambo etenim norant de se sponsalia facta)

229. This is one of the few hints given to the chronology of the first part of the poem. We know that when the hostages were taken, Gunther was too young to leave his mother, and we know that the three children are essentially adults by the time they leave (Hildegund is old enough to serve as quartermistress, and the boys have become warriors), and here we learn that Hildegund and Walther were both old enough when they were taken that they remember they are betrothed.

Provocat et tali caram sermone puellam:

«Exilium pariter patimur nam tempore tanto,

231. The theme of exile is another that is common to both Classical and Germanic poems. In Anglo-Saxon, the elegies *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Wife's Lament* each recount sad stories of exile. In the *Aeneid*, the phrase *exsilium pati* appears, describing what Aeneas's father will not do (l. 2.638). Additionally, as Walther and Hildegund go into exile for the sake of their earthly fathers, and Hagen does so for the sake of his earthly lord, religious figures of their period underwent exile or wandering for the sake of God.

Virgo per hyroniam meditans hoc dicere sponsum

Paulum conticuit, sed postea talia reddit:

«Quid lingua simulas, quod ab imo pectore damnas,

Oreque persuades, toto quod corde refutas,

Sit veluti talem pudor ingens ducere nuptam?»

235-239. This passage, particularly the word *hyronium* in line 235, is at the heart of many scholars' arguments about irony in the poem. It is clear from this passage that the poet understands the phenomenon of irony, and that he uses it for humorous effect, at least in this instance. However, it is not clear from this passage whether the poet meant anything more than entertainment, let alone the Christian conversion message which Parkes argues the irony encodes ("Irony in *Waltharius*"). This passage is funny because the betrothed misunderstand each other, not because the poet somehow subverts pagan values. Indeed, Walther is not even being ironic. It is only that Hildegund thinks he is.