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Virgil, *Aeneid* VII. 695–6

D. A. Slater

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names have been traditionally connected with this poem. But Jewish ideas of a reign of peace and splendour, of a mysterious prince and saviour who should re-organize

the earth, colour every word—ideas derived, through Pollio, from ‘Pollio the Pharisee’ or Herod the Great, or both.

H. W. GARROD.

VIRGIL, *AENEID* VII. 695–6.

Hi Fescenninas *acies* aequosque Faliscos,
Hi Soractis habent arces Flauiniaque arua.

THE zeugma involved in the accepted version of these two lines is so harsh that critics tend either to regard the word *acies* as corrupt or to argue that the passage is one of those which would have been recast, had Virgil lived to revise the *Aeneid* for publication.

If the reading *acies* were condemned, the conjecture ‘Hi Fescenninos<s>altus’ might claim consideration, but it is ill meddling with fourth century MSS., and besides, is it quite certain that the traditional interpretation is sound?

In the first place *Faliscos* may quite possibly be the name not of the people but of the city, employed here as in Ovid (*Am.* iii. 13.1), because the more usual form *Falerii* is not suited to a dactylic metre. Then the epithet *aequos*, as Müller pointed out long since, may mean the city ‘in the plain.’ Virgil is thinking of the Roman, not the Etruscan, town—the modern Falleri, which¹ Dennis describes as standing ‘on the very level of the plain by which you approach it.’

The town of Fescennium (or Fescennia) was situated somewhere in the ager Faliscus. Its exact position is now unknown. Two sites have however been suggested—Civita Castellana and San Silvestro—and with regard to these one point is noteworthy. Each occupies a fairly lofty plateau surrounded or bounded by some of those deep and abrupt ravines,² which are the most striking feature of the ager Faliscus.

Now I submit that the word *acies*, which sprang from the same root and developed on the same lines as our own word *edge*, was used locally to describe these ‘sheer rock walls,’ the escarpments terminating the plateau on which Fescennium stood. Virgil was an enthusiastic antiquary, and in a

passage full of old-world terms and legends he has preserved the name which the Fescennines themselves had given to this striking feature of their home. We have then in the two lines a double antithesis between hill and dale, plateau and plain. Translate: ‘These are they of the Fescennine Edges and these the people of Falisci in the plain: these the hillmen of Soracte, and these the tillers of the Flavianian levels.’

No precise parallel for such a use of *acies* is given in the new Thesaurus, although the cognate word *acumen* is twice used by Ovid (*Met.* xii. 337 and xiii. 778) to mean a mountain-bluff; but names borrowed from the configuration of the country are to be found in all languages.³ A bolder man might argue that in *Aeneid* x. 408⁴ the word has the same force, but I would rather rely on our own analogous use of the word ‘Edge’ to support, as it suggested, my theory. Thus (*e.g.*) Kinver Edge near Stourbridge is ‘almost a precipice on one side, and a very gradual ascent on the other, about 400 feet high,’ not higher that is to say than the site assigned by Dennis to Fescennium.

Soon after Virgil’s time the town fell into ruins, and with the town the name also died. Few indeed are the allusions in our own literature to the many English Edges, and Macaulay’s New Zealander, if he ever arrives, is likely to be as much puzzled by such a couplet as:—

‘Oh tarnish late on Wenlock Edge,
Gold that I never see’;

as are the critics of these two lines with their theory of a harsh zeugma in an unrevised poem.

D. A. SLATER.

Cardiff.

¹ *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, vol. i. p. 101. Servius in his note uses the masculine Falisci to signify the town: ‘Is condidit Faliscos.’

² Dennis, *op. cit.* i. 121.

³ Cf. Isaac Taylor, *Words and Places*, p. 492, § vii.: and *Aeneid* i. 109 saxa uocant Itali mediis quae in fluctibus Aras.

⁴ extenditur una Horrida per latos acies Volcania campos, A jagged edge (or precipice) of flame stretches across the broad plains?