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LOWERING ONE'S STANDARDS—ON STATIUS, *SILVAE* 4.2.43

Statius' *Silvae* 4.2 describes a banquet, hosted by the emperor Domitian and attended by the poet Statius. The divine majesty of the emperor is plain to see. However, one strand of thought in Statius' description of the emperor is intriguing: the use, perhaps surprising, of military language in the description of the emperor in a private space and a social context. The description is created from imagery that is militaristic, triumphalistic, and an overt display of imperial power and authority. The language used is not only jarring in this social context but also in itself unusual. In particular, the phrase *summittentemque modeste fortunae vexilla suae* will be analysed in this article as something that requires careful decoding if it is to be understood properly.

Domitian's banquet is presented as a religious event (*sacrae*, 4.2.5; cf. *sacratissimis*, *Silv.* 4 *praef.* 6) and Statius imagines himself as though he were reclining in the heavens with Jupiter (*mediis videor discumbere in astris / cum Iove*, 4.2.10–11). The setting of the feast is Domitian's vast palace (18–31)[1] and the feast itself is both monumental (*mille … mensis*, 33) and portrayed as a divine feast with Ceres and Bacchus as the serving staff (34–7). Domitian's palace rivals the neighbouring temple of Jupiter Tonans which is itself amazed at the scale of the adjacent building (21–2). The palace acts as a quasi-temple of Domitian, who, god-like, weighs it down with his divine presence (*ille penates / implet et ingenti genio gravat*, 25–6). Statius' address to Domitian evokes hymnic utterances (*tene … te … te*, 14–15)[2] and *iacens* (16) might suggest a position of subjection before a god.[3] In the preface to Book 4, Statius refers to his emperor's *numen* (*invocato numine*, 4 *praef.* 2). Statius also makes a more direct comparison between Domitian and Jupiter (53–6). Statius observes Domitian as though he were a statue in a temple (*cerno … tueri*, 16), and Newlands sees Statius portraying Domitian as a god very much in a literal sense: 'immobile, inscrutable, the emperor is, in a sense, the culminating point of the palace's architecture'.[4] But Domitian's portrayal as a divine force contains one further twist: this is a god at whom it is permitted to gaze (*datur haec iuxta, datur ora tueri … / et non assurgere fas est?*, 16–17).[5] Statius is now able to admire the divine majesty of the emperor from close at hand, just as the ghost of Marcus Curtius was in the opening poem of the entire

[1] The scale and especially the height of Domitian's palace was remarkable, see P. Zanker, 'Domitian's palace on the Palatine and the imperial image,' in A. K. Bowman, H. M. Cotton, M. Goodman and S. Price (edd.), *Representations of Empire: Rome and the Mediterranean World* (Oxford, 2002), esp. 111–14, 117–19.

[2] On the repetition of *tu* and *te* in hymnic address, in general, see J. Wills, *Repetition in Latin Poetry* (Oxford, 1996), 361–2. For Statius addressing Domitian in this manner see *Silv.* 1.1.79–80; 4.3.82–3; *Theb.* 1.22–31; *Ach.* 1.14–19. See also K. M. Coleman (ed.), *Statius Silvae IV* (Oxford, 1988), ad 4.2.14–15.

[3] As C. Newlands, *Statius' Silvae and the Poetics of Empire* (Cambridge, 2002), 272 notes with reference to *TLL* 7.10.64–11.

[4] Newlands (n. 3), 273. For her discussion of this poem, on which these opening remarks rely, see 260–83. See also K. Vössing, *Mensa Regia* (Munich–Leipzig, 2004), 312–14.

[5] Cf. e.g. Julius Proculus encountering the deified Romulus, *petens precibus ut contra intueri fas esset?* at Livy 1.16.1. More on *datur ora tueri* follows below, p. 199. Cf. Zanker (n. 1), 114.

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collection (*cum te prope nosse tuumque / immortale iubar vicina sede tueri / concessum*, *Silv.* 1.1.76–8). The repetition of *ipsum* at line 40 picks up the hymnic anaphora of *te* in lines 14–15 and the double pronoun in the accusative with *spectare* emphasizes very strongly that this event is all about *looking* at the emperor.[6] Indeed, this is a poem in which appearances matter, and especially one in which the carefully crafted (one might almost say stage-managed) appearance of the emperor is interpreted by Statius.[7] The poet describes the emperor who holds his gaze:

> sed mihi non epulas Indisque innixa columnis
> robora Maurorum famulasque ex ordine turmas,
> ipsum, ipsum cupido tantum spectare vacavit,
> tranquillum vultus et maiestate serena
> mulcentem radios summittentemque modeste
> fortunae vexilla suae; tamen ore nitebat
> dissimulatus honos. Talem quoque barbarus hostis
> posset et ignotae conspectum agnoscere gentes. (*Silvae* 4.2.38–45)

Domitian is an unusual 'god' in that Statius is allowed to look at him in the flesh. It is the poet's scrutiny that reveals Domitian's divine majesty. Indeed, *radios* (42) and *nitebat* (43) reflect a face that literally shines forth majesty.[8] Domitian's full, complex and awe-inspiring authority lights up the room despite the emperor's attempts to conceal his nature (*mulcentem*, 42 and *dissimulatus*, 44). Coleman's commentary on Book 4 concurs: 'Domitian is a model of repose and dignity'.[9] After this passage, Domitian is compared directly with a series of deities: Mars, Pollux, Bacchus, Hercules and Jupiter (46–56).[10] The image is of an emperor who closely resembles Jupiter in his role as god of the heavens and the weather, or Apollo as god of the Sun. As Newlands states: 'Domitian is represented here refulgently, as if he were the Sun god shining from behind the clouds.'[11] Presumably, were we not allowed to gaze at him, we would not become aware of Domitian's true nature.

Despite the emperor's apparently relaxed demeanour, he would be recognizable to a barbarian enemy and even unknown races (44–5). Military language might already be apparent in the description of the ordered squadrons of servants (*famulasque ex ordine turmas*, 39).[12] The word *vexilla* (43) is striking outside its normal, military context and the 'splendour' that Domitian attempts to hide (*dissimulatus honos*, 44) may be military honour. Such a description reworks ideas already present in the

[6] In general on the repetition of the pronoun, see Wills (n. 2), 76–9. The repetition may also be linked to the omnipresence of a commander in the topos of the ideal general, see Sall. *Iug.* 100.4, *ipse armatus intentusque … vigilias ipse circumire* and Tac. *Ann.* 4.24.3, *ipse consultor aderat omnibus* with R. H. Martin and A. J. Woodman (edd.), *Tacitus Annals Book IV* (Cambridge, 1989), ad loc. For the beneficial presence of Augustus, see Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.15; Vell. Pat. 2.92.2.

[7] As well as the series *cerno … tueri … spectare* (16, 40) punctuated by a visual description of the palace (18–37) we might take *videor* (10) as a straight passive, 'I am seen', with the simile comparing Statius to Apollo singing for Jupiter (56). Thus the visual aspect of the poem broadens to include poet and honorand. Such a reading would be possible whether we believe the poem to be performed at the banquet or not (on this, see Coleman [n. 2], 83–4).

[8] The ideal ruler looking with benevolence upon his people may be described in similar terms, e.g. Hor. *Carm.* 4.5.6–7, *vultus ubi tuus / adfulsit populo*. Lightning imagery is combined with sense of presence by Velleius in his description of Caesar as an ideal general, *ipsius adventus vigore ac fulgore occupatus*, 2.50.4.

[9] Coleman (n. 2), ad 2.41.

[10] Mars and Jupiter are especially suggestive choices and will be discussed further, pp. 204–6.

[11] Newlands (n. 3), 274.

[12] The combination of *turma* and *famula* is unique.

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portrayal by Statius of Domitian's giant equestrian statue (*Silv.* 1.1.15–16, *ora mixta notis*) that suggests both peace and war.[13] But while the context in which military imagery is used and the way in which Statius uses the language is unusual, his desire to incorporate military imagery into this description is less surprising. Domitian did, after all, value his military reputation very highly indeed. The name *Germanicus* (cf. *Germanice*, 52) that Statius uses in this poem for Domitian was earned in his campaign against the Chatti and first used by Domitian in the summer of A.D. 83.[14] The *vexilla* might echo the *Itala signa* that the poet promises to sing of at *Thebaid* 1.17–18. Statius concludes this poem with a reminiscence of his success at the Alban games when he sang of Domitian's Dacian and German conquests (65–7).

Yet surely most extraordinary in this description of the emperor is the phrase *summittentemque modeste / fortunae vexilla suae* (42–3).[15] The literal meaning of these words is clear: Domitian lowers his *vexilla*[16] modestly.[17] The imagery seems to promote the resonance of Domitian's imperial power, especially in the qualifying genitive *suae fortunae*,[18] and, as will be suggested below, Domitian appears to be presented in a specifically triumphal context. The manner of describing Domitian's 'pre-eminence' is eloquently suggestive of imperial power.[19] Yet the exact meaning of the metaphor, or rather the image it is intended to evoke remains unclear. This is apparently a unique usage of *vexillum*,[20] and the combination of *vexillum* with *summittere* is certainly unique. Coleman explains this as 'a calque on *summittere fasces*, the term for dipping the insignia of office as a mark of respect either towards the *populus Romanus* (see Ogilvie [n. 21], on Livy, 2.7.8) or from a lesser magistrate to his superior (cf. Plin. *HN* 7.112)'.[21] Some clarification is required. This phrase is normally used for the dipping of *fasces* before the people, a ceremony whose origins Livy explains at 2.7.7 (cf. Val. Max. 4.1.1; Plut. *Publ.* 10), or may be used figuratively before a superior power as a compliment (Cic. *Brut.* 6.22 and Plin. *HN* 7.112).[22]

[13] See J. W. Geyssen, *Imperial Panegyric in Statius—A Literary Commentary on Silvae 1.1.* (New York, 1996).

[14] B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London–New York, 1992), 129; M. Griffin, 'The Flavians', in *CAH*[2] (Cambridge, 2000), 11.1–84, at 63.

[15] Comparing translations of the Latin is instructive. Coleman (n. 2), renders this as 'and modestly dipping the standards of his eminence', Newlands (n. 3), 273, as 'and lowering gently the standards of his pre-eminence', while D. R. Shackleton-Bailey (ed.), *Statius Silvae* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), has 'modestly lowering the banner of his fortune'. But none of these perfectly accurate translations gives a great deal of help in understanding the meaning of the phrase.

[16] 'Its [a *vexillum*] appearance was that of an ordinary flag, square or rectangular in shape, sometimes with a fringe along the bottom, and slung from a horizontal cross-bar attached to a shaft.' V. A Maxfield, *The Military Decorations of the Roman Army* (London, 1981), 82.

[17] Modesty became a buzzword in the literary representations of Domitian. Cf. Mart. 6.10, 8.1, 9.5; Stat. *Silv.* 4.1.9–10; Suet. *Dom.* 2.2, 18.1–2; Tac. *Hist.* 4.40.1. Lowering standards might suggest surrender, but *modeste* seems to counteract that interpretation neatly.

[18] It is striking that the exact phrase *suae fortunae* in this sense of imperial power is not used elsewhere in poetry, but is combined here with the unpoetic *vexilla*, see n. 45.

[19] Cf. e.g. Livy 9.17.16, 42.50.6, 45.4.6; Vell. Pat. 2.41.2; Sen. *Ep.* 47.20; Tac. *Hist.* 3.68; *Ann.* 15.52.

[20] *OLD* s.v. *vexillum* 1a lists the figurative use at *Silvae* 4.2.43 separately.

[21] Coleman (n. 2), ad 2.42–3. Her reference is to R. M. Ogilvie (ed.), *A Commentary on Livy Books 1–5* (Oxford, 1965), on Livy 2.7.7 *[consul] vocato ad concilium populo submissis fascibus in contionem escendit*.

[22] The phrase *fascisque summitteret* at Cic. *Brut.* 6.22 is clearly metaphorical, but the passage at Plin. *HN* 7.112, *Pompeius confecto Mithridatico bello intraturus Posidonii sapientiae professione clari domum forem percuti de more a lictore vetuit et fasces litterarum ianuae summisit is cui se oriens occidensque summiserat*, implies that Pompey literally lowered his *fasces* before Posidonius' door.

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Velleius shows senators of the highest rank lowering their *fasces* before the *maiestas* of Tiberius, even though he was a private citizen (Vell. Pat. 2.99.4).

Yet the way in which the term *summittere fasces* is used differs from the way in which Statius uses *summittere vexilla*. The party (usually the consul) who lowers his *fasces* before the people is acknowledging their superiority and authority over him. The same is true in the figurative uses in Cicero (old age causes Cicero to give way to young blood, metaphorically lowering his *fasces* before their growing authority) and Pliny (where Pompey acknowledges the authority of the philosopher). Moreover, if Plutarch is to be believed, the ceremony of lowering *fasces* was still taking place under Domitian's rule,[23] and we must assume that the seventeen-times consul would have been intimately aware of this ceremony. The connection with the consulship becomes more significant when one considers the possibility that the banquet might even be the *cena aditialis* for Domitian's inauguration as consul in A.D. 95,[24] especially when one considers the strong connections between this poem and the poem that precedes it in this collection, a more formal celebration of Domitian's seventeenth consulship.[25]

Yet Statius confounds the expectations that *summittentem* may have suggested amongst his audience. Domitian lowers *vexilla* not *fasces*, and this has powerful implications for the meaning of this text. Both words are highly specific technical terms, and it seems implausible to me that one could easily conflate the two terms (the way one might, as Statius does in the *Thebaid*, use *vexilla* as a synonym of *signa* in a battle narrative).[26] Domitian should not have a relationship with his fellow diners comparable to the consul's relationship with the Roman people:[27] indeed reading *vexilla* as synonymous with *fasces* would imply a relationship very much the opposite of the one Velleius illustrates between Tiberius and his senators. Rather, Domitian is superior to his fellow diners; Statius may be allowed to look at Domitian, but seemingly only allowed to address him at one remove through the medium of poetry.[28] Moreover, Statius makes clear elsewhere in this poem that the emperor is equal in status and even superior to the gods themselves. Domitian will be compared in turn to Mars, Pollux, Bacchus and Hercules in the lines immediately following (46–51) and to Jupiter throughout (10–17, 20–6, 30–1, 52–6). Explaining away the phrase as equivalent to *summittere fasces* misses some nuances.

It might make sense nonetheless to take *summittentem vexilla* with what surrounds it and assume, as Coleman does, a sense of humility whatever the exact meaning: 'Statius' metaphor is somewhat analogous to the biblical "hide one's light under a bushel" '.[29] This certainly applies to *mulcentem radios* 'softening rays' and *tamen ore nitebat / dissimulatus honos*,'nevertheless the honour he tried to hide shone in his face' where the sense of visible light being hidden unsuccessfully is clearly expressed. However, the central phrase does not follow this pattern. The meteorological

[23] The dating of the *Publicola* is not entirely straightforward, but the reference to Domitian's temple building at *Publ.* 15 suggests a date in the 80s A.D.

[24] As Coleman (n. 2), 83 speculates.

[25] See Newlands (n. 3), 265.

[26] Cf. e.g. *Theb.* 7.622.

[27] The architecture of Domitian's dining area also emphasizes his separation from and superiority to his fellow diners, see Zanker (n. 1), 114.

[28] Cf. the simile comparing Statius performing his poem for Domitian to Apollo singing a gigantomachy to Jupiter, 4.2.56. Newlands (n. 3), 272 overplays the remoteness of the emperor slightly. See Coleman (n. 2), 83–4, for arguments concerning the performative context. Vössing (n. 4), 504, thinks it likely the poem was performed during the banquet.

[29] Coleman (n. 2), ad 4.2.42–3.

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vocabulary (*tranquillum, serena, mulcentem, radios, nitebat*) is absent, as is the sense that Domitian is attempting to hide something (*mulcentem, dissimulatus*). Instead we have a plain visual metaphor; he lowers his 'standards' of fortune modestly. The image is still difficult to picture. Yet it might become less difficult to comprehend when one remembers that the Praetorian Guard carried the imperial portrait on their standards and that, while it is not certain that imperial representations would appear on the *signa* of legions or auxiliaries,[30] all such military units may have carried the *imago imperatoris* on a separate pole and units may have inscribed the name of the emperor beneath *vexilla*.[31] Thus the equation that Statius makes between the face of the emperor and a *vexillum* makes sense. Analysis of this language suggests a more precise physical image than a metaphorical one. It might not be as fanciful as Coleman believes that Domitian surrounded himself with real soldiers or some kind of honorific escort.[32]

Moreover, we can establish a significant connection between *vexilla*, the red face of the emperor (*radios, nitebat*) and the triumphs of Jupiter (56) and Domitian (65–7). Pliny's *Natural History* notes the censor's duty to ensure the painting of the face of the statue of Jupiter with red cinnabar before taking it on a triumphal procession (*HN* 33.111–12).[33] As Domitian had made himself censor in perpetuity, he would presumably have been charged with this task during his own triumphal processions. A physiognomic account of the emperor Gordian in terms which describe his red face as a triumphal procession (SHA *Gord.* 6.1, *pompali vultu, ruber magis quam candidus*) surely suggests that the red-faced statue of Jupiter was recognizable into the third century A.D.[34] Martial's description of Domitian returning in triumph is strongly suggestive of the same image (*hic stetit Arctoi formosus pulvere belli / purpureum fundens Caesar ab ore iubar*, 8.65.3–4). Josephus' description of the Flavian triumph following the war in Judaea (*BJ* 7.123–62) notes the purple robes worn by Vespasian and Titus (7.124) and the triumph's culmination at the temple of Capitoline Jupiter (7.153).[35] Moreover, *vexilla* were military *dona* and although in the imperial period

[30] C. Damon (ed.), *Tacitus Histories 1* (Cambridge, 2003), ad 1.41.1: '*Imagines* of emperors were fastened to praetorian standards amidst the unit's insignia and to *vexilla* below the pennant; an *imago* is visible beneath the *vexillum* in scenes 32 and 103 of Trajan's column (see Reinach [1909–12] 1: 342, 366; also 244).' Damon's reference to S. Reinach, *Répertoire de reliefs grecs et romains*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1909–12), is unclear. It seems that she is referring to scene 36 on page 342 and scene 107 on page 366. The evidence may be slightly less clear cut than Damon's note suggests. Both drawings by Reinach of the scenes on the column seem to show circular *imagines* (one must assume of the emperor) under *vexilla*, but Reinach's drawings may make more of the visible evidence on the column than is perhaps warranted. Pictures of the column itself are certainly less clear than the drawings. The image from Reinach (1909), 1.244 is from the Arch of Constantine.

[31] See J. B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army* (Oxford, 1984), 96–9. On the Praetorian practice, cf. esp. Tac. *Hist.* 1.41.1, *Viso comminus armatorum agmine vexillarius comitatae Galbam cohortis (Atilium Vergilionem fuisse tradunt) dereptam Galbae imaginem solo adfixit*; 3.13.1, *simul Vitellii imagines dereptae*; 4.62.2, *revulsae imperatorum imagines.* Cf. also Herodian 2.6.11, 8.5.9. On imperial portraits in army camps, cf. Tac. *Ann.* 1.39. See K. Wellesley (ed.), *Tacitus Histories 3* (Sydney, 1972), ad 3.13.1 for the possibility that the emperor's name was inscribed beneath *vexilla*.

[32] Coleman (n. 2), ad 4.2.42–3.

[33] See also Serv. ad *Verg. Ecl.* 6.22; Isid. *Orig.* 18.2.6; H. S Versnel, *Triumphus* (Leiden, 1970), s.v. 'red colour'.

[34] Llewelyn Morgan presented these connections in a lecture to the Roman Society, 'Domitian's Blush', 2005.

[35] See T. Rajak, *Josephus* (London, 1983) 203–4, 217–22; M. Beard 'The triumph of Flavius Josephus', in A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik (edd.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden, 2003), 543–58, esp. 552–8.

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vexilla were a standard decoration for an officer, Domitian's carrying *vexilla* would surely be appropriate in a triumphal context.[36] As we noted earlier, the use of *vexilla* appears less strongly metaphorical than was suggested at first. *Silvae* 4.2 is surely working with the same complex of triumphal imagery. Domitian has already been described in terms that suggest a statue in a temple, he possesses a shining face (even if he attempts to conceal this) and is likened to Jupiter.

This image is surely an allusion to Domitian's blush.[37] The emperor's facial features and public image were subjects of enormous interest both for contemporary authors and for those writing after Domitian's assassination. Domitian had vast numbers of statues produced (Cass. Dio 67.8.1), including the equestrian statue described by Statius himself (*Silv.* 1.1). These images became the target of senatorial iconoclasm once Domitian had been assassinated (Plin. *Pan.* 52.3–6; Suet. *Dom.* 23).[38] Moreover, Domitian's house on the Palatine opened onto the Circus Maximus, allowing him to be more visible to his people both symbolically and in reality.[139] Domitian as emperor can be characterized both through his role as censor in perpetuity, through which he involved himself in every aspect of life in Rome, and through heavy emphasis on his military achievements.[40] Domitian was therefore an emperor who liked to make himself as visible as possible, in the visual arts, at public events and in the running of the empire. His visual persona combined more than a hint of 'big brother' with a compulsive desire to be seen as a successful soldier like his father and brother. Thus Domitian's red face became the focus of attention for many writers. Ancient interpretations of physiognomy might view a red face as a positive attribute, revealing *pudicitia* (Polemo 38) or a negative expression of inward rage (Sen. *De ira* 1.1.3–4). But blushing was also often seen as something neutral, a natural phenomenon and as such, one that could not be hidden or assumed (Sen. *Ep.* 11.6–7; Philostr. *VA* 7.28).[41] Domitian's red face became a subject that could be activated to demonstrate positive or negative interpretations of the emperor. Martial frequently invokes the imperial image in positive terms, and often in passages that connect Domitian with or compare him to Jupiter (e.g. 4.1, 5.2, 5.6, 5.7, 9.101). For later authors, Domitian's blush is a mark of his dissimulative and tyrannical nature (Plin. *Pan.* 48.4; Tac. *Agr.* 45.2; *Hist.* 4.40; Suet. *Dom.* 18.1–2). Tacitus and Suetonius are all clearly aware that the blush might be interpreted as a mark of modesty. Both acknowledge this possible interpretation only to discount it. In particular, Suetonius' assessment, *simulavit et ipse mire modestiam* (*Dom.* 2.2), indicates that for later authors seeking to denigrate the image

[36] Maxfield (n. 16), 82. See also M. Rostovtzeff, 'Vexillum and victory', *JRS* 32 (1942), 92–106. Cf. Stat. *Theb.* 12.399; Sil. *Pun.* 15.262. In contemporary usages lifting standards (Val. Fl. *Argo.* 6.89, *levant vexilla*; Juv. 2.101, *tolli vexilla iuberet*) happens prior to fighting. Lowering standards presumably means an end to fighting.

[37] This paragraph also owes much to Morgan's lecture, see n. 34.

[38] This excess of statues might lead to other comparisons between Domitian and Jupiter, specifically the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, which was decorated with numerous offerings, many presented by generals after victorious campaigns (cf. Livy 2.22.6, 40.51.3), which occasionally had to be removed to preserve space (in 197 B.C. and by Augustus, cf. Livy 40.51.3; Suet. *Calig.* 34.1).

[39] Mart. 6.34; Zanker (n. 1), 109. Cf. S. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), esp. 148–87.

[40] Griffin (n. 14), esp. 56, 62–5, 79–83.

[41] Cf. also W. C. Hembold, 'The complexion of Domitian', *CJ* 45 (1950), 388–9; B. W. Jones (ed.), *Suetonius Domitian* (London, 1996), ad *Dom.* 18.

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of Domitian, the associated notions of concealment and misinterpretation are crucial in their constructions of Domitian as an emperor who looked like a tyrant.[42]

What is intriguing in *Silvae* 4.2 is that Statius appears to be equally concerned that Domitian's striking facial features may be misinterpreted in a negative manner as dissimulation. Much as Tacitus is careful to correct any possible positive reading of Domitian's blush as modesty, Statius is careful to correct any possible negative reading of it as dissimulation and concealment. The hidden depths of Domitian's facial expression do not hide tyrannical thoughts but his god-like, triumphal nature. Even in this more intimate social context and despite his attempts to conceal this, Domitian looks like a triumphal general. The attempts by Domitian to hide and to soften his own facial expression (*mulcentem, dissimulatus*) fail to hide his modesty and literally triumphal face. Coleman may be right to say that Domitian did not literally surround himself with standards and standard-bearers,[43] but if so, this is because he did not have to. His demeanour and in particular his shining face are enough to suggest unmistakeably a triumphal context.[44]

Furthermore, the striking use of military vocabulary that *vexilla* constitutes is part of a series of military metaphors that have their climax in the simile that follows. *Vexillum* is a very unpoetic word, and is used much more often in prose.[45] The military imagery builds through Statius' striking picture of ranked squadrons of servants (*famulasque ex ordine turmas*, 39), the lowering standards (42–3), the hidden honour, perhaps suggestive of military honours (*honos*, 44). Moreover, the *vexilla* image introduces a further series of quasi-military images which follow the description of Domitian. All are suggestive of military exploits and add to the quintessential military flavour that *vexillum* carries. That Domitian would be recognized by barbarian enemies (*barbarus hostis*, 44 is also somewhat militaristic in tone; it certainly suggests Domitian's military campaigns, cf. 66–7) and foreign races is suggestive of foreign conquest, and so is the simile comparing him to four gods, each of whom rests after completing a military or heroic undertaking. Mars has been fighting, Pollux wrestling, Bacchus at war in India, Hercules completing a labour (46–51). All four are resting after periods of great activity. Moreover, the image of Mars is especially suggestive of a military context. All four images add to the cumulative image of imperial and military power. Hercules' is the traditional example of the world-conqueror[46] and in religious cult was associated with conquering and triumph.[47] Pollux is

[42] See *pro modestia accipiebatur*, Tac. *Hist.* 4.40; *commendari se verecundia oris adeo sentiebat*, Suet. *Dom.* 18.2. Cf. also *precibusque receptis / curia Caesareum gaudet vicisse pudorem*, Stat. *Silv.* 4.1.9–10.

[43] Coleman (n. 2), ad 4.2.42–3.

[44] Mary Beard, both in 'The triumph of the absurd: Roman street theatre', in C. Edwards and G. Woolf (edd.), *Rome the Cosmopolis* (Cambridge, 2003), 21–43, and in her lecture 'the Roman triumph', the Triennial Classics Conference, 2005, casts doubt on the quality of evidence regarding the details of triumphal ceremonies including the painting of the *triumphator*'s face. But it is interesting to note the relative frequency with which the notion of redness is associated specifically with the triumph.

[45] *Vexillum* does not occur anywhere, for example in the works of Catullus, Virgil, Horace, Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid, Lucan or Martial. The word begins to be used in Flavian and later poetry (e.g. twice each in Silius and Valerius Flaccus, three times in Juvenal) Statius uses it relatively frequently: eight times in the *Thebaid* and twice elsewhere in the *Silvae*. The word is quite common in historiography, occurring forty-nine times in the works of Tacitus and seventeen times in Livy. *Vexilla* are rarely attested in the republican period and the earliest convincing reference dates to 107 B.C.

[46] See P. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford, 1986), 173, n. 43 and 383.

[47] There were a number of temples of Hercules Victor and Hercules Invictus at Rome, and the statue of Hercules Triumphalis in the Forum Boarium (probably somewhere along the route of

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seen wrestling at Therapne in the Eurotas valley, from where the Dioscuri were said to keep a guard on Sparta.[48] This image is suggestive of Domitian's role as guardian of the Roman state.[49] Bacchus is seen in a different context from earlier in the poem (34–5) as a conqueror of a far distant land (cf. *ignotae gentes*, 45). He also has been fighting a barbarian and foreign enemy, in Thrace (*Rhodopes*, 46). All three of Hercules, Pollux and Bacchus are also especially appropriate in that, like Domitian, they are born mortal and assume divine status. Moreover, it is clear that Domitian is to be seen as superior to these gods (*parva loquor*, 52). But the sight of Mars in a pose of relaxation is especially unusual and the most powerful image of the four, and this is reinforced by his emphatic first position in the list and the fact that Mars Gradivus was associated with starting war, rather than bringing it to an end.[50] Domitian may be shown displaying a greater control over war than the god of war himself. Furthermore, all of these activities performed by Mars, Pollux, Bacchus and Hercules are characteristic of epic poetry in particular. The cumulative effect of this striking military imagery and the simile comparing Domitian to four deities suggests an emperor relaxing after an intense period of specifically military activity. It is as though the banquet is not to be seen as a celebration following Domitian's consulship, but rather a celebration of some military triumph.

Yet even these are not adequate images with which to compare the great Domitian (*parva loquor*, 52). Statius finally compares the emperor with Jupiter:[51]

> talis ubi Oceani finem mensasque revisit
> Aethiopum sacros diffusus nectare vultus
> dux superum secreta iubet dare carmina Musas
> et Pallenaeos Phoebum laudare triumphos. (*Silvae* 4.2.53–6)

Domitian is compared specifically to Jupiter when he visits the Ethiopians. The emperor has taken time away from his normal affairs to attend this banquet, and the comparison with Jupiter in the proverbially distant Ethiopia suggests that he is far away from his proper place. The simile is highly suggestive of epic song; the visit of god or gods to Ethiopia for a banquet is a conventional feature of epic poetry from Homer (*Il.* 1.423; *Od.* 1.22–5) onwards. Moreover, Apollo and the Muses sing a Gigantomachy which praises Jupiter in terms which sound very much like the praise a poet might give to an emperor returning from foreign conquest (*laudare triumphos*

the triumphs) would be dressed in triumphal robes during a triumphal procession, see H. H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (London, 1981), 171–2, 215; L. Richardson, *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore–London, 1992), 186–9.

[48] See Coleman (n. 2), ad 4.2.48.

[49] Domitian also restored the temple of Castor and Pollux and renamed it the temple of Castor and Minerva, see Richardson (n. 47), 74–5. Vigilance and protection of the people are important elements in the topos of the ideal leader, cf. Livy 6.1.4; 6.35.8; Vell. Pat. 2.79.1; Tac. *Ann.* 4.1.3.

[50] A similar image at *Silv.* 1.1.18–19 shows Mars after fighting (*exhaustis armis*, 1.1.18) but not himself relaxing. In the *Thebaid*, Mars never appears to relax, cf. *Theb.* 3.420–39 and 7.64–89, esp. 7.81, *nec longa moratus*. On Gradivus, see Ogilvie (n. 21), ad Livy 1.20.4: 'in historical times M. Gradivus presided over the inception (*ancilia movere*) … of war'. However, while the use of Gradivus for Mars was rare in Augustan poetry (e.g. only twice in Vergil), it is relatively common in Statius (twenty times) and it may be that this is a standard rather than a pointed usage, see J. J. L. Smolenaars (ed.), *Statius Thebaid VII—A commentary* (Leiden, 1994), ad *Theb.* 7.20.

[51] Martial also compares Domitian favourably to Jupiter in the context of a banquet, Mart. 8.39, 9.91.

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56). Referring to Domitian as Germanicus (*Germanice*, 52) reminds us of Domitian's own foreign conquests, much as *imperator* (cf. *maximi imperatoris*, 4 *praef.* 2–3) can mean both 'reigning emperor' and 'victorious general' at the same time.[52] Indeed, the relationship between Apollo and Jupiter is undoubtedly intended to mirror the relationship between Statius and Domitian and the language even evokes some of the praises that Statius dared not give in the *Thebaid* (compare *Theb.* 1.17–18, *nondum* / … *ausim spirare triumphos*).[53]

With these ideas in mind, we can begin to appreciate the subtlety of meaning implied in Statius' unusual phrase *summittentemque modeste* / *fortunae vexilla suae*. The phrase is arresting, using a piece of technical military vocabulary out of its normal context in a piece of praise poetry (not prose) and in a uniquely metaphorical manner. The word *vexilla* calls to mind a specific set of military images and creates the impression of the emperor as a military commander and not the leading magistrate (as *fasces* would suggest). The emperor lowers the *vexilla* that represent his military identity and in reality also bear his image. Domitian is seen by Statius with his military identity visible but at ease, appearing in public in a non-military guise,[54] presumably as a private citizen. The emperor is modest, even dissimulating in the way he hides his true nature.[55] But the emperor cannot hide his true colours. His divine nature, and in reality his red colouring shine through. Domitian's serenity and calm bearing reflect both his divinity and his status as an ideal leader.[56] Meanwhile the warlike aspect, with its heroic and epic connotations, shines through as well. Hence the instant recognition that Domitian would elicit from any barbarian enemy or foreign people, who would know that he was not just the Roman emperor, but rather that he was a godlike hero, an earthly Jupiter.

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[52] Josephus creates exactly the same double meaning with *autokratores* in his description of a Flavian triumph, *BJ* 7.123. On both terms, see Beard (n. 35), 554.

[53] On the nature of this relationship between poet and emperor, see Newlands (n. 3), 276–7. Note also the neat inversion of Muses commanding Statius at *Theb.* 1.3–4 *unde iubetis* / *ire, deae?* and Jupiter commanding Muses, *Silv.* 4.2.55, *dux superum secreta iubet dare carmina Musas.*

[54] *Pace* Newlands (n. 3), 275.

[55] *Dissimulatus* might suggest a god in disguise whose nature is nonetheless revealed. Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 1.406–7, *quid natum totiens, crudelis tu quoque, falsis* / *ludis imaginibus?*

[56] Compare the positive sketch of Sejanus at Vell. Pat. 2.127.4, *vultu vitaque tranquillum* and the ambiguous depiction of Sejanus at Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.1.3, *palam compositus pudor* with Martin and Woodman (n. 6), ad loc.

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