

THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE: COELIUS ANTIPATER, *FRHist* 15 F 41*

Abstract: This note argues in favour of *pectus auorsum* in *FRHist* 5 F 41, which is the reading attested in all Nonian manuscripts, and against the commonly accepted conjecture *pectus aduorsum*, which is nothing other than an easily explicable simplification.

Keywords: Coelius Antipater, *pectus auorsum*, textual criticism, *examinatio*, *Constantinopolitanus*

Its fragmentary state does not diminish (and may in fact enhance) the keenness of Coelius’ description of the buckling horse that throws its rider (*FRHist* 15 F 41; translation Briscoe):

ipse regis eminus equo ferit pectus a<d>uorsum, congenuclat percussus, deiecit dominum.

From a distance he himself struck the king’s horse on its breast which was facing him, the horse, having suffered the blow, sank to its knees and threw its rider.

For more details on the name of the king (Syphax, the king of the Masaesylians) and the context (his capture in 203 BCE by the Romans) later sources have to be consulted,¹ as this fragment, like so many of the Roman historians, has reached us in Nonius Marcellus’ *De compendiosa doctrina*, where it figures in the second book (*De honestis et noue ueterum dictis*) under the lemma *congenuclare* for its use of that exceedingly rare verb (126 Lindsay).² However, the manuscripts of Nonius’ work all read *auorsum*, as John Briscoe duly acknowledges in his commentary, before going on to assert ‘that the old and easy change ... to *aduorsum* is clearly right; Roth’s retention of *auorsum*, with

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¹ They are (*FRHist* III.258) Livy 30.12.1; Sil. Ital. 17.133–7; App. *Pun.* 26. Cf. below, n. 15.

² The verb also figures in Book I (80–1L), where it is glossed as *genu replicato cadere*; Nonius then cites *Sisenna Historiarum lib. III: multi, plagis aduersis icti et congenu<c>lati, Romanis praecipitatis ipsi supra uoluti in caput* (= *FRHist* 26 F 11). These are the only securely attested instances (*TLL* IV.275.42–7 (Lommatzsch)).

punctuation before it (the meaning, presumably, being “fell backwards”) is improbable’.³ The origin of that ‘old and easy change’ is identified by Lucian Müller in his Teubner edition of Nonius’ work as the 1476 edition from the press of Nicolas Jenson in Venice (*Nonii Marcelli peripatetici Tiburticensis Compendiosa doctrina ad filium de proprietate sermonum*).⁴ Neither Müller nor W. M. Lindsay nor, most recently, Rosanna Mazzacane give any reason (in their editions or (to my knowledge) elsewhere) for their decision against the unanimous manuscript readings.⁵ This phalanx of confidence is joined by the editors of the other recent editions of the fragmentary Roman historians: in fact, Wolfgang Herrmann’s *Die Historien des Coelius Antipater*, Martine Chassignet’s *L’Annalistique Romaine*, and Hans Beck and Uwe Walter’s *Die frühen römischen Historiker* do not so much as mention the attested reading!⁶

This is a puzzling state of affairs. One should think that for the unanimously attested *auorsum* to be so confidently discarded, it would have to be grammatically impossible or else make less sense than the conjectured *aduorsum*.⁷ Neither is the case, however, and it would appear that the conjecture was accepted before the case for retaining *auorsum* had been subjected to a proper *examinatio* first—that the cart had been put before the horse.⁸ In the MSS reading, *auorsum* is rather typically used as a predicative adjective (cf. *OLS* II.791–6), ‘mediopassive’ in meaning (cf. *OLS* I.230–3). A few examples (from different genres and times):⁹ Plautus (*Rud.* 176) has a woman ‘turn[s] to the right and walk[s] into destruction’ (*sed dextrouorsum auorsa it in malam crucem*); Cicero (*Fam.* 15.4.7) reports to Cato how he realised that ‘the Parthian troops had turned away from Cappadocia and were not far from Cilician borders’ (*a*

³ *FRHist* III.259. Briscoe hews closely to Peter’s textual note ((1883) XIV): ‘*auorsum libri, aduorsum uulg., ante auorsum interpunxit Roth*’. ‘Roth’ refers to Roth (1852); his text reads: ... *equo ferit pectus; auorsum conuenclat percussus* ...

⁴ Müller (1888) 132: ‘*advorsum ed. a. 1476; avorsum cdd.*’.

⁵ Lindsay (1903) 126: ‘*avorsum: corr. ed. a. 1476*’. Mazzacane (2014) 155: ‘*advorsum ed. princ: avorsum w*’. A history of the transmission of Nonius’ work and its editions can be found in Gatti (2014) XVII–XXIX.

⁶ Herrmann (1979) 188–9; Chassignet (1996–2004) II.66; Beck–Walter (2001–4) II.52. Nor does the *TLL* (II.1319.22–1324.79 (Bickel)) mention the passage, not even as a *uaria lectio*, under the lemma *auertere*.

⁷ Cf. Maas (1958) 11: ‘a very harsh anomaly’.

⁸ ‘Our next [sc. task] is to examine this tradition and discover whether it may be considered as giving the original (*examinatio*); if it proves not to give the original, we must try to reconstruct the original by conjecture (*diuinatio*) or at least to isolate the corruption’ (Maas (1958) 1). He considered the *examinatio* as equally challenging and important as the *diuinatio* and took umbrage at ‘the practice to indicate the authorship of conjectures [only]. [For] justice and consistency demand that mention should also be made of the scholar who first explained the transmitted text or pointed out the corruption’ ((1958) 23).

⁹ They are taken from the rich sampling in *TLL* II.1321.18–53 (Bickel).

Cappadocia Parthorum copias auersas non longe a finibus esse Ciliciae); and when Thyestes realises what he has consumed he understandably exclaims (Sen. *Thyest.* 1035–6): ‘This is what caused the gods such shame, this turned the day away and forced it back to its rising’ (*hoc est deos quod puduit, hoc egit diem auersum in ortus*).

Nor is the transmitted text nonsensical, dimwitted, or otherwise needing improvement. On the contrary: if we retain *auorsum* in Coelius’ lively description (note the shift from the dramatic present (*ferit*) to the resultative perfect (*deiecit*), which has raised a few text-critics’ eyebrows too and caused Leo to conjecture *deicit* (*FRHist* II.408)), the attacker ‘himself from afar struck¹⁰ the horse at its breast, which (had) turned away; the horse [then] sank to its knees, having suffered a blow’. It does not matter much whether *auorsum* is classified as an instance of ‘non-anterior use’ of the perfect passive participle (*OLS* I.547–9) or as an instance of the so-called ‘proleptic (or: anticipatory) use’ (*OLS* II.811), whereby ‘the resulting state of the object constituent[s]’ of the finite verb (*ferit*) is indicated—though, clearly, Coelius, whom Cicero grudgingly singled out for stylistic aspirations,¹¹ would appear to make this a textbook case of such a use: ‘he struck the horse at its breast, which [in consequence] (had) turned away’. It does matter, however, that the original *auorsum* makes much better sense than *aduorsum*. To begin with, it adds the realistic element of the horse’s turning away when attacked. This is so natural a behaviour in a horse that Machiavelli would use it in the early sixteenth century in *Dell’arte della guerra* to belittle the cavalry’s effectiveness on the battlefield;¹² it merits especial comment, perhaps, that Machiavelli remarks in particular on the threatened horse’s impulse ‘to turn to the right or left’. Thus, the original reading not only

¹⁰ *eminus ferire* is a common coupling: cf., e.g., Verg. *Aen.* 10.346–7: *aduenit et rigida Dryopem ferit eminus hasta | sub mentum grauiter pressa*; *TLL* VI.1.510.74–5, 511.69–72, 512.38 (our passage); cf. 514.59 *ictum inferendo (et comminus et eminus)* (Bannier).

¹¹ Cic. *De Orat.* 2.54: *sed iste ipse Coelius neque distinxit historiam uarietate colorum neque uerborum conlocatione et tractu orationis leni et aequabili perpoliuit illud opus; sed ut homo neque doctus neque maxime aptus ad dicendum, sicut potuit, dolauit; uicit tamen, ut dicis, superiores*. In similar vein: *Leg.* 1.6: (*paulo inflauit uehementius, habuitque uires agrestis ille quidem atque horridas ... sed tamen admonere reliquos potuit ut adcuratius scriberent*); *Brut.* 102: *fuit ut temporibus illis luculentus*. Briscoe (2005) 63–4 documents several unique features of Coelius’ style.

¹² ‘Né alcuno si maravigli che uno nodo di fanti sostenga ogni impeto di cavagli, perché il cavallo è animale sensato e conosce i pericoli e male volentieri vi entra. E se considererete quali forze lo facciano andar avanti e quali lo tengano indietro, vedrete senza dubbio essere maggiori quelle che lo ritengono che quelle che lo spingono; perché innanzi lo fa andar lo sprone, e dall’ altra banda lo ritiene **o la spada o la picca**. Tale che si è visto per le antiche e per le moderne esperienze ... se il cavallo discosto comincia a vedere di avere a percuotere nelle punte delle picche, o per se stesso egli raffrenerà il corso, di modo che come egli si sentirà pugnere si fermerà affatto, o, giunto a quelle, **si volterà a destra o a sinistra**’: Machiavelli (1971) 969–70.

produces a mimetically highly effective sequence of events: the charge at the horse's breast, which is turning away, but the horse is struck (anyway), collapses, and throws its rider; it also effects a beautiful adversative asyndeton ('it turned away but was struck still'), while softening the abrupt change of subject (from the attacker (*ipse*) via the object (the horse's turning breast) to the horse itself (*deiecit*).¹³ David West exclaimed 'This is murder' after he had reviewed various translations of Lucretian metaphors;¹⁴ if it were not too strong a statement, it might seem applicable to this case of disimprovement.

The later sources do not contain any revealing information;¹⁵ but there is one final consideration. While the two verbs are quite commonly confused (*auertere confunditur cum ... auertere ut saepe per errorem scribarum*, *TLL* II.1319.32–3 (Bickel)), the two *iuncturae* in question differ starkly in popularity. On the one hand, *pectus aduersum* is so frequent as to border on a cliché, including such instances as Vergil's *ferrum aduerso sub pectore condit* (*Aen.* 12.950) or Ovid's *cui pectore quondam | haesit in aduerso grauis hasta minoris Atridae* (*Met.* 15.160–1);¹⁶ it also appears in contexts very similar to Coelius', so again in Vergil's *quadriugis in equos aduersaque pectora tendit* (*Aen.* 10.571) or the *Bellum Africum*, when a veteran of the tenth legion misses Labienus and pierces the horse instead (*pilum... equi grauiter aduerso pectori adfixit*, 16.3). *pectus auorsum*, on the other hand, is rarely seen; in fact, the only loose parallels provided in the *TLL* are Livy (*at imperitae multitudini nunc indignatio, nunc pudor pectora uersare et ab intestinis auertere malis*, 2.45.5) and Statius, in whose *Thebaid*, after a night of fears and laments, everyone feels downcast, their hearts averse from war: *fracta dehinc cunctis auersaque pectora bello* (*Theb.* 8.211).¹⁷ This evidence not only casts a damning light on the *TLL*'s decision to omit the MSS reading *pectus auorsum* from the entry on *auertere* (above, n. 6), as Coelius' literal use of the phrase complements Livy and Statius' figurative one (hence my qualification: 'loose parallels'); it also

¹³ Such a change is not, however, in and of itself noteworthy, as the references in Briscoe *FRHist* III.259 document (to which add Courtney (1999) 2–3).

¹⁴ D. West (1969) 3.

¹⁵ Livy 30.12.1 merely mentions Syphax as riding towards the enemy: *dum obequitat hostium turmis si pudore, si periculo suo fugam sistere posset, equo grauiter icto effusus opprimitur*; Sil. Ital. 17.133–7: *prima in cornipedis sedit spirantibus ignem | naribus hasta uolans erexitque ore cruento | quadrupedem elatis pulsantem calcibus auras. | corruit asper ecus confixaque cuspide membra | huc illuc iactans rectorem prodidit hosti*; App. *Pun.* 26: *τραπέντες οἱ τοῦ Σύφακος ἐς φυγὴν τὸν ποταμὸν ἐπέρων, ἔνθα τις αὐτοῦ Σύφακος τὸν ἵππον ἔβαλεν· ὁ δ' ἀπεσεῖσατο τὸν δεσπότην.*

¹⁶ Gatti includes it under *iuncturae quaedam sollemnes* (*TLL* X.1.908.51). Vergil particularly favours it (*Aen.* 9.347; 10.570; 11.368; 12.948). Its virtually periphrastic meaning 'courage' pertains too (e.g., *B. Afr.* 82.4: *cum centuriones pectore aduerso resisterent* (with *TLL* X.1.911.4–8); Liv. 2.23.4: *cicatrices aduerso pectore ostentabat*).

¹⁷ It does not surprise that several manuscripts of the *Thebaid* offer the non-sensical *aduersa*.

reveals *pectus auorsum* to be the *lectio difficilior*, which an editor would have a strong case for choosing, even if *pectus aduorsum* were attested in a few Nonian manuscripts.¹⁸ But all fifteen Carolingian manuscripts offer nothing other than *auorsum*, which was the reading of the archetype, clearly;¹⁹ why, then, put an unattested *lectio faciliior* before the attested *lectio difficilior*?

In discussing the text-critical principle just alluded to—*lectio difficilior potior*—Martin West warned ‘that it ... should not be used in support of dubious syntax, or phrasing that it would not have been natural *for the author* to use’ (my italics).²⁰ As my reference to the Nonian archetype is meant to recall, we are still several degrees of separation away from ‘the author’ Coelius’ writing, which Nonius himself would have encountered in a miscellaneous text, to boot.²¹ If anything, these circumstances of transmission place an even greater burden on the criterion of ‘sense’, which Moritz Haupt famously emphasised, when he provoked his students’ (text-)critical thinking, asserting that, ‘if the sense require[d] it, [he was] prepared to write *Constantinopolitanus* where the [manuscripts] have the monosyllabic interjection *o*’.²² But Coelius Antipater’s ‘Constantinopolitanus’ is preserved in all manuscripts, and there appears to be no reason for rejecting it; contrariwise, there exist several excellent reasons for retaining it, which the modified phrasing *lectio difficilior* atque *potior* may summarise. Thus:

ipse regis eminus equo ferit pectus auorsum; congenuclat percussus, deiecit dominum

he himself, from a distance, struck the king’s horse at its breast, which turned away; [but] the horse sank to its knees, having suffered the blow, and threw its rider.

The attested reading thus reinstated, the king’s horse again shies away from the threat, and a small piece is restored in the order of the world.

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¹⁸ Luck (1981) 187 offers further literature on the principle *lectio difficilior potior*, ‘first recognized by Clericus (Jean Leclerc) in his *Ars Critica* (1697)’.

¹⁹ Gatti (2014) XV–XVI.

²⁰ M. L. West (1973) 51.

²¹ Gatti (2014) XIV–XV.

²² Haupt’s dictum is cited in Belger (1879) 126; it caught Housman’s eye (or ear) who then quotes it in his lecture ‘The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism’ (my quotation is taken hence: (1961) 142).

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