

READING 3

Aeneas has been invited to a banquet at Dido's palace in Carthage. Near the end of the banquet Dido asks Aeneas to tell her and her court about the fall of Troy. Aeneas explains how a huge wooden horse filled with Greek soldiers was left on the plain in front of the gates of Troy, while the rest of the Greeks sailed away to the nearby island of Tenedos, where they hid in order to convince the Trojans that they had returned to Greece. Most of the Trojans wanted to bring the wooden horse inside the city walls, but the priest Laocoon tried to convince them that this would not be a good idea. To make his point that the wooden horse might be a trick on the part of the Greeks, Laocoon hurled a spear at the side of the wooden horse. A hollow sound was made on impact. This should have convinced the Trojans that it was not safe to bring the horse inside the city. But Sinon, a Greek left behind on the plain at Troy, persuaded the Trojans that the wooden horse was an offering to the goddess Minerva, a portent that would bring good luck to the Trojans. At this point a terrifying omen appeared: two snakes made their way from the sea to the shore. The snakes from Tenedos, attacking first the sons of Laocoon and then their father, strangled the bodies in their spiraling coils. The monsters then sought shelter at the shrine of Minerva. Sinon said that they were a punishment for Laocoon's having struck the wooden horse with his spear.

The ancient Romans placed great importance on omens/portents as indicators of good or bad luck. Priests, such as Laocoon, were often entrusted with interpreting these omens. In this passage the Trojans are faced with two different interpretations of the wooden horse—one from Laocoon and one from Sinon. Laocoon realizes that the horse is a bad omen for the Trojans. Sinon and the gods, it seems, see the horse as a good omen for the Greeks. Vergil assumes that his readers understand that it was fated for Troy to fall and that these snakes were sent by the gods to persuade the Trojans to take the horse into the city. It is important to keep in mind that Aeneas, an eyewitness to these events, is telling the story from a Trojan point of view.

DEATH OF LAOCOON AND HIS SONS

VERGIL *AENEID* 2.201–222

Meter: Dactylic Hexameter

Lāocoōn, ductus Neptūnō sorte sacerdōs,

sollemnīs taurum ingentem mactābat ad ārās.

Ecce autem geminī ā Tenedō tranquilla per alta

—horrēscō referēns—immēnsīs orbibus anguēs

205 incumbunt pelagō pariterque ad litora tendunt;

NOTES AND VOCABULARY

- Line 201: **Lāocoōn, Lāocoōntis**, m. Trojan priest of Neptune
Neptūnus, -ī, m. Neptune, god of the sea; *Neptūnō*: dative of reference
sors, sortis, f. lot, fate, destiny, oracle; translate *ductus sorte* “drawn (chosen) by lot.”
sacerdōs, sacerdotis, m. (f.) priest(ess)



BY THE WAY

Diaeresis is a term that refers to the coincidence of the end of a metrical foot and the end of a word. A diaeresis appears between feet. In line 201, a diaeresis occurs between the fourth and fifth foot (*Nep*)*tunō* and *sorte*. Caesura is a term that refers to the lack of coincidence between the end of a metrical foot and the end of a word. A caesura occurs within a metrical foot. In line 201 a caesura occurs in the third foot, between (*duc*)*tus* and *Nep*(*tunō*). Both caesura and diaeresis result in a pause in the line.

- Line 202: **sollemnis, sollemne** annual, customary, solemn
taurus, taurī, m. bull, bullock, ox
mactō (1) to sacrifice, slaughter; honor
ad: translate “at, beside.”
- Line 203: **ecce**, *interjection* see! look! behold! *Ecce* is intended to make the narrative more vivid and to draw the reader into the scene by calling attention, in this instance, to something surprising that is about to happen.
autem, *adv.* moreover, but, however
Tenedos, -ī, f. Tenedos, small island near Troy†
tranquillus, -a, -um tranquil, calm
altum, -ī, n. the deep (sea)
- Lines 203–204: **ecce autem . . . anguēs**: the snakes from Tenedos foreshadow and symbolize the later coming of the Greek ships from Tenedos, bringing destruction with them. Note the HYPERBATON.
- Line 204: **horrēscō, horrēscere, horruī** to shudder, tremble; understand *haec* (“these things”) as a direct object of *horrēscēns*.
referō, referre, rettulī, relātum to tell, bring back, withdraw; *horrēscō referēns*: Aeneas was indeed an eyewitness, and his use of the present tense through much of this passage makes the recollection vivid for his listeners.
immēnsus, -a, -um immense, immeasurable
orbis, orbis, m. circle, fold, coil; earth; *immēnsīs orbibus* is an ablative of quality or manner; translate “with huge coils.”
anguis, anguis, m. (f.) snake, serpent; understand *venientēs* with *geminī anguēs*.
- Line 205: **incumbō, incumbere, incubuī, incubitum** to lean upon, hang over, lower (over) (+ *dat.*)
pelagus, -ī, n. sea; *pelagō* is a dative with compound *incumbent*
pariter, adv. equally, side by side
tendō, tendere, tetendī, tentum or **tēsum** to go, advance, strive, stretch

VERGIL AENEID 2.201–222, CONTINUED

pectora quōrum inter flūctūs arrēcta iubaeque

sanguineae superant undās; pars cētera pontum

pōne legit sinuatque immēnsa volūmine terga.

Fit sonitus spūmante salō; iamque arva tenēbant

210 ardentisque oculōs suffectī sanguine et ignī

sībila lambēbant linguīs vibrantibus ōra.

Diffugimus vīsū exsanguēs. Illī agmine certō

NOTES AND VOCABULARY

Line 206: **pectus, pectoris**, n. breast, chest; with *arrēcta*: the snakes seem almost to stand on the water.

quōrum: connecting relative

flūctus, flūctūs, m. wave, tide

arrigō, arrigere, arrēxī, arrēctum to raise, rear; translate *arrēcta* with *sunt* understood as “were raised.”

iuba, -ae, f. mane, crest

Line 207: **sanguineus, -a, -um** bloody, blood-red

superō (1) to surmount, overcome, survive

cēterus, -a, -um rest, remaining, other; *pars cētera*, the remaining part, refers to the rear part of the snakes’ bodies.

pontus, -ī, m. sea, waves



STUDY TIP

Be careful to distinguish the adverb *pōne* (“behind, after”) that derives from *post + ne* from the verb *pōnō, pōnere, posuī, positum* that means “to put, place.”

Line 208: **pōne**, *adv.* behind, after

legō, legere, lēgī, lēctum to choose; skim

sinuō (1) to fold, curve, twist, wind

immēnsus, -a, -um immense, immeasurable

volūmen, volūminis, n. fold, coil, roll; *volūmine* is an ablative of manner or respect; translate “in a coil.”

tergum, -ī, n. back, body, rear

Line 209: **fīō, fierī, factus sum** to become, arise

sonitus, sonitūs, m. sound, roar, noise, crash

spūmō (1) to foam, froth, spray

salum, -ī, n. sea, swell (of the sea) *spūmante salō* is an ablative absolute.

arvum, -ī, n. field; literally the clause *arva tenēbant* means “they held the fields.” Translate “they arrived upon the fields.”



BY THE WAY

Note the SIBILANCE and ONOMATOPOEIA in line 209. The ALLITERATION of “s” in *sonitus spūmante salō* is intended to suggest the sound made by the hissing of the waves. The SIBILANCE carries over into the next lines as well with *suffectī sanguine . . . sībila*.

Line 210: **ardeō, ardēre, arsī, arsum** to burn; *ardentīs* is the poetic accusative plural form of the present active participle.

oculus, -ī, m. eye; *oculōs*: direct object of the participle *suffectī*, treated here as a middle/reflexive participle capable of having a direct object (“having suffused their eyes”); alternatively, *oculōs* is an accusative of respect translated “suffused with respect to their eyes.” (See Language Fact later in this chapter on p. 262)

sufficiō, sufficere, suffēcī, suffectum to supply, suffuse; the participle *suffectī* modifies the third plural subject (“they”) of *tenēbant*.

sanguine and ignī: both words are ablatives of means. *Ignī* (instead of *igne*) often occurs as the ablative singular.



BY THE WAY

The repeated sound of “l”—*sībi-la lambēbant linguīs*—is suggestive of the snakes licking their mouths. The English word SIBILANCE, the use of words that repeat the “s” sound, derives from the Latin base *sībil-*.

Line 211: **sībilus, -a, -um** hissing, whirring
lambō, lambere, lambī to lick, lap
lingua, -ae, f. tongue, language
vibrō (1) to quiver, vibrate, dart
ōs, ōris, n. face, mouth; *ōra* is neuter accusative plural; note the CHIASMUS.

Line 212: **diffugiō, diffugere, diffūgī** to flee apart, scatter; Aeneas inserts himself and his companions again into the scene.

vīsus, vīsūs, m. sight, view, vision, aspect; *vīsū* is either ablative of cause with *exsanguēs* or ablative of separation with *diffugimus*.

exsanguis, exsanguē bloodless, lifeless, pale; modifies the first plural subject (“we”) of *diffugimus*.

certus, -a, -um sure, fixed, certain, reliable; *agmine certō* is an ablative of means; translate “in a sure line.”



BY THE WAY

Interestingly, Vergil uses the adjective *exsanguis* (*ex* + *sanguis*), “bloodless,” hence “pale,” to describe those witnessing the assault of the snakes, which are associated with “blood” a few lines earlier (*sanguineae* in line 207 and *sanguine* in line 210).

VERGIL AENEID 2.201–222, CONTINUED

Lāocoōnta petunt; et primum parva duorum

corpora natorum serpens amplexus uterque

215 implicat et miserōs morsū dēpascitur artūs;

post ipsum auxiliō subeuntem ac tēla ferentem

corripiunt spīrisque ligant ingentibus; et iam

bis medium amplexī, bis collō squāmea circum

terga datī superant capite et cervicibus altis.

220 Ille simul manibus tendit dīvellere nōdōs

perfūsus saniē vittās ātrōque venēnō,

clāmōrēs simul horrendōs ad sīdera tollit.

NOTES AND VOCABULARY



STUDY TIP

When Greek names of persons and places occur in Latin, the authors used either the appropriate Latin ending on the noun or the original Greek endings. In the accusative singular, most Greek nouns in Latin end in *-an*, *-on*, *-en*, or *-a*. Be careful not to confuse a Greek accusative *-a* (e.g., *Lāocoōnta* in line 213) with a Latin feminine singular nominative ending (e.g., *iuba*) or a Latin accusative plural ending (e.g., *corpora* in line 214).

Line 213: **primum**: an accusative adjective, as in Greek, can function as an adverb. Translate “first.”

duo, duae, duo two

Lines 213–14: Note the SYNCHESIS.

Line 214: **nātus, nātī**, m. son

serpens, serpentis, m. (f.) serpent, snake

amplector, amplectī, amplexus sum to embrace, enfold; *amplexus* as a perfect passive participle of a deponent verb translates actively. Thus *amplexus* means “having enfolded.”

uterque, utraque, utrumque each, both

Line 215: **implicō, implicāre, implicāvī (uī), implicātum (itum)** to entwine

morsus, morsūs, m. bite, biting, jaws, fangs

dēpascor, dēpascī, dēpāstus sum to feed on, devour

artus, artūs, m. joint, limb, body

Line 216: **post**, *adv.* afterward; *prep.* + *acc.* after, behind

ipse, ipsa, ipsum –self; *ipsum* modifies *Lāocoōnta*, which is understood.

auxilium, -i, n. help, aid, assistance; *auxiliō* is a dative of purpose.

subeō, subīre, subīi, subitum to approach; *subeuntem* is the present participle of *subeō*.