

Seek and Ye Shall Find: Martial 4.59.6

Martial wrote three epigrams about living creatures entombed in amber: a bee in 4.32, an ant in 6.15, and a viper or asp in the longest, 4.59:¹

Flentibus Heliadum ramis dum vipera repit,
fluxit in obstantem sucina gutta feram:
quae dum miratur pingui se rore teneri,
concreto reguit vincta repente gelu.
ne tibi regali placeas, Cleopatra, sepulcro, 5
vipera si tumulo nobiliore iacet.

2 gutta T : gemma βγ

While a viper crawled among the weeping branches of the Heliads a drop of amber flowed onto the creature in its path. As it marveled to find itself stuck fast in the viscous liquid, it stiffened, bound of a sudden by congealed ice. Be not proud, Cleopatra, of your royal sepulcher, if a viper lies in a nobler tomb.

The endings of the other two share a significant word:

credibile est ipsam *sic* voluisse mori. (4.32.4)

sic modo quae fuerat vita contempta manente,
funeribus facta est nunc pretiosa suis. (6.15.3-4)

I think Martial wrote *sic* in the close of 4.59 as well:

ne tibi regali placeas, Cleopatra, sepulcro, 5
vipera *sic* tumulo nobiliore iacet.

To keep you from being proud, Cleopatra, of your royal sepulcher, a viper lies thus [= buried in amber] in a nobler tomb.

If I am right, line 5 is not a polite command, with a conditional clause following, but a final clause of the illogical type,² with the main clause following.

¹ Text, apparatus, and translation are quoted from Shackleton Bailey's Loeb (1993). Victoria Rimell discusses all three in *Martial's Rome: Empire and the Ideology of Epigram* (Cambridge, 2008), in a subsection of Chapter 2 entitled "Amber tombs and the ocean of Rome: Book 4" (82-89).

² What I mean by 'illogical' is this. In English, we say "Just to show what a fool I am, I spent five years thinking Martial's name was Gaius, not Marcus, Valerius Martialis", though I never formed any purpose of demonstrating my foolishness in this or any other way. Similarly, Martial's viper did not choose to die as it did in order to have a more splendid tomb than Cleopatra's, but rhetorically we (or rather Martial) may say that it did. Is there a name for this sort of illogical purpose clause? Do grammarians discuss it? Further research is needed here.