

Dammae Damnatae: Two Notes on Martial 4.74

Twice in Book IV, Martial writes of antelopes fighting each other in the arena and putting the other animals to shame by their unexpected ferocity. In 4.35, he tells us that a pair of them cheated the *venatores* and hunting dogs by fighting each other to the death:¹

Frontibus adversis molles concurrere dammas
vidimus et fati sorte iacere pari.
spectavere canes praedam, stupuitque superbus
venator cultro nil superesse suo.
unde leves animi tanto caluere furore? 5
sic pugnant tauri, sic cecidere viri.

5 animi βγ : animae T

In 4.74, we see the same *dammae*, or a similar pair, prior to their fight:

Aspicias imbelles temptent quam fortia dammae
proelia? tam timidis quanta sit ira feris?
in mortem parvis concurrere frontibus ardent.
vis, Caesar, dammis parcere? mitte canes.

2 tam Tβ quam γ | 3 ardent T : audent βγ

I have two things to say about the second poem:

1. The epithet in line 3 has bothered some readers. Koestlin emended to *pavidis*, Postgate to *torvis* (details in Moreno Soldevila). It seems to me more likely that Martial wrote *paribus*, as he wrote *fati sorte . . . pari* in 4.35.2. If they were not well-matched in size and strength and ferocity, they would not both be risking death. Misreading would have been easy via Classical identification of U/V or Mediaeval confusion of B/V.

2. Moreno Soldevila interprets the last line more tastefully than I would: “the Emperor’s intervention may be seen in positive terms: if he lets the dogs loose, the antelopes will stop fighting and flee, thus saving their lives thanks to their swiftness.” That is one way to take it, though I wonder how swiftness could save them in an enclosed arena. I prefer to think that they display such viciousness towards each other that being torn apart by dogs would be less painful. Such an implication would be hyperbolic, and quite tasteless, but neither of those was ever much of an obstacle when Martial was flattering Domitian.

¹ My text is taken from Shackleton Bailey’s 1990 Teubner, with selections from his apparatus.