

DIM HYPERBOREA?
OVID, *METAMORPHOSES* 15, 356–360*

Esse viros fama est in Hyperborea Pallene,
qui soleant levibus velari corpora plumis,
cum Tritoniacam noviens subiere paludem;
haut equidem credo: sparsae quoque membra venenis
360 exercere artes Scythides memorantur easdem.

356 Pallene : palerne, phalene, philene, pillene, *dett.*

That Ovid, or for that matter “Pythagoras” who speaks these lines, should give the epithet Hyperborean to Pallene, the westernmost peninsula of Chalcidice (more southern than Rome), is unsatisfactory. While some sources may suggest links between the Hyperboreans and the northern regions of Greece,¹ this evidence is obscure and incoherent,² and the level

* I am grateful to the editors and to the anonymous referee of *Hyperboreus* for suggestions and additional references improving this article.

¹ H. Daebritz, “Hyperboreer”, *RE* 9 (1914) 268.

² A Macedonian month is named Ὑπερβερεταῖος (irrelevant according to Daebritz [n. 1] 261 e, but see the end of this note); *Dodona* is glossed χωρίον ἐν ὑπερβορείς τῆς Θεσπρωτίας in the D-scholia on *Il.* 2, 750, but here ὑπερβορείς (Erbse: ὑπερβορέω Heyne) τῆς Θεσπρωτίας means *the utmost north of Thesprotia* (ὑπερβόρεος in the sense ‘most northern’ is not recorded in LSJ, but found in scholarly texts from late antiquity, whose authors follow the advice of Strabo 1, 3, 22 on the use of the name: e. g., Ptol. *Geog.* 2, 2, 1; 5, 9, 16, etc.; Sext. Emp. *Math.* 9, 247. 249); the D-scholia on *Il.* 16, 233 = *EM* s. v. Δωδωναῖος (p. 293), Ζεῦ ἄνα Δωδωναίε· ἐν χωρίῳ τῶν Ὑπερβορέων (Heyne: τῶ ὑπερβορέῳ Dindorf) τῆ Δωδώνη τιμώμενε, may be a distorted and/or corrupt paraphrase of the former passage (cf. Sylburg’s n. on *EM* loc. cit.). According to a theory by E. Maass, *Orpheus* (Munich 1895) 160 and *Parerga Attica* (Progr. Greifswald 1889) x, the Hyperboreans mentioned in Paus. 10, 5, 7 would originally have referred to people from Pagasae. In Mnaseas fr. 24 *FHG* = *schol. in Ap. Rhod. Argon.* 2, 675, “the Hyperboreans are now said to be Delphians” or “the Hyperborean land is now called Delphi” (Μνασέας δέ φησι νῦν τοὺς Ὑπερβορέους Δελφούς λέγεσθαι); Philostephanus fr. 33 *FHG* = *schol. Pind. Ol.* 3, 28a invents an eponymous individual “Hyperboreus of Thessaly”, presumably in response to Phanodemus of Athens, who had claimed that Hyperboreus was Athenian (ἐκλήθησαν δὲ Ὑπερβορέου τινὸς Ἀθηναίου, ὡς φησι Φανόδημος [Φιλόδημος

of antiquarian sophistication that such a reference would involve does not strike one as Ovidian or even poetical. A Hyperborean Chalcidice amounts to an obscurity and an anti-climax which would have been awkward even for Callimachus; and for the Roman poets “Hyperborean” is never elsewhere anything but a poetical epithet of a more or less vaguely defined people or region in the distant, frozen, by definition non-Mediterranean north (or of the Ursa Major star constellation).³

Virgil, *Georgics* 4, 517 speaks of “Hyperborean ice and snowy Tanais” meeting Orpheus’ gaze as he wanders lonely in Thrace, but critics agree either that “these north-eastern names, far beyond Thrace, serve merely to emphasize cold and loneliness”,⁴ or that Orpheus “wanders to the [north-eastern] borders of Thrace”.⁵ Tanais (Don) is in fact far from Thrace, emerging from the east into Lake Maeotis (Azov) in eastern Scythia. Chalcidicean Pallene on the other hand, if granted a situation in Thrace (it is usually taken as Macedonian or even Greek proper), would constitute its extreme south-western edge. Vibius Sequester, who has read our passage, lists in his record of *paludes* “Triton in Thrace: he who submerges in it nine times is transformed into a bird”;⁶ on the other

codd.]· Φιλοστέφανος δὲ τὸν Ὑπερβόρειον Θεσσαλὸν φησιν εἶναι). *Schol. in Il.* 2, 252 may be a mistaken reference by Daebritz; I find no mention of the Hyperbo-reans here in the editions of H. Erbse (Berlin 1969), W. Dindorf (Oxford 1875) or C. G. Heyne (Oxford 1834). Finally, H. L. Ahrens, “Zur griechischen Monatskunde”, *RhM* 17 (1862) 329–367 (at 340 ff.), proposed an etymology for the word “Hyperborean” which is lauded by R. C. Jebb, *Bacchylides* (Cambridge 1905) 460; L. R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States* IV (Oxford 1907) 101 ff.; A. J. van Windekens, “Les hyperboréens”, *RhM* 100 (1957) 164–169; and H. M. Werhahn, “Hyperboreer”, *RAC* 16 (1994) 968 f. According to this theory, ὑπερβόρειοι is a folk-etymologizing distortion of an original *ὑπέρβοροι (*vel sim.*), a Macedonian dialectal form of περρερές, i. e. “overbringers”, the title of the escorts of the Hyperborean maidens in *Hdt.* 4, 33. While attractive as such, the etymology is certainly beyond Ovid.

³ Catull. 115, 5; Verg. *G.* 3, 196. 381; 4, 517; Hor. *Carm.* 2, 20, 16; Luc. 5, 23; Mart. 4, 3, 5; 7, 6, 1; 8, 78, 3; 9, 45, 1; 9, 101, 20; Stat. *Theb.* 1, 693; Valerius Flaccus 8, 210; Iuv. 6, 470.

⁴ R. A. B. Mynors, *Virgil: Georgics* (Oxford 1990) 320; cf. R. F. Thomas, *Virgil, Georgics: Vol. 2, Books III–IV* (Cambridge 1988) and C. G. Heyne, *P. Virgilius Maro I* (Hanover 1816) ad loc.

⁵ *Vergils Gedichte*, 1. Band, *Bukolika und Georgica*, erkl. von Th. Ladewig, C. Schaper und P. Deuticke, bearb. v. P. Jahn (Frankfurt a. M. 101973, 91915) 257.

⁶ *Triton Thraciae, in quo qui se novies merserit in avem convertitur* (p. 38 Gelsomino, p. 68 Parroni). “Vibius Sequester” (probably a pseudonym) around AD 400

hand he locates the “Hyperborean [mountains] in Thrace, *beyond the northern region*”.⁷ Bömer ignores the evidence for Hellenic Hyperboreans cited above (n. 2) but still argues on the basis of Virgil that “we may hardly doubt that Ovid here has thought of Chalcidice”.⁸

Pallene is certain in Ps.-Lactantius’ *Narrationes* (pp. 713, 718 Magnus).⁹ Nevertheless I suspect that Ovid in fact wrote *Hyperborea pallente*, “dim Hyperborea”.¹⁰ The noun appears to be unparalleled outside of Neo-Latin, but the ellipsis of *terra* or *regio* is regular and systematized in the case of the Roman provinces.¹¹ There is also some positive evidence in support of the emendation. “Ancient descriptions of the frozen North have a strong family likeness”, writes Mynors (n. 4) on *Georgics* 3, 349–383; and apart from the cold we hear of the darkness, which is combined with intense fog in the *locus classicus* of northern panorama, the Homeric description of the Cimmerians (*Od.* 11, 13–19):

ἦ δ' ἐς πείραθ' ἵκανε βαθυρροῦ Ὠκεανοῖο.
 ἔνθα δὲ Κιμμερίων ἀνδρῶν δῆμός τε πόλις τε,
 15 ἥερι καὶ νεφέλη κεκαλυμμένοι· οὐδέ ποτ' αὐτοῦς
 Ἥελιος φαέθων καταδέρκεται ἀκτίνεσσιν,
 οὐθ' ὀπότε ἄν στείχησι πρὸς οὐρανὸν ἀστερόεντα,
 οὐθ' ὅτ' ἄν ἄψ ἐπὶ γαῖαν ἀπ' οὐρανόθεν προτράπηται,
 ἀλλ' ἐπὶ νύξ ὀλοή τέταται δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι.

compiled a briefly annotated catalogue of geographical names, using among other sources the third and fifteenth books of the *Metamorphoses* (K. Sallmann, “V. Sequester”, *DNP* 12/2 [2002] 177 f.).

⁷ *Montes: ... Hyperborei Thraciae ultra plagam aquiloniam* (p. 44 Gelsomino, p. 70 Parroni).

⁸ F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso, Metamorphosen: Kommentar, Buch XIV–XV* (Heidelberg 1986).

⁹ The *Narrationes Fabularum Ovidiarum* (edited by H. Magnus, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoseon libri XV* [Berlin 1914] 625–721) is an independent prose paraphrase of the *Metamorphoses* of unknown date and authorship, attributed to the Christian author Lactantius in one ms., but by humanist editors to “Lactantius Placidus”, the name under which a fifth- or sixth-century commentary on Statius’ *Thebaid* has been transmitted (P. Wessner, “Lactantius (2)”, *RE* 12 [1924] 360 f.).

¹⁰ The corruption would be another instance of the tendency noted by Georg Luck, “Missing Letters in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*?”, *Myrtia* 21 (2006) 113–121.

¹¹ See M. C. P. Schmidt, *Stilistische Beiträge zur Kenntnis und zum Gebrauch der lateinischen Sprache*, 2. Heft (Leipzig 1911) 47; and Hor. *Carm.* 1, 22, 14 *Daurias* for a remarkable hyper-Greek instance.

She came to deep-flowing Oceanus, that bounds the Earth,
 where is the land and city of the Cimmerians,
 15 wrapped in mist and cloud. Never does
 the bright sun look down on them with his rays
 either when he mounts the starry heaven
 or when he turns again to earth from heaven,
 but baneful night is spread over wretched mortals.

(Tr. A. T. Murray)

Virgil in the *Georgics* adapts *Od.* 11, 16–18 to a description of the perpetually cold and dark lands of Scythia, and here we find *pallentis umbras*, “dim shadows”, in 3, 357 (*G.* 3, 354–359):

sed iacet aggeribus niveis informis et alto
 355 terra gelu late septemque adsurgit in ulnas.
 semper hiems, semper spirantes frigora Cauri.
 tum Sol *pallentis* haud umquam discutit *umbras*
 nec cum invectus equis altum petit aethera, nec cum
 praecipitem Oceani rubro lavit aequore currum.

With our emendation, Ovid’s Scythian women who grow feathers sprinkling magical potions on themselves would accordingly be linked to the Hyperborean swamp both geographically and topically, to the improvement of the coherence of the passage. There may be an indication that Ovid had the passage of the *Georgics* fresh in mind, if the exhortation against hunting in 15, 475 *nec formidatis cervos includite pinnis* is a reminiscence of *G.* 3, 372, where the Scythians are said not to hunt *cervos ... pavidos formidine pennae*. (The scaring of prey with feathers is depicted elsewhere in both Ovid and Virgil, though, as well as in other Latin authors: *TLL* s. v. *formido* II B 1, vol. VI col. 1100.)

The Greeks would occasionally refer to the actual mythical race of Hyperboreans, Apollo’s favourites,¹² as Scythians.¹³ Virgil’s Scythians are subject to *Hyperboreo septem ... trioni*, “the Hyperborean seven-oxen”, that is the seven stars of Ursa Major, in *G.* 3, 381. In Pliny, *NH* 4, 88, often cited in connection with our passage, a particularly cold and dark region situated just south of Hyperborea proper is called *Pterophoros*, “feather-bringer”. Like his Greek sources, Pliny describes the Hyper-

¹² Pind. *Pyth.* 10, 31–44; Hdt. 4, 32–36; Hecataeus Abd. fir. 7–14 *FGrH* (264) etc.

¹³ Ananius fr. 1 W; Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2, 29, 4.

boreans themselves as living in a bright region with a well-tempered climate, but realist positions occur with regard to the Hyperboreans: Strabo 1, 3, 22 argues that the term simply applies (or should apply) to those people who live farthest to the north (cf. n. 2).

The concept of murky and marshy regions in or in the vicinity of Hyperborea also seems to fall back on a Greek tradition: Simias fr. 1 Pow. describes a journey *τηλυγέτων ἀφνειὸν Ὑπερβορέων ἀνὰ δῆμον*, “through the rich society of the far-dwelling Hyperboreans”, leading further as follows (vv. 7–8):

ἐκ δ' ἰκόμην ἐλάταισι περὶ χλωρῆσιν ἐρεμνάς
νῆσους ὑψικόμοισιν ἐπηρέεας δονάκεσσιν.

I came round about green firs to murky
islands covered by tall reeds.

Here live a people with the heads of dogs. With the Hyperborean name in Ovid thus emended so as to offer proper northern associations, the mythological tale of a water transforming men into birds may also gain in credibility. Such a transformation has been heard of in connection with the river Eridanus, which is sometimes located in the far north.¹⁴ Here it was that Phaëthon fell (*Met.* 2, 324),¹⁵ his lamenting sisters turning into poplars (345–363) and their tears into amber (364 ff.). A less known peripheral motif is that of Phaëthon's friend Cynus, who, weeping incessantly by the river banks, was turned into a swan. This was noted by Aaron J. Atsma, who connects the “marsh of the Tritonian” in *Met.* 15, 358 with the description of rivers of pitch and flames that precedes the passage (15, 340–355).¹⁶ He takes this marsh to be a “bitumen marsh”, and goes on:

The bitumen marsh is presumably the mythical swamp of the Eridanos into which Phaëthon fell after he was struck down from the chariot of the sun by Zeus with a thunderbolt. The swans of Hyperborea were said to rise from

¹⁴ Hdt. 3, 115 relates the opinion that Eridanus emerged into the northern Ocean, and it is restored in Hes. *Cat.* fr. 98, 23 Most (= fr. 150 M–W) in close proximity to the Hyperboreans.

¹⁵ Ovid locates the Eridanus in the north-west, but possibly understands it as distinct from both Po and Rhone, as he mentions these rivers elsewhere as Padus and Rhodanus (2, 258).

¹⁶ <http://www.theoi.com/Phylos/Hyperborea.html>, accessed on 1 Feb. 2011.

its waters. In Ovid's story the Hyperborean folk themselves become swans after bathing in the waters. Cf. Ovid's myth of the metamorphosis of Kyknos "the Swan", a friend of Phaethon.

I have not been able to find any sources which state that the swans of Hyperborea rose from the Eridanus¹⁷ or that the Hyperborean marsh-bathers actually turn into swans; nor does there seem to be anybody else who interprets the *Tritoniaca ... palus* in 15, 358 as a "bitumen marsh" or equates it with the Eridanus. Ovid does relate the transformation of Cycnus (one of several by that name) in *Met.* 2, 367–380; it is also mentioned in Verg. *Aen.* 10, 189–193; Phanocles fr. 6 Pow. (cited by Ps.-Lactant. on *Ov. Met.* 2, 367–380; p. 638 Magnus);¹⁸ Hyg. *Fab.* 154; schol. to Germanicus' translation of Aratus (p. 175 Breysig); and the anonymous Greek paradoxographon *De transformationibus* (p. 222 Westermann). While none of these sources explicitly states that Cycnus' metamorphosis occurred through contact with the water, a nine times repeated submersion in a stagnant mist-swept Hyperborean marsh, possibly in the vicinity of the Eridanus, may well be thought to produce a similar effect – unlike a taking to waters in Mediterranean Pallene.¹⁹

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Автор подвергает сомнению правильность рукописного предания для Ovid. *Met.* 15, 356: Hyperborea не может быть подходящим эпитетом для Паллены на Халкидике. Взамен предлагается читать Hyperborea pallente, т. е. 'тусклая', плохо освещаемая солнцем земля, лежащая на севере (ср. Verg. *Georg.* 3, 357 pallentis... umbras, что восходит к описанию киммерийцев, *Od.* XI, 16–18).

¹⁷ Cf. Philostr. *Imag.* 1, 11, Hecataeus Abd. *FGrH* 264 F 12; Lucian, *Electrum* passim.

¹⁸ On which see J. Diggle, *Euripides: Phaethon* (Cambridge 1970) 195, n. 2.

¹⁹ The question as to why the marsh is called *Tritoniaca* remains unanswered, though. Properly this does not mean "Tritonian", an epithet of several waters in North Africa (W. Huss, "Triton (2)", *DNP* 12/1 [2002] 834; LSJ s. v. Τρίτων, Τριτωνιάς, Τριτωνίς), but "belonging to (Minerva) Tritonia" (so also in *Met.* 6, 384 *Tritoniaca harundine*, "Tritonia's reed", Athena being the inventor of the flute). Possibly it is significant that Atlas and the Hesperides, who like Lake Tritonis are normally located in Libya or "the far West", in [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 2, 113. 120 are situated in Hyperborea.