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T. E. FRANKLINOS

SVMMA HARENA: the sand's surface and Ovid, *metamorphoses* 2.573.

This paper discusses the use of the collocation *summa harena* in Latin, and concludes that an alternative adjective ought to be sought to describe the sand at Ovid, *met.* 2.573.

In the second book of his *metamorphoses*, Ovid has the daughter of Coroneus tell the story of how she was transformed by Minerva into a crow (569–88). She was walking along the beach when a god of the sea caught sight of her and attempted to rape her (572–4): the virgin deity heard the victim's cry (578–80) and transformed her into a bird so that she might fly from her attacker (580–88). The brief moment with which we are concerned here is the girl's description of her coastal walk.

forma mihi nocuit. nam cum per litora lentis
passibus, ut soleo, summa spatiarer harena,
uidit et incaluit pelagi deus, utque precando
tempora cum blandis absumpsit inania uerbis,
uim parat et sequitur. fugio densumque relinquo
litus et in molli nequiquam lassor harena.

Ov. *met.* 2.572–77

She explains that, as was her custom (*ut soleo*), she was strolling along the shore (*per litora*) with slow paces (*lentis* | *passibus*), and that – as the paradoxos has it – she was walking on the sand's surface (*summa* ... *harena*). The specificity of this detail strikes me as slightly bizarre. It is true that she goes on to tell her interlocutor that she fled from the more densely-packed and firmer sand – the swash zone or beach face – when the sea-god made to pursue her (*densumque relinquo* | *litus*), and found herself being tired by the looser sand of the wrack zone (*in molli* ... *harena*). In this respect, it may make sense for her to emphasise that she was originally walking on the sand's surface and that she was undone as her feet started to sink into it, but it is nevertheless superfluous given the later reference to the differing degrees of the beach's density. It seems to make more sense to have her merely say that she was walking 'on the sand', which *summa harena* does not mean¹.

1 BÖMER (1980), 300 suggests that *summa* here is 'beinahe [ein] Epitheton *ornans*'.

The collocation *summa harena* is not uncommon, but it is always specifically employed to refer to the ‘sand’s surface’ or ‘the top of the sand or soil’, rather than to signify ‘sand’ *per se*. It occurs three times elsewhere in Ovid, at *met.* 10.653, 10.701, and 11.231. Let us take the final instance first.

est sinus Haemoniae curuos falcatus in arcus,
bracchia procurrunt, ubi, si foret altior unda,
portus erat. summis inductum est aequor harenis:
litus habet solidum, quod nec uestigia seruet
nec remoretur iter nec opertum pendeat alga.

Ov. *met.* 11.229–33²

In this ecphrastic description of a Thessalian gulf, Ovid describes the quality of the beach. The swash spreads over the surface of the sand, and, in so doing, forms a compact shore (*litus habet solidum*) that neither preserves footprints, nor hinders anyone walking over it (cf. Coroneus’ *densum litus*), nor has a decline, covered with seaweed, into the sea. Given the particular details of 232–3, it is clear that *summ*is ... *harenis* here refers quite specifically to the very top layer of the beach in question – ‘[d]er Sand war ganz oben (an der Oberfläche) mit (einer dünnen Schicht) Wasser “überzogen”’ (my emphasis), as Bömer puts it³.

The other instances of the collocation under consideration in the *metamorphoses* both occur in Ovid’s telling of the Atalanta-myth. The first instance occurs at the start of the race, where Hippomenes and Atalanta both dash forward after the starting signal and skim the sand’s surface with their feet.

signa tubae dederunt, cum carcere pronus uterque
emicat et summam celeri pede libat harenam.

Ov. *met.* 10.652–3

The two runners are moving so quickly, we are told, that their swift feet (*celeri pede*) only graze the very top of the sand (*summam* ... *harenam*). The image of a rapidly moving person touching only the upper surface of the ground finds a parallel in Vergil’s depiction of Camilla (*per summa uolaret | gramina* (*Aen.* 7.808–9)), but more pertinent is his discussion of how to raise a horse suitable for war or for racing.

at tribus exactis ubi quarta accesserit aestas,
carpere mox gyrum incipiat gradibusque sonare
compositis, sinuetque alterna uolumina crurum,
sitque laboranti similis; tum cursibus auras
tum uocet, ac per aperta uolans ceu liber habenis
aequora uix summa uestigia ponat harena.

Verg. *g.* 3.190–5

- 2 I have altered the punctuation of the OCT from which the text is taken. The shore is firm (*litus habet solidum*) precisely because the swash compresses the surface of the sand over which it flows (*summ*is *inductum est aequor harenis*); we should punctuate with a colon after *harenis*.
- 3 BÖMER (1980), 300.

So fast does such a horse move that, as it flies across the open plain, its feet scarcely make contact with the very surface of the sand. Again, *summa ... harena* is used pointedly to refer to the uppermost level of the ground. This rapid movement of Atalanta's and Hippomenes' feet over the *summa harena* is recalled by Ovid toward the end of Venus' narration of the myth. Troubled by the ingratitude of the lovers whom she has brought together, Venus chooses to make an example of them lest her godhead be spurned again in the future (*met.* 10.684–5): she transforms them into lions.

poena leuis uisa est. ergo modo leuia fuluae
colla iubae uelant, digiti curuantur in ungues,
ex umeris armi fiunt, in pectora totum
pondus abit, summae cauda uerruntur harenae.

Ov. *met.* 10.698–701

In a charmingly witty turn, Ovid depicts the erstwhile lovers' leonine tails sweeping the uppermost layer of the ground, where previously it had been their feet that had done so; even after their metamorphosis, their manner of gliding swiftly across the sand's surface is allowed to them in some way. The collocation *summa harena* appears thus, when associated with movement, to belong to descriptions of rapidity. This is not an idea conveyed by the verb *spatiari* at *met.* 2.573, nor by *lenti passus* (2.572–3), and offers another reason for doubting the paradoxos.

The phrase in question occurs in a number of other places all of which specifically describe the surface of the sand or soil. These may be dealt with more succinctly. The collocation occurs twice elsewhere in the *georgics*. At 2.232, Vergil speaks of the topsoil needing to be levelled off after a pit has been refilled, and, at 3.493, he describes a sacrifice during which the topsoil alone is soaked by the blood of the victim. In Lucan, it is used to refer to the uppermost layer of sand that is removed to create a shallow trench in which to burn Pompey's corpse (8.754), and to the surface on which his ashes end up lying (8.856). It also refers to the alluvial deposits – necessarily forming a new topsoil – from which wealthy Arimaspians panned for gold (7.756). Livy has the collocation once in a description of people digging for freshwater on a beach: as soon as its surface was removed (*uix deducta summa harena erat*), *scaturriges* burst forth (44.33.3).

In the light of this, it seems to me that an alternative to *summa* ought to be considered at *met.* 2.573. An adjective of spondaic (or anapaestic) shape is desirable, and a number of possibilities present themselves. The passage of the *metamorphoses* in question closely remodels a line of Vergil's first *georgic*⁴.

tum cornix plena pluuiam uocat improba uoce
et sola in sicca secum spatiatur harena.

Verg. *g.* 1.388–9

The collocation *sicca ... harena* is a common one⁵, and a comment on the dryness of the beach would not be entirely out of place in the *metamorphoses* when we consider that it would provide an elegant contrast to the pursuit of the watery *pelagi deus*, just as the dryness of the beach in the *georgics* is set against the predicted rain. That being said, it is from the *densum litus* (made firm by

4 For a discussion of the relationship between these two passages, see KEITH (1992) 29–31.

5 e.g. Ov. *met.* 2.262, 15.268, *her.* 18.33 (Dörrie); Prop. 2.3.5; Luc. 4.588; Manil. 1.910, 4.669, 5.730.

the swash) that the princess runs, and it is in the dry, looser sand that she struggles (*in molli ... harena*)⁶: *sicca* could scarcely produce the necessary sense. It is possible, indeed, that by not writing *sicca*, Ovid is offering a correction of sorts to Vergil's suggestion that the crow walks on dry sand; in so doing, he may have an eye on Vergil's source, Aratus, where the crow does walk at the water's edge (953).

ἢ που καὶ λακέρυζα παρ' ἡϊόνι προύχουσι
κύματος ἐρχομένου χέρσῳ ὑπέτυψε κορώνη,
ἢ που καὶ ποταμοῖο ἐβάψατο μέχρι παρ' ἄκρους
ῥίμους ἐκ κεφαλῆς, ἢ καὶ μάλα πᾶσα κολυμβᾷ,
ἢ πολλὴ στρέφεται παρ' ὕδωρ παχέα κρώζουσα.

Arat. 949–53

Another possibility would be to draw attention to the daughter of Coroneus' vulnerability as she wended her way along the beach: she may well be lonely, and soon to be taken as the lover of a god, as Ariadne before her.

desertam in sola miseram se cernat harena.

Catul. 64.57

This phrase – *sola ... harena* – is paralleled at Mart. 1.48.57. Neither *sicca* nor *sola* would affect the mannered alliteration of *met.* 2.573.

A further possibility might be the very Ovidian *fulua*⁸. The description of the princely maiden walking along the beach is recast by Ovid in his final book of the *epistulae ex Ponto*, as he himself walks along the beach and is accosted by *Fama*⁹.

nam mihi, cum fulua solus spatiarer harena,
uisa est a tergo pinna dedisse sonum.

Ov. Pont. 4.4.11–12

It is not at all implausible that this passage also drew the adjective *fulua* from the daughter of Coroneus' description of herself in the *metamorphoses*. I would incline toward reading *fulua* in place of *summa* at *met.* 2.573. The source of the corruption could be various: (i) *summa* and *fulua* are both frequently used by Ovid in agreement with *harena*; (ii) were a scribe to misread an 'f' for an 's'-longa followed by a series of minims, the change from one to the other is not difficult to imagine; (iii) there is a not inconsiderable amount of sibilance in the line which might have encouraged the palaeographical error; (iv) the proximity of *harena* and *summa* at *met.* 2.586–7 (*currebam, nec ut ante pedes retinebat harena, | sed summa tollebar humo*) may have had some influence on the corruption.

6 My thanks to Prof. Stephen Heyworth for discussing this passage with me *per litteras*. He has wondered about reading *firma* at *met.* 2.573, but notes that the collocation *firma harena* is unparalleled, and that Ovid does not use *firmus* of the ground elsewhere. He also notes that *ut soleo* serves to link the past behaviour of Coroneus' daughter and the regular activity of crows on beaches, pacing the surface of the denser sand nearer the water looking for food.

7 We might also compare Lucan 9.882 (*nuda ... harena*).

8 cf. *met.* 2.865, 9.36, 10.716, 11.355, 11.499, *tr.* 4.6.31; see also Verg. g. 3.110, *Aen.* 5.374, 6.643, 12.276, 12.741.

9 For a discussion of the relationship between these two passages, see FRANKLINOS (forthcoming).

BÖMER (1980) = F. BÖMER, *P. Ovidius Naso Metamorphosen*, Buch X–XI, Heidelberg (1980).

FRANKLINOS (forthcoming) = T. E. FRANKLINOS, 'Ovid, *ex Ponto* 4: An Intratextually Cohesive Book'.

KEITH (1992) = A. KEITH, *The Play of Fictions: Studies in Ovid's Metamorphoses Book 2*, Ann Arbor, MI (1992).

DR T. E. FRANKLINOS

Oxford



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