When Cicero looked back under Caesar’s domination to his unhappy role in the civil war, he compared himself, as a man of foresight and an actual Augur, to Amphiaraus, quoting from an unnamed tragedy:

\[ prudens et sciens \] / \[ ad pestem ante oculos positam \].

In Statius’ *Thebaid*, emulation of the *Aeneid*, and in particular of the events leading up to the outbreak of war in *Aeneid* 7, contribute to the greater complexity of Amphiaraus’ character and actions, but Statius maintains his traditional persona as one of the two virtuous leaders in the gruesome tale of *Seven Against Thebes*. Although Adrastus too is honourable, in Statius as in the Greek tradition, the myth itself required that he should give way to the pressure of his son in law and the other more power-hungry leaders. And Adrastus does not only fall short of heroism by showing his weakness as a leader, but also because it is his role to survive. He cannot compare with Amphiaraus in tragic grandeur, since he does not have to face the knowledge of his own certain death: this ordeal is peculiar to

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1 The quotation is perhaps from Accius’ *Eriphyle*, cf. trag. 145 (2nd ed. p. 250, 3rd ed. p. 296). Amphiaraus is both devout and honest, and a loyal ally of Adrastus throughout the Greek tradition: compare Aeschylus Th. 609–12, in which even Eteocles speaks of him as self-controlled, just, good, pious, and a great prophet: \[ σώφρων δίκαιος ἀγαθὸς εὐσεβὴς ἀνήρ / μέγας προφήτης \]. The same passage contrasts his associates as “unHoly and loud-mouted”, and foretells his death by engulfment.

2 For the early Greek tradition on Amphiaraus see Gantz 1993, II.506–15, and the detailed analysis of evolution from saga to surviving texts of Bener 1945. Bener shows how Amphiaraus is associated with the power of prophecy and death by engulfment, and his character is favourably assessed from *Odyssey* 15.245–7 through Pindar *O. 6.12*, (cf. N. 9.13–4, for his receipt of evil omens against the expedition) to Aeschylus Th. 571–2 and Euripides *Ph.* 171 and 1109, also *Supp.* 157. This version of his prophecy, developed to include his foreknowledge of his own death (cf. Bener 1945, 35), persists in the Hellenistic tradition, cf. Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.2–4 and 3.6.8; Diod. 4.65; Hyginus *Fabulae* 73 (based on Euripides *Alcmaeon*; Bener, 28). But even Bener’s diligence can only reconstruct a Greek narrative of the omen taking at Argos from Statius’ own text (Bener, 22–3). I am most grateful to Valéry Berlincourt for making Bener’s work available to me.
Amphiaraus, first identified in *Theb.* 1.42 (*laurigeri subitos an uatis hiatus?*) by the extraordinary mode of his death, but also by his prophetic status. It is his foreknowledge that makes him a tragic hero, and the manner in which he acquires and tries to control this knowledge which Statius emphasizes in the scenes I wish to discuss.

Aeschylus had played down the myth of Eriphyle’s treachery in the *Seven Against Thebes,* and Statius will do the same. Although Amphiaraus is brought into the epic action through the history of the fatal necklace, coveted by the *coniunx perituri uatis* (2.299, cf. 299–305), Statius deliberately subordinates the motif of domestic treachery so as to give full importance to Amphiaraus’ moment of truth at the taking of the auspices at Argos. I would like to consider first three aspects of this episode in relation to the epic tradition of his Greek and Roman predecessors: the forms of divination practised by Melampus and Amphiaraus; the nature of the portent sent to them by the gods; and the reaction of both prophet and poet to human foreknowledge of evil destiny.

Five forms of divination were known at Rome, shared between the *disciplina etrusca* as practised by the haruspices and the *auspicia* of Roman augurs. As Cicero lists them in *De Divinatione* 2.49, the haruspices conducted three kinds of divination: extispicy, by examining the entrails of a sacrificial victim, especially the liver: healthy entrails would convey divine blessing on an enterprise such as joining battle on the coming day, and diseased or distorted entrails warn against it; to this he adds the study of *fulgura* and of *ostenta.* The other two forms of divination were the function of the augurs, and concerned the behaviour of birds, either the *tripudium* of caged fowls, or the formal taking of auspices to observe the flight and song of prescribed birds, which were classified as either *alites praepetes,* whose flight signified divine consent or refusal by its position and direction, or *oscines,* indicating divine will through their song (from *os + canere*). Before a commander left Rome on campaign or joined battle, his augurs took

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3 On the myth as modified by Aeschylus’ pro-Theban orientation see Hutchinson 1985, 132–3; Aeschylus does not include the tale of Eriphyle’s betrayal reported in *Odyssey* 15.245–7, which comes to dominate the tale of Amphiaraus’ death and Alcmaeon’s revenge in Sophocles’ *Eriphyle* and Euripides’ *Alcmaeon.*

4 Strangely there do not seem to have been any discussions since the lucid and quite detailed analysis of Vessey 1973, 153–9. Besides his pages I have found Burck 1979, 300–51 and Snijders’ commentary most useful.