

Hyperbaton in Obsequens's Prodigiorum liber

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Abstract

The book known as *Prodigiorum liber*, an inventory of extraordinary phenomena that were thought to foretell important events, written at the end of the fourth century by Obsequens, can be classified as a "specialized" text, with a particular language (*sermo prodigialis*) and a specific style. Given the "technical" nature of such a writing, where the emphasis lies on conciseness and clarity, it is expected that the occurrence of a topical figure such as the *hyperbaton* will not be very common. The purpose of this study is to analyze way of achievement and the role of this figure in *Prodigiorum liber*. Following the examination, it is observed that the *hyperbaton*, present in a large enough number of examples, appears mainly as a pragmatic means of highlighting, its use as a stylistic ornament, with various expressive valences, being very restricted.

1. Introduction

Author of which little is known, Julius Obsequens wrote at the end of the fourth century¹ a book containing the inventory of prodigies that announced important events in 564 A.U.C. (190 B.C.) until 743 A.U.C. (11 B.C.). Known as *Prodigiorum liber* or *De prodigiis liber*², the work, without literary pretensions, inventorying extraordinary phenomena, predictions of special events, which took place four centuries before, seems to address a heterogeneous audience, made up of both intellectuals interested in curiosities, representatives of the political elite, who recognized the propagandistic potential of the interpretation of divine signs, and people in whose mentality was well rooted the belief in the meanings of prodigies (*prodigia*) and the need for expiatory rituals (*procurationes*)³. The writing, which has, as main source, the text of Titus Livius (or an epitome of it)⁴, follows a well-established, rigid pattern, close to that of analysis⁵. The events are presented in chronological order, the years being specified according to the eponymous consuls. Each sequence begins by mentioning the place where the extraordinary event took place, followed by a brief exposition of the predictions and their interpretation.

Written in a clear and quite neat Latin, the text is characterized by conciseness and simplicity. Preference for parataxis, ellipsis of the verb *esse* from compound passive forms, abundance of participles, reduction of hypotaxis and limitation to the use of certain subordinates, low weight of stylistic procedures, repetitive formulas, specific lexicon led to the identification of a particular style of such "technical" writing, called by Luterbacher (1904, p. 43) *Prodigienstil*. Although the exegetes gave special importance to the

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¹ See the discussion regarding the author and the date of the elaboration of the paper in Trixi (ed. 2017, p. XVII–XXIII); Mastandrea (ed. 2005, p. V–VII), Picone (1974).

² The first edition was published in 1508, in Venice. About the discovery of the manuscript and the first editions, see Mastandrea (ed. 2005, p. XII–XVIII). A list of editions of the Latin text can be consulted in ed. 2017, p. LV–LVI.

³ On the purpose of writing the paper so many centuries after the events, see also Santini (1988, p. 212). The political and social dimension of the interpretation of divine signs should not be neglected either. We wonder if it could be a didactic intention (compiling a textbook to instruct young people on the extraordinary supernatural phenomenon, miracles and their influence in interpreting historical events in the past).

⁴ See, for example, the discussion of sources in Moore (1904); Schmidt (1968); Santini (1988, p. 215); Trixi (2017, p. XII–XVII).

⁵ Santini (1988, p. 215–216). On *Annales Maximi*, see, for example, Alfonsi (1973); Frier (1999).

study of the language specific to this type of literature (e.g. [Luterbacher, 1904](#); [Rocca, 1978](#); [Rocca, ed. 2017](#), p. XXXI–LIII), called *sermo prodigialis*, Obsequens's writing was analyzed from the point of view of stylistic particularities, a number of figures being identified (e.g. alliteration, homoioteleuton, polyptoton, chiasmus, climax), whose use, as [Santini](#) observes ([1988](#), p. 226), is emphatic, slightly naive and provincial. A careful reading of the writing of Obsequens points out to another type of topical "figure", the *hyperbaton*.

2. Methodological clarifications

The *hyperbaton* affects the contiguity of linguistic units (which are syntactically-semantically related) by introducing one or more words into them. Considered only a stylistic figure for a long time and studied as such, occurring in Latin literary texts (e.g. [Berger, 1942](#), p. 325)⁶, lately, the *hyperbaton* has been analyzed mainly from the point of view of its pragmatic role (e.g. [Spevak, Powell, Pinkster](#)).

Although, in general, in Latin, the order of words in a sentence was quite lax, modern researchers have observed in late Latin the tendency to stabilize the topic within syntactic groups, especially nominal ones ([Herman, 2001](#), p. 100), by keeping the determinant next to the center word. However, although with a more restricted use, the hyperbaton continues to be found in late Latin, in literary texts, but also in other categories of writings⁷, in which, most of the time, it has no ornamental role, but pragmatic, as in current speech⁸. As Obsequens's text falls into the category of "specialized" technical ones, where the emphasis lies on conciseness and clarity, it is expected for the use of hyperbaton as an ornament to be quite restricted. Our analysis aims both at the use of the *hyperbaton* as a pragmatic means of highlighting, and at emphasizing the possible expressive valences of the dislocations in *Prodigiorum liber*.

We will call the simple noun group the syntactic-semantic unit formed by a noun and an adjective or noun determinant in the genitive; the complex nominal group, the unit consisting of the noun-center and two or more determinants; the simple prepositional group, the syntactic unit formed by the preposition and the noun it precedes; the complex prepositional group, the unit consisting of the preposition and the nominal group governed by the preceding name; the verbal group, the syntactic unit consisting of a verb-center and its obligatory (complements) and optional (circumstantial) determinants. Syntactic dislocations involve the "breaking" of these groups by interposing one or more elements.

In *Prodigiorum liber*, the most frequent dislocations occur in nominal groups, which have a higher degree of cohesion, but can also be found in prepositional and verbal groups. The dislocating element is a word or group of words, a particle or an entire sentence. The most striking situations are, of course, those in which the disjunctive does not belong to the group it "breaks", the intention being usually to obtain stylistic effects⁹.

3. Hyperbata in *Prodigiorum liber*

Part of the dislocations encountered in *Prodigiorum liber* is imposed by the specific pattern of these writings, in which, as a rule, the sequences begin by mentioning the time and place where the occurrence of the extraordinary phenomenon is observed. If the year is announced by an ablative construction, preceding the entire sequence in which the events that occurred during that year are presented, the place is specified in the opening of each segment that contains a new prodigy. Inevitably, these circumstances are separated from the regent verb by one or more words (e.g. In Gallia tres soles et tres lunæ visæ.¹⁰ – 32 – "In Gaul, three

⁶See also [Marouzeau \(1922, p. 99–118; 1953, p. 10–12\)](#).

⁷[Spevak \(2012, p. 255–256\)](#). Cf. [Herman \(1985, p. 333–334\)](#).

⁸We include in the category of hyperbaton also what some researchers call "inversion", i.e., the change of the order of words within the same syntactic group (cf. [Panhuis, 1982, p. 73, n. 8](#)). On the occurrence of syntactic dislocations in five texts of different invoices from late Latin, see [Spevak \(2012\)](#).

⁹We notice an increase in the number of dislocations towards the end of the writing, where the events of the late republican period are presented, for which the sources had given Obsequens more information.

¹⁰We selected the examples from the [2017](#) edition (comparing the text with the one from the [2005](#) edition).

suns and three moons were seen.¹¹”, where the circumstantial *in Gallia* is separated from the regent verb *visæ*, elliptically by the auxiliary *esse*, by two simple nominal groups, which make up the multiple subject). Such dislocations find their practical utility in placing events unequivocally in space and time¹².

Another series of dislocations, imposed by the “technical” character of the text, is that of repetitive formulas. In the example: *Fulmine pleraque decussa*¹³ (15, 17, 24, 47, 49, 52 – “many others were struck down by lightning”), recurring formula in the text¹⁴, placing *fulmine* in the initial position and separating it from the verb (elliptically from the auxiliary *esse*) through the subject *pleraque*¹⁵ makes the emphasis fall on it, as a force that produces disaster¹⁶. Moreover, the sequence *fulmine pleraque* becomes stereotypical in the text and can be followed by other verbs, depending on how strong the action of lightning is and its result: *fulmine pleraque icta* (20, 53, 69); *Fulmine pleraque deiecta* (25, 29); *fulmine pleraque tacta* (36, 46, 68). The degree of cohesion of this sequence (in which *fulmine* and *pleraque* are not syntactically linked, however) is so great that the introduction of other elements into it seems to produce a dislocation: *Fulmine Romæ et circa pleraque tacta* (36) (“By lightening, in and around Rome, many more have been touched”).

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Within the *complex prepositional group*, the dislocation, optional and without representing a process of stylistic ornamentation, common in classical Latin, is done by interposing between the preposition and noun an element in the genitive, syntactically belonging to the nominal group centered on the noun preceded by preposition: *per hostium classem adnatavit* (60a)¹⁷ (“swam through the fleet of enemies”); *supra deorum simulacra* (47) (“above the statues of the gods”); *in agrorum divisione* (33) (“on the division of fields”). The anaphoric pronoun *is*, in the plural genitive, according to the classical model, occurs only once in this position¹⁸: *in eorum finibus* (21)¹⁹ (“within their borders”).

A special situation is represented by the construction of *vervecum de grege pars* (14) (“part of a herd of wether sheeps”), where the location of the explanatory genitive *vervecum* before the preposition is a stylistic ornament. The topic, unusual in Obsequens (cf. *gregem vervecum* – 52)²⁰, captures and draws attention both to the victims of the phenomenon and to the idea of partition, suggested by the use of the ablative with *de* instead of the partitive genitive.

The whole nominal group, with a *pars* center, of which the other three components are part, is, in fact, the disjunctive of a verbal group, *fulgure vervecum de grege pars exanimata* (14) (“a part of a herd of wether

¹¹The translation is ours. We tried, as much as possible, to provide equivalences as close as possible to the text.

¹²However, there are a few situations in which the word with the semantic function of Locative is not in the initial position, this being given to other elements. E.g. *Mædorum gens in Macedonia provinciam cruenta vastavit* (53) (“The people of the Medes, in Macedonia, bloodily devastated the province”), the emphasis falls on the ethnonym in the first position, the attack of an oriental population being anticipated by a series of previously exposed prodigies and the failure of the expiatory ritual; *in Macedonia* (with the semantic function of Locative) brings additional information.

¹³Cf. Tit. Liv., 25, 7: *non ictæ modo fulminibus sed etiam decussa*.

¹⁴The expression can be accompanied by other elements, meant to specify the place where the phenomenon takes place: *Fulmine pleraque decussa in Palatio* (14).

¹⁵Here with the pragmatic role of “Topic” (element about which the speaker chooses to provide information to the receiver); see Pinkster (2021, p. 830, 951).

¹⁶The pragmatic role is what Pinkster (2021, p. 839, 951) calls “Focus” (it provides important information about the subject for the addressee). On the singular *fulmine*, seen as the result of a single action, of a single god, see Gusso (2005, p. 46).

¹⁷The term *hostium* has the role of resuming, in fact, an information already known from the phrase occurring in the previous sentence, *turres hostium*, where the genitive is positioned after the determined name. Cf. Spevak (2010, p. 168), who observes that, if not anaphoric, in classical Latin, the genitive is placed after the regent.

¹⁸In Obsequens, an anaphoric value, similar to *is*, may have the pronouns of reinforcement *ipse*: *in ipsius conspectu* (69) (“under his gaze”); *flamma ex ipsius ore nata* (14) (“a flame rising from its snout”). In this last example, the whole prepositional group governed by *ex* produces, in turn, the separation of the noun *flamma* from *nata*.

¹⁹E.g. Cæs., *B.G.*, I, 1; I, 31. On this order within the prepositional group (positioning the possessive genitive to the left of the center-noun), see, for instance, Devine & Stephens (2006, p. 361).

²⁰The author prefers the usual order, which involves the location of the explanatory genitive after the noun *grex*: *grex ovium* (28, 31); *grex luporum* (33); *grex piscium* (68).

sheeps was killed by lightning”), with the *exanimanta* center (predicate verb, elliptic from the auxiliary *esse*). The occurrence of *fulgure*, having in this structure the same emphatic role that *fulmine* has in the ones presented above, a *hapax legomenon* in Obsequens²¹, can support the interpretation of the sequence as having a higher degree of expressiveness.

There is only one case in which the prepositional group is dislocated by the enclitic *-que*, which forms a common body with the preposition *circa*²²: *Soles tres fulserunt, circaque solem imum corona spicæ similis in orbem emicuit* (68) (“Three suns shone and around the bottom one, a disc-shaped spike-like crown fell”).

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Within *complex noun groups*, the determinative in the genitive is usually positioned after or before the noun and adjective phrase²³.

However, the text of the pamphlet also offers examples of optional *hyperbata*, in which a word in the genitive, syntactically related to the noun-center, is the disjunctive of the phrase²⁴: *Padus... ingentem viperarum vim reliquit* (68) (“The forest... left behind a huge crowd of vipers”) – the pragmatic role of the whole nominal group is that of “Focus”; the alliteration, *viperarum vim*, further marks the dimensions of the phenomenon.

Such a framing of the genitive can indicate the unity of the construction, setting its limits (Spevak, 2012, p. 261), but it can also have an emphatic role: *simulacrum Martis ligneum* (42) (literally “wooden statue of Mars”), where the name of the god is relevant to the interpretation of the prodigy²⁵.

In the excerpt: *ingens signorum sonus armorumque horrendo clamore auditus* (57) (literally: “a loud trumpet sound and weapons with a frightening noise was heard”), where the expected topic would be *ingens sonus signorum armorumque*, there seems to be a “double internal hyperbaton”, because, within the nominal group, the genitive *signorum* separates the adjective from the determined noun, and the noun-center, in turn, separates the two genitives in a close coordination relationship through the enclitic *-que*. The possibility of a *lapsus calami*, instead of a nominative *clamor*, on which the *armorum* depends, the ablative being used, would not be excluded here either.

In the fragment *filia eius virgo* (37) (“his daughter, virgin”), the pronoun separates the apposition from the determined noun, and the pragmatic role of this apposition is that of appendix (“Tail”)²⁶, which brings an additional clarification.

Dislocations within *nominal groups* can also be produced by elements that are syntactically unrelated to them²⁷. Modern researchers have identified several types of disjunctors²⁸: a. enclitic particles, welded by the previous term (*-que*, *-ve*, *-ne*); postpositive connectors (*autem*, *vero*, *enim*²⁹, which usually rank second in the statement); particles and focusing postpositive adverbs (such as *quidem*, *quoque*, *etiam*, *vel*, *modo*, *solum*³⁰); b. subordinate conjunctions (e.g. *cum*, *quia*, *postquam*, *si*)³¹, which are normally positioned in the subordinate opening; c. nouns, verbs or nominal or verbal groups; d. sentences.

- a. The dislocation produced by elements of the first three categories is poorly represented in Obsequens. Among the enclitics, only the coordinating conjunction *-que* is used, which has its usual role of closely

²¹ See also Trixi (ed. 2017, n. 76, p. 73).

²² The combination of bisyllabic prepositions with this enclitic was also rare in classical Latin (Spevak, 2010, p. 18, n. 12).

²³ See also Spevak (2012, p. 260), who finds that such dislocations also occur in the authors of the late period.

²⁴ Spevak (2010, p. 272–275) calls this type of dislocation “internal hyperbaton”.

²⁵ The overthrow of the statue of a deity of war, from which the Romans claimed their origin, could only bring gloomy predictions about the fate of military troops (which we learn from the following sentence that they were defeated by the Lusitanians).

²⁶ See Cabrilla (2019, p. 227); Pinkster (2021, p. 857).

²⁷ A number of researchers believe that this is only a real dislocation, as the cohesion of the group is “broken” and its coherence is lost.

²⁸ Spevak (2012, p. 254); Pinkster (2021, p. 1099).

²⁹ Cf. Spevak (2010, p. 16).

³⁰ Spevak (2010, p. 20). Cf. the part dedicated by Devine & Stephens (2006, p. 249–275) to focusing binders.

³¹ Pinkster (2021, p. 1099); Spevak (2010, p. 14).

linking two words of the same kind and with the same syntactic role (e.g. *hominum boumque cadavera* – 10 – “corpses of men and cattle”). The conjunction *-que*, placed after the first element (which can be both the noun-center and its determinant), “separates” the noun phrase, but has the same role of highlighting the connection with the previous sequence: *Procellosa tempestate tecta diruta stragesque agrorum facta*. (14) (“The roofs fell due to a severe storm and the fields were destroyed”); *...sol noctu visus, eiusque lux aliquamdiu fuit visa*. (27) (“... the sun was seen at night and its light was visible for a long time”); *Puer aruspicum iussu crematus cinisque eius in mare deiectus*. (25) (“A <deformed> child was burned at the command of the haruspices and his ashes were thrown into the sea”)³².

The *autem* connector is the only one of the second category of dislocating elements that appears in *Prodigiorum liber* (only once: *Abrogaverunt autem hi* – 70 – “but they dismissed them”), yet, in the emphatically open sequence of the predicate verb, it occupies its usual place in the enunciation (the second position).

Of the focal elements, only *quoque* acts as disjunctive for a nominal group³³: *Ilio a C. Fimbria incenso, cum aedes quoque Minervae deflagrasset, inter ruinas simulacrum antiquissimum inviolatum stetit...* (56b) (“When Ilio was set on fire by C. Fimbria, after even the temple of Minerva burned down, there remained standing, among the ruins, untouched, a very old statue...”) – example in which *quoque* dislocates the two components of the phrase *aedes Minervae*, which it highlights (the significance of the prodigy being the reconstruction of the fortress, which is mentioned below).

- b. Common in the text of Obsequens are the dislocations caused by the subordinate conjunction *cum*.

Usually, the term that separates the conjunction from the rest of the subordinate is the stressed one (the prediction is directly related to it): e.g. *Pireum Sylla cum oppugnaret diuturno labore, unus miles eius aggerem ferens exanimatus fulmine*. (56b) (“While Sulla was attacking Piræus with long efforts, one of his soldiers, who was carrying reinforcement materials, was killed by lightning”)³⁴; *Cæsar cum in campum Martium exercitum deduceret, sex vultures apparuerunt*. (69) (“When Cæsar /Octavian our emphasis/ led the army to the field of Mars, six eagles appeared”)³⁵. In the example of *P. Elvius eques Romanus a ludis Romanis cum in Apuliam reverteretur, in agro Stellati filia eius (...) fulmine icta* (37), the whole group of the subject and an optional component of the predicate chain are separated from the rest of the sentence by *cum*.

- c. Dislocations produced by names, nominal groups or prepositional groups are not numerous.

The disjunctive can be a nominal group that includes a numeral: *stella hora undecima crinita sub septemtrionis sidere exorta, convertit omnium oculos* (68) (“a comet that appeared at eleven o'clock under the northern region of the sky turned all eyes <to it>”) – the phrase *stella crinita* has the meaning of “comet”, and the information related to the moment of the comet's appearance, inserted between the two components of the phrase, is essential³⁶; *Stella per dies septem insignis arsit* (68) (“an incomparable star lit up for seven days”) – the epithet *insignis*, with an ornamental role, is separated from the noun determined by a complex prepositional phrase³⁷.

The insertion of the phrase *uno tempore*, with adverbial value in the example *Tres uno tempore virgines*

³²If the two previous examples contained *prodigia*, here it is about *procuratio* (religious atonement ceremony), necessarily involving, in this situation, the development of the two actions (burning and throwing ashes into the sea), whose connection is highlighted by its use of *-que*.

³³Its role here is not that of a simple additive, in a descriptive context (adding another edifice to a series of several burned buildings), but rather argumentative. See also Orlandini (2001, p. 211–212).

³⁴*Cum* separates both the complement *Pireum* and the subject *Sylla* from the rest of the sentence they are part of.

³⁵The prodigy served the propaganda of Octavian (by associating him with Romulus). See also Gussó (ed. 2005, n. 12, p. 249).

³⁶The phenomenon, which took place in 44 BC, played an important role in Cæsar's apotheosis, the comet being interpreted as his soul received into heaven (Suet., *Ces.*, 1, 88); the star was called *sidus Iulius* (Hor., *Carm.*, 1.12.47) and was represented on coins from the Augustan era. Of course, the interpretation of the phenomenon had a propagandistic purpose.

³⁷The importance of the prodigy also seems to be underlined by the odd number.

Vestales nobilissima (37) (“At the same time three vestal virgins of the noblest nation”) separates the numeral *tres* from the rest of the nominal group, emphasizing it.

Sometimes the hyperbaton, used as an ornament, is accompanied by another stylistic figure (e.g. alliteration: *os flamma ferrugineum ostendit* – 52) (“the flame had a rusty mouth”).

Dislocations caused by verbs or verbal groups (verbal hyperbaton)³⁸ also have ornamental value.

These dislocations are not pragmatically motivated, but used for stylistic reasons, being present especially towards the end of the nominal group (see also Spevak, 2012, p. 265)³⁹: *cum et imperio et maximos haberet exercitus* (56a) (“because he had so much supreme power, as well as a very large army”); *...odore intolerabili <et> mortifero vapore gravem pestilentiam fecerunt pecorum hominumque* (30) (“by an unbearable miasma and a deadly exhalation they caused a serious disease of flocks and people”) – where the predicate verb “breaks” the cohesion of the nominal group, separating the genitives from the determined noun.

In *Prodigiorum liber*, such dislocations often occur in phrases that express the type of foresight, highlighting them: *...fruges et tempestates portendit bonas* (47) (“... foretold harvests and good times”); *civiles portendere discordias* (48) (“predicted civil misunderstandings”); *Proditum est memoria Tiberium Gracchum, quo die periit, tristia neglexisse omnia* (27a) (“It is said that Tiberius Gracchus, on the day he died, neglected the omens of evil”).

Rarely, the dislocated components of a nominal phrase are at a great distance from each other⁴⁰, the stylistic intention being to increase the effect produced by the supernatural phenomenon: *In aede Larum flamma a fastigio ad summum columen penetravit innoxia*. (41) (“In the temple of the Lari, a flame that does not burn has penetrated from the pediment to the top of the roof”) – the phrase *flamma... innoxia* is separated from the verbal group with center *penetravit*; *Mons Aetna maioribus solito arsit ignibus*. (26) (“Mount Aetna burned with more fire than usual”).

Within the simple nominal group *caput iocineris* (“tip of the liver”), consisting of the noun and its determinant in the genitive, an expression belonging to the technical language of the divinatory art, the disjunction produced by the verb is meant to mark, in context, the importance of *exta tristia* (“unfavourable entrails”): *Rutilius Lupus spretis religionibus cum in extis caput non invenisset iocineris, amisso exercitu in praelio occisus*. (55)⁴¹ (“Rutilius Lupus, because he despised religious beliefs, after not finding the tip of his liver in his bowels, losing his army, was killed in battle”).

In the nominal predicate, the position of the copula between the predicative noun and the subject can also be considered a dislocation: *adversa fuerunt fulmina* (65a) (“lightning was against him”); *Ipsi Caesari ...generosa fuit ad resistendum constantia*. (68) („Caesar /Octavian/ himself... proved a great perseverance to resist”). The expressive value of the figure can be enhanced by the addition of another element: *Tanta fuit Lunensibus pestilentia ut iacentibus in publicum passim cadaveribus qui funerarent defuerint* (22) (“So great was the disease for those of Luna, that, although the corpses lay everywhere in public places, those who would bury them were missing”). The emphasis is on the intensive adjective, which emphatically occupies the initial position.

- d. The hyperbaton produced by an entire sentence is also used as a stylistic ornament: *vulturum et aliarum alitum quibus strages cadaverum pabulo est ingens vis exercitum advolavit*. (70) (“A huge onslaught of eagles and other birds fed by the pile of corpses flew to the army”) – the members of the nominal group *vulturum et aliarum alitum... vis* are separated by a whole relative subordinate.

³⁸ Adams (1971).

³⁹ Spevak (2012, p. 265) is of the opinion that, in the nominal phrases, their stylistic purpose is to mark its limits.

⁴⁰ Powell (2010, p. 174–176) uses the phrase “long-range hyperbaton” for this type of dislocation.

⁴¹ The expression, without dislocation, has several occurrences, but in contexts where the prodigy is announced bluntly, without being recorded the consequences: *Catone consule immolante exta tabuerunt, caput iocineris inventum non est* (35); *Apud adem Apollinis decemviris immolantibus caput iocineris non fuit, sacrificantibus anguis ad aram inventus*. (47); *Herennio consuli bis immolanti caput iocineris defuit*. (52).

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Within the *verbal group*, the disjunction is given by the inclusion of one or more allogenic elements in the predicate chain.

Lucum Furiarum cum Mithridates succenderet, risus exauditus ingens sine auctore (56) (“When Mithridates set fire to the sacred grove of the Furies, a loud laugh was heard without knowing from whom”) – the cohesion of the verbal group with center *succenderet* and obligatory determinant *lucum* (with the syntactic function of direct complement) is broken by the subordinate conjunction *cum*, as well as the subject *Mithridates*.

...bovem flamma ex ipsius ore nata non lesit (14) (“on a bull a flame from its snout did not hurt him”) – *bovem*, the obligatory complement of the verb-predicate *lesit*, with the pragmatic function of “Topic”, is positioned in the opening of the sequence, the two elements of this verbal group framing the nominal group with center *flamma*.

Dislocation can also affect the verbal group that contains an adverbial component: *quod immunde sua templa fœdarentur* (55) (“because its temples have been shamelessly defiled”).

4. Conclusions

Following our analysis, we noticed that, despite the “technical” character of the writing, the *hyperbaton* is present in *Prodigiorum liber*, but is rarely used as a stylistic ornament. The aridity of the text, the enslavement in certain canons that force the presentation of phenomena in a certain order (first the prodigy, then the result and its interpretation) make the role of the *hyperbaton*, a predominantly pragmatic one.

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