

## RIVER, GIANT AND HUBRIS: A NOTE ON VIRGIL, *AENEID* 8.330–2\*

### ABSTRACT

*Virgil has Evander trace the origins of the name of the river Tiber back to the death of a giant, called ‘Thybris’ (Aen. 8.330–2). This article argues that the reference to the violent (asper) giant can be understood as etymological wordplay on the Greek word hubris and as a potential allusion to the grammatical debate on the nature of aspiration. Varro’s De gente populi Romani is identified as an important source for the characterization of the Tiber as a giant in primeval times. The political implications of the word hubris are also briefly explored with reference to various identities to which Evander alludes. The final part of the article argues that Theocritus’ Idyll 1 and the scholiast to Theocritus may have also inspired Virgil’s description of the Tiber in this passage.*

**Keywords:** *Aeneid*; Tiber; Evander; giant; Varro; Theocritus; etymology; hubris

### INTRODUCTION

In his recent article on Horatius Cocles and some other matters in the *Aeneid*, Sergio Casali argues that Virgil renders much of Roman history in terms of Greek mythology, especially the motif of the gigantomachy.<sup>1</sup> Cacus, Horatius Cocles and other characters are portrayed in a way which resembles a description of giants and Cyclopes.<sup>2</sup> As Philip Hardie has shown, this is most evident in the story of Cacus, who is portrayed in *Aeneid* Book 8 as a fire-belching monster or as a giant. The aim of this article is to demonstrate that Evander’s portrayal of the Tiber in the same book also belongs to this conceptual framework and can be connected to other sources, particularly Varro and the scholia to Theocritus, both of which have so far evaded scrutiny, at least with regard to the passage of the *Aeneid* discussed below.

The first part of the article presents the argument that the aspiration in ‘Thybris’ is a potential reference to the Greek word hubris as a characteristic of giants. The second part explores the possibility that Virgil’s source for the story was Varro’s *De gente populi Romani*, in which the antiquarian recounted a rationalization of the gigantomachy with humans of unusual size acting as protagonists. In the final part of the article, it is argued that Virgil may have also alluded to the scholia on Theocritus in which the commentator explained the Sicilian toponym Thybris as a reference either to a river in Sicily or to a ditch constructed around Syracuse.

\* The author would like to thank Sergio Casali, Fiachra Mac Góráin, Adam Gitner, Stephen Heyworth, Christopher Pelling, Andreas Ammann, Thomas Tsartsidis, Bartłomiej Bednarek, Massimo Cé, Bruce Gibson, Costas Panayotakis and the anonymous reader for their useful advice and suggestions. My research was funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in Germany, by a Grant of the Italian Ministry of University and Research, FARE *EarlyGeoPraxis*, cod. R184WNSTWH at the University of Venice, Ca’ Foscari, and by a Primus Grant at Charles University in Prague.

<sup>1</sup> S. Casali, ‘Porsenna, Horatius Cocles, and Cloelia (Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.649–51)’, *CQ* 70 (2021), 724–33 (with references).

<sup>2</sup> As P. Hardie has established in *Virgil’s Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford, 1986), 85–156.

Evander's exposition of the history of Latium to his guest Aeneas has attracted a lot of critical attention. Much of what the old Greek host says is incompatible with other accounts of the history of Italy in the *Aeneid*.<sup>3</sup> Evander starts from the primeval period when Saturn was king of a Golden Age that gave way to a less fortunate time when war and greed (*belli rabies et amor ... habendi*, 8.327) prevailed. The first indication of this is the arrival of migrants, Ausonians and Sicilian peoples (*gentes Sicanae*, 8.328), followed by indeterminate *reges* in whose reign the river of Rome changed its name from feminine to masculine (8.330–2):<sup>4</sup>

tum reges asperque immani corpore Thybris,  
a quo post Itali fluuium cognomine Thybrim  
diximus; amisit uerum uetus Albula nomen

then kings and the violent Thybris with his huge body, after whom we Italians later call the river Thybris. The ancient Albula lost her true name.

The river's unusual gender shift is explained through an aetiology that places a giant on its banks.<sup>5</sup> According to Servius, Virgil's reference to Thybris refers to a story about the drowning of a king called Thybris in the river, a myth that was also related by other sources, most notably Varro.<sup>6</sup> However, unlike Virgil, other sources qualify him only as king and do not mention his unusual size. Briquel rightly remarks that King Thybris 'est présenté comme un monstre'.<sup>7</sup> The collocation of *asper* ('violent', 'rough') and *immani corpore* ('of huge body') indicates a creature that surpasses human limits. Virgil already used the latter phrase when describing Scylla (*immani corpore pistris*, *Aen.* 3.427).<sup>8</sup> He also applies *immanis* to the Hydra, another gigantic mythical monster (*Aen.* 6.582). On the face of it, this could simply refer to the enormous size of the river itself, which far exceeds ordinary human perception.<sup>9</sup>

### THYBRIS, HYBRIS AND ASPIRATION

The exaggerated dimensions of Thybris are consistent with Virgil's evocative description of other characters in gigantic terms, especially the monstrous Cacus.<sup>10</sup> The hyperbolic

<sup>3</sup> See S. Casali, 'Evander and the invention of the prehistory of Latium in Vergil's *Aeneid*', in M. Aberson, M.C. Biella, M. Di Fazio, M. Wulschleger (edd.), *Nos sumus Romani qui fuimus ante...: Memory of Ancient Italy* (Bern, 2020), 145–68.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth pointing out that the Sicani are usually synonymous with the Sicilians, but Servius (ad loc.) says that they originally arrived in Sicily from Spain and later moved to Italy. See A. Montenegro Duque, *La onomástica de Virgilio y la antigüedad preitálica* (Salamanca, 1949), 96–100.

<sup>5</sup> Roman rivers are usually masculine and are portrayed as muscular bearded men in iconography. See G.E. Meyers, 'The divine Tiber: ancient Roman identity and the image of Tiberinus', in C. Kosso and A. Scott (edd.), *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing, and Hygiene from Antiquity through the Renaissance* (Leiden, 2009), 233–47.

<sup>6</sup> Servius auctus ad loc. presents all the various ethnicities of the king; Varro, *Ling.* 5.30 only Etruscan and Latin.

<sup>7</sup> D. Briquel, 'Les Aborigènes et l'ethnographie de l'*Énéide*', *MEFRA* 129 (2017), 65–84, at 77.

<sup>8</sup> See S.J. Heyworth and J.H.W. Morwood, *A Commentary on Vergil Aeneid 3* (Oxford, 2017), ad loc.

<sup>9</sup> It is notable that another instance of the word in the *Aeneid* also appears in the context of a river, Gela (*Aen.* 3.700–2): *fatis numquam concessa moueri | apparet Camerina ... immanis Gela fluuii cognomine dicta*. The adjective is otherwise almost always negative. See e.g. Ov. *Tr.* 3.4.43; *TLL* s.v. *immanis*.

<sup>10</sup> See Hardie (n. 2), 85–118.

language of the Cacus episode, with several repetitions of *immanis* and *ingens*, resonates with Evander's gigantic Tiber.<sup>11</sup> The Titans are famous for their outsized proportions and their attitude towards the gods, their hubris.<sup>12</sup> However, Evander's statement that 'Albula lost its true name' singles out etymology as a central theme of this passage, suggesting that one should be attentive to the form of the names. Fratantuono and Smith remark: 'Thybris was a giant (are we to think of the *hybristic* Cacus)?'<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the similarity between the Thybris and hubris is obvious and is noted by Servius with the addition of the fanciful explanation that 'the ancients loved to place  $\theta$  in the place of aspiration' (*nam amabant maiores ubi aspiratio erat  $\Theta$  ponere*).<sup>14</sup>

Although Servius' argument is linguistically untenable,<sup>15</sup> it reveals that Virgil could use the adjective *asper* to refer both to the violent nature of the giant and to hubris, an aspirated word that could be perceived as the etymology of Thybris. Both the Greek *spiritus asper* and the Latin initial 'h' were referred to simply as *aspiratio*. Speakers of Latin were aware of aspiration as a linguistic phenomenon. Catullus famously ridiculed a man called Arrius who insisted on adding aspiration to a number of words that never had it.<sup>16</sup> In the Late Republic, there was debate on whether an initial 'h' should be considered a letter in Latin; Varro argued that it should not because it is merely a vocalic aspiration and not a consonant.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the adjective *asper* can be interpreted as a learned reference both to a grammatical debate and to the nature of the supposed giant that drowned in the river. An allusion to a debate on the phonology of aspiration should not be surprising: Virgil's concern with linguistic phenomena in the *Aeneid* has been well documented, especially in relation to place names.<sup>18</sup> The variant toponyms of early Italy cluster in Evander's monologue more than in any other passage of the epic. As Mac Góráin argues, 'Evander's history reminds us that name-changes are often violent affairs.'<sup>19</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *ingens* (8.192, 8.204, 8.241, 8.252, 8.258), *immanis* (8.225, 8.245). For other instances and discussion, see Hardie (n. 2), 117 and G. Binder, *P. Vergilius Maro. Aeneis. Ein Kommentar. Band 1* (Trier, 2019), 231–4. Horace (*Carm.* 3.4.43) refers to the Titans as *impious Titanas immanemque turbam*.

<sup>12</sup> The confusion between the Titans and the giants is widespread in the sources, starting from Euripides (*IT* 221–4) and continuing throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The Titans were the first offspring of Uranus and Gaia and fought against the Olympian gods, who imprisoned them underground. The giants were produced from the same union later and attempted to free their older siblings. See *LIMC* s.v. 'Gigantes'; L. Preller, *Griechische Mythologie* (Berlin, 1894), 47–8, 66–78. See also D.J. Wright, 'Giants, Titans, and civil strife in the Greek and Roman world down through the Age of Augustus' (Diss., Rutgers University, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> L.M. Fratantuono and R. Alden Smith (edd.), *Virgil, Aeneid 8, Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Leiden, 2018), ad loc. (emphasis in the original). L.M. Fratantuono, 'Vnde pater Tiberinus: the river Tiber in Vergil's *Aeneid*', *Classica et Christiana* 11 (2016), 95–122, at 115 notes: 'Thybris is *asper* and of huge shape; if anything he reminds one of the monstrous Cacus who was vanquished by Hercules.'

<sup>14</sup> Serv. *Aen.* 8.330.

<sup>15</sup> It is possible that Servius misconstrued an earlier source commenting on aspiration in early Latin inscriptions, which used a range of different Greek letters to represent aspiration.

<sup>16</sup> Catullus 84.

<sup>17</sup> Funaioli fr. 240, 279, 280. See J. Uría, 'Cornutus on Varro on the aspirate *H*: making full sense of Cassiod. *Orth.* 1.79–87 Stoppacci (Cornut. fr. 16 Mazzarino)', *Phoenix* 74 (2020), 79–90 (with references).

<sup>18</sup> See K.F.B. Fletcher, *Finding Italy* (Ann Arbor, 2014) and M.B. Sullivan, 'Names', in R.F. Thomas and J.M. Ziolkowski (edd.), *The Virgil Encyclopedia*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 2.877–81 (with references).

<sup>19</sup> F. Mac Góráin, 'Language politics in the *Aeneid* and Friel's translations', *Proceedings of the Vergil Society* 30 (2020), 1–25, at 15, a paper with many other interesting points on language difference and imperialism in the *Aeneid*.

The adjective *asper* has destructive connotations and explicitly marks the Tiber as a place of aggression. Virgil reserves it for negative characters and inimical places in his epic. Juno is described this way (1.279) by Jupiter, and Carthage itself is said to be *asperrima studiis belli* (1.14) at the very beginning of the poem. The collocation of this adjective with the Tiber adds additional weight to the foreignness of Rome's river, which Virgil otherwise dubs Etruscan (*Tuscus amnis*).<sup>20</sup> Evander's statement that the river changed its original name from Albula to Tiber reinforces the impression of otherness (to use a contemporary term). This tell-tale sign of learned etymological wordplay in the Alexandrian vein points to the unstable identity of the river, which changes its gender from feminine to masculine. As O'Hara notes, it is impossible not to think of Alba Longa, Rome's mother city on the mountain that derives from the same root as Albula.<sup>21</sup> The foundation of Alba was announced to Aeneas by the Tiber in the form of the famous omen of the white sow with its thirty piglets (*Aen.* 8.42–8, 81–5). The giant aspect of the Tiber also fits in this context: mountains are often associated with giants, either because they hurled them as weapons or because they piled them up to reach Olympus.<sup>22</sup>

#### GIANTS AND VARRO'S *DE GENTE POPVLI ROMANI*

There is, however, another pertinent story of mountains and rivers which Virgil would have been aware of. In Varro's *De gente populi Romani*, giants feature as protagonists in the story of the great flood: they are humans of unusual size who ascended to attack other survivors of the flood who were taking refuge on the mountains. The latter group prevailed because they occupied higher ground while the giants were defeated because of their disadvantaged position in the lowlands.<sup>23</sup> The victorious humans were then divinized after their triumph while their opponents were vilified. In this rationalization of the myth of gigantomachy, both the giants and the gods are humans differentiated by the positions they occupied in the primordial battle, the lowlands and the mountains (or hills), respectively.<sup>24</sup> Servius says that Varro explicitly associated giants with wetlands and described them as having serpentine legs. The image of a giant as a semi-serpentine hybrid fits the representation of Greek rivers in iconography while their inferior position in the wetlands points to valleys as the original abode of the giants.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Aen.* 8.473, 10.198, and already in *G.* 1.499.

<sup>21</sup> J.J. O'Hara, *Virgil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay* (Ann Arbor, 2017), 208. Most sources derive Albula from *albus*, and Isidore (*Etym.* 13.21.27) explicitly connects it with snow. See G. Ramires and M. Lafond, *Servius. Commentaire sur l'Énéide de Virgile. Livre VIII* (Paris, 2022), 335–6. P.T. Eden, *A Commentary on Virgil: Aeneid VIII* (Leiden, 1975), 109 says that Albula was also the name of sulphur springs at Tibur (Tivoli) which would give the water a whitish colour, not least because Virgil (*Aen.* 7.517) thus describes a tributary of the Tiber: *sulpurea Nar albus aqua*.

<sup>22</sup> See F. Vian, *La guerre des Géants: Le mythe avant l'époque hellénistique* (Paris, 1952).

<sup>23</sup> P. Fraccaro (ed.), *De gente populi Romani* fr. 6; Serv. *Aen.* 3.578 *sed Varro dicit in diluvio aliquos ad montes confugisse cum utensilibus, qui lacessiti postea bello ab his, qui de aliis ueniebant montibus, facile ex locis superioribus uicerunt. unde factum est ut dii superiores dicerentur, inferiores uero terrigenae. et quia de humillimis ad summa reptabant, dicti sunt pro pedibus habuisse serpentes*.

<sup>24</sup> See P. Fraccaro, *Studi Varroniani* (Padova, 1907), 118–25. He also discusses the several flood myths (Ogyges', Dardanus' and Deucalion's) that featured in Varro's work as well as in Varro's sources for rationalization of myths. On the uncertain location of the battle, he concludes (at 124): 'Probabilmente per Varrone le lotte erano avvenute in molti e diversi luoghi funestati dal diluvio.'

<sup>25</sup> On the imagery, see *LIMC* s.v. 'Achelous'. There are many other mythic creatures with snake

Thus, in Varro's work on the Roman people, the giants were the first to emerge after the great flood.<sup>26</sup> For Virgil's contemporaries, flooding naturally evoked the destructive floods of the Tiber, which took place at least once a decade in ancient Rome.<sup>27</sup> Given the fragmentary state of Varro's work, it is impossible to say whether he mentioned the Tiber as a giant in primeval Latium.<sup>28</sup> However, the fact that he defined the earliest period of world history by a great flood, after which giants emerge only to be defeated, makes it likely that this tradition influenced Virgil's portrayal of the Tiber as a giant, which is extant in no other source. One should also note that Evander's lessons in etymology and his learned tour of Rome owe much to Varro's *Divine Antiquities*,<sup>29</sup> pointing to Varro as a crucial source in this part of the epic.

The myth of the drowning king also has political implications. As noted, there were rival accounts of his ethnicity, reflecting competing claims on the river by Etruscans and Latins.<sup>30</sup> The name itself presents the most obvious political characteristic of the Tiber in the *Aeneid*. Why did Virgil choose to refer to the river of Rome as 'Thybris' rather than using 'Tiberis', its common Latin name?<sup>31</sup> According to Jenkyns, 'Thybris is a literary and Graecized name, flaunting its Greekness in the consonant *th* and the vowel *y*; the likelihood is that it was Virgil himself who introduced it into Latin verse.'<sup>32</sup> It has also been argued that the Greek word is meant to evoke the Trojan river Thymbris, a tributary of Scamander,<sup>33</sup> and thus to facilitate the transition of the Trojans between their native land and the Italian landscape.<sup>34</sup> Whichever interpretation one prefers, there is no doubt that the name is constructed as deliberately foreign.

elements. See D. Ogden, *Drakōn: Dragon Myth & Serpent Cult in the Greek & Roman Worlds* (Oxford, 2013), 86–115.

<sup>26</sup> Varro composed *De gente populi Romani* and *De uita populi Romani* concurrently in 43 B.C. See A. Pittà (ed.), *M. Terenzio Varrone, de vita populi Romani. Introduzione e commento* (Pisa, 2015), 7–12.

<sup>27</sup> See G. Aldrete, *Floods of the Tiber in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore, 2006), 45–50.

<sup>28</sup> This may seem to go against Varro's own description of the Tiber at *Ling.* 5.30 (see note 6 above). However, the vast range of Varro's works, written over several decades, must have involved inconsistencies. See Fraccaro (n. 24), 82.

<sup>29</sup> See F. Mac Góráin, 'Virgil's *Divine Antiquities*: Varro in the *Aeneid*', *Aevum Antiquum* 20 (2020), 235–58, at 240–2.

<sup>30</sup> See note 6 above.

<sup>31</sup> Thybris is used eight times in the *Aeneid*, Tiberinus (which is the cult title of the river god) four, and Tiberis once. See N.M. Horsfall in *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* s.v. 'Thybris'.

<sup>32</sup> R. Jenkyns, *Virgil's Experience* (Oxford, 1998), 401. A. Momigliano, 'Thybris Pater', in *Terzo Contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome, 1966), 609–25 argues that Virgil took it from the Sibylline oracles and notes the similarity with a number of Etruscan words (*contra*: E. García Domingo, 'Sobre el nombre del río Tiberis (Tiber)', *Habis* 52 [2021], 51–68). See also K. Meister, *Altitalische und römische Eigennamen* (Berlin, 1916), 53–75. Fletcher (n. 18), 10 says: 'Virgil's use of antiquated and even invented names—such as "Thybris" for the Tiber river—creates a sort of double vision and enacts a certain displacement, rendering the familiar unfamiliar like using New Amsterdam for New York.'

<sup>33</sup> Hom. *Il.* 10.430. Apollo had a temple at the river; hence Aeneas invokes Apollo as *Thymbraee* at *Aen.* 3.85 and Aristaeus mentions the epithet at *G.* 4.323.

<sup>34</sup> Alongside the adjective Etruscan (see above), Virgil also calls the Tiber Lydian (*Aen.* 2.781, 3.500). The two adjectives are not contradictory but in line with the notion that Etruscans migrated to Italy from Asia Minor. See Montenegro Duque (n. 4), 76–9; García Domingo (n. 32), 63–4. See also J.D. Reed, 'The death of Osiris in "Aeneid" 12.458', *AJPh* 119 (1998), 399–418.

## VIRGIL'S THYBRIS AND THE SCHOLIA TO THEOCRITUS

However, there may be another reason for Virgil's choice of Thybris that involves a Greek settlement on an island. Momigliano argued that Virgil was partly influenced by Theocritus (*Id.* 1.118), who mentions a river called Thybris alongside Arethusa in the context of Sicilian streams.<sup>35</sup> This is a plausible suggestion, not least because Virgil's *Eclogues* clearly owe a great deal to Theocritus' *Idylls*. However, Momigliano makes no mention of the Theocritus scholia, which Virgil demonstrably read and used in writing his *Eclogues*.<sup>36</sup> Following Evander's mention of Sicilian peoples (*gentes Sicanae*, 8.328), Servius attributes the similarity of Thybris and hubris to the arrival of Sicilians who transferred the name of a Sicilian river to Italy.<sup>37</sup> The earliest source for this is the Theocritean scholiast, who explains Thybris as a Sicilian river, where Hercules came with the cattle of Helios and which dug out a valley after a terrifying storm near the city of Cephaloedia in northern Sicily:<sup>38</sup>

Θύβρις ποταμός Σικελίας, ἐφ' ᾧ μυθεύονται Ἡρακλῆν <... ὅτε> τὰς ἐκ τῆς Ἐρυθείας βούς ἐλαύνων ἐνταῦθα ἀφίκετο· γενομένου δέ χειμῶνος ἀνυπερβλήτου χῶσαι τὸν ποταμὸν καὶ ἐπίπεδον ποιῆσαι, ἐφ' οὗ οἱ Κεφαλοῖδιοι δείκνυνται κατοικοῦντες. Θεαίτητος δέ φησι Συρακοσίους ἀπὸ τῆς ὕβρεως <ὀνομάσαι προσθέσει τοῦ Θ>. Ἀσκληπιάδης δὲ ὁ Μυρλεανὸς διὰ τοῦ δ γράφει καὶ φησι 'δύβρις κατὰ γλῶσσαν ἢ θάλασσαν', γράφουσι δὲ τινες κατὰ Θύμβριδος· ἔστι δὲ καὶ οὗτος ποταμὸς Σικελίας.

Thybris is a river in Sicily where the story is told that Heracles <... when> he arrived there driving the cattle from Erytheia. And after an unrelenting storm/winter the river created a plain on which the people of Cephaloedia are shown to reside. Theaetetus says that the Syracusans <name> it from 'hybris' (ἀπὸ τῆς ὕβρεως) <by the addition of a θ>. But Asclepiades of Myrlea writes it with a δ and says that 'δύβρις is a dialect form of the sea (ἢ θάλασσαν)'. Some write κατὰ Θύμβριδος. This is also a river in Sicily.

The violent storm that fills the river has mythic connotations: the Titans were interpreted by natural philosophers as storm winds of winter.<sup>39</sup> Hesiod had already identified Typhon as the origin of all the violent winds.<sup>40</sup> Virgil mentions the Titan in the

<sup>35</sup> Theoc. *Id.* 1.118 καὶ ποταμοὶ τοὶ χεῖτε καλὸν κατὰ Θύβριδος ὕδωρ. See Momigliano (n. 32), 616–17, 624–5.

<sup>36</sup> See T. Keeline, 'A poet on the margins: Vergil and the Theocritean scholia', *CPh* 112 (2017), 456–78. See also J.D. Farrell, 'Ancient commentaries on Theocritus' *Idylls* and Virgil's *Eclogues*', in C.S. Kraus and C. Stray (edd.), *Classical Commentaries: Explorations in a Scholarly Genre* (Oxford, 2015), 397–418.

<sup>37</sup> Most ancient sources distinguish between Sikans (*Sicani*) (claimed to be the autochthonous population of Sicily) and Sikels (*Siculi*) (migrants from the mainland), but Virgil uses both terms interchangeably. See M. Malavolta, *Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, s.v. 'Sicani' and T.J. Dunbabin, *The Western Greeks: The History of Sicily and South Italy from the Foundation of the Greek Colonies to 480 B.C.* (Oxford, 1948), 40–1. Thuc. 6.2 is sceptical about the Sicans' autochthony, but says that they were the first to migrate to Sicily. See C.B.R. Pelling, *Thucydides. The Peloponnesian War. Book VI* (Cambridge, 2022), 99–102.

<sup>38</sup> *Schol. Theoc.* 1.118. The scholiast's name is Asclepiades, dated to the Late Republican period. See K. Belcher, 'Theocritus' ancient commentators', in T. Fögen (ed.), *Antike Fachtexte/Ancient Technical Texts* (Berlin, 2005), 191–206. The translation of the passage is also Belcher's.

<sup>39</sup> Such interpretations of Titans as elementary forces of nature were very popular among the Stoics. See F. Vian, 'La Guerre des Géants devant les penseurs de l'antiquité', *REIG* 65 (1952), 1–39, at 22–31.

<sup>40</sup> On Typhon (or Typhoeus), see Hes. *Theog.* 853–80. Ovid (*Fast.* 2.453–74) exploits this characteristic for comical effect as Venus, hiding from the Titan, mistakes the rushing wind for the



hymn that the Salii sang in honour of Hercules, a mere thirty-two lines before the appearance of Thybris (*Aen.* 8.298). Of course, Hercules' stolen cattle were the cause of his fight with Cacus, which is the subject of Evander's extensive exposition to Aeneas in an earlier passage of Book 8 (185–275). Hercules and his stolen cattle thus connect various strands of traditions to which Virgil alludes, including Sicilian and Latian Thybris.<sup>41</sup> The fact that river gods were represented as horned bulls may have also facilitated the association of Sicilian and Latian Thybris, both of which Hercules is said to have visited.<sup>42</sup> Finally, the aggressive nature of the giant Thybris evokes both Hercules' struggle with the river Achelous and the Sicilian Thybris tearing through the landscape to create a valley at its mouth (around Cephaloedia).<sup>43</sup> It also fits the aggressive image that the god of the Tiber paints to Aeneas at the end of his dream: 'I am the river that you see in full flood tearing his banks and slicing fruitful fields' (*ego sum pleno quem fulmine cernis | stringentem ripas et pingua culta secantem*, *Aen.* 8.62–3).

The forceful nature of Virgil's Thybris reflects the many claims on the river made by the peoples fighting on its shores. It is significant that the Greek Evander counts himself an Italian (*Itali ... diximus*) when naming the giant, thus underlying the fusion of various identities that come together on Italian soil. Evander's fluid identity seems to justify his own claim on the land and to encourage his collocutor to do the same.<sup>44</sup> However, the reference to the dead king inevitably foreshadows the death of Aeneas in a similar stream and makes the reading of this passage ambiguous.<sup>45</sup> It seems that Aeneas will seal his claim on the land by merging with the river that stands in for the whole of Latium.<sup>46</sup> The river itself is by its very nature fluid and always shifting under the influence of various actors that possess its shores. The loss of its old 'true' name,

hostile (and innumerable) hands of monstrous Typhon. See also Y. Noriko, *Challenges to the Power of Zeus in Early Greek Poetry* (London, 2013), 117–31.

<sup>41</sup> Hercules' visit to Sicily can be traced to the accounts of Greek colonists of the Archaic period, and probably featured already in Stesichorus' *Geryoneis*. See I. Malkin, *Myth and Territory in the Spartan Mediterranean* (Cambridge, 2003), 206–11. Hercules is otherwise a popular itinerant hero who appears all over the Mediterranean. See R. Lane Fox, *Travelling Heroes. Greeks and their Myths in the Epic Age of Homer* (London, 2008), 203–10. Some of the localizations of Hercules in different places serve as charter myths. See I. Malkin, *The Returns of Odysseus* (London, 1998), 2, 4, 8, 173, 202–7, 217, 223.

<sup>42</sup> See Meyers (n. 5), 233–47. Most representations of river gods as horned bulls come from Sicilian towns. See N.J. Molinari and N. Sisci, *ΠΙΟΤΑΜΙΚΟΝ. Sinews of Acheloius. A Comprehensive Catalog of the Bronze Coinage of the Man-Faced Bull with Essays on Origin and Identity* (Oxford, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> On Hercules' struggle with Achelous, see C.A. Salowey, 'Rivers run through it', in G. Hawes (ed.), *Myths on the Map: The Storied Landscapes of Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 2017), 159–77, at 171–7.

<sup>44</sup> On constructing identities in the *Aeneid* in relation to the landscape, see Fletcher (n. 18). On the various Italic ethnicities, see F. Stok, 'Servio e la geopolitica della guerra italiana', in C. Santini and F. Stok (edd.), *Hinc Italiae gentes: Geopolitica ed etnografia dell'Italia nel Commento di Servio all'Eneide* (Pisa, 2004), 111–62.

<sup>45</sup> Virgil moves the scene of Aeneas' landing in Italy from its traditional setting on the Numicus to the mouth of the Tiber. See H. Boas, *Aeneas' Arrival in Latium* (Amsterdam, 1938), 53–68; J.T. Dyson, *King of the Wood. The Sacrificial Victor in Virgil's Aeneid* (Norman, OK, 2001), 59–67. See also K. Vuković, 'Silvia's stag on the Tiber: the setting of the *Aeneid's casus belli*', *Mnemosyne* 73 (2020), 464–82, a paper that explores the role of the Tiber in *Aeneid* Book 7; Fratanuono (n. 13), 104–14.

<sup>46</sup> As G. Binder, *Aeneas und Augustus* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1971), 106 pithily states: 'Der Tiber prägt die italische Landschaft, er steht stellvertretend für ganz Latium und begleitet dessen Geschichte von Urzeiten an.'

Albula, invokes a sense of nostalgia for a world that has vanished owing to the violence and greed of competing leaders.<sup>47</sup>

The allusion to hubris in the etymology of Thybris can also be understood in the political sense, aside from the aforesaid violent/hubristic nature of the giant. The Latin word *hybrida* (with the variant *hibrida*) was used to denote not only a child of mixed origin, whose parents are of different ethnicities (for example in Hor. *Sat.* 1.7.2), but also a hybrid creature (from which the modern sense of the word) that combines traits of different animals (for example in Plin. *HN* 8.213).<sup>48</sup> Both would be appropriate in this context, the former pointing to the arrival of migrants (Ausonians and Sicilians) who mixed with the local population, the latter reinforcing the animal aspects of the giant.<sup>49</sup> The hybrid aspects of the Tiber resonate with the polyvalent identities of the Greek speaker who claims himself to be both an Italian and an ally of the Trojans, potentially preparing the latter for an assimilation of Trojans with Latins at the end of the epic. It hardly needs arguing that the war between Trojans and Latins (and their allies) resonates with the trauma of the Civil Wars that Virgil saw in his lifetime.<sup>50</sup> The fluid nature of the river is able to encompass all of these conflicting identities but at the same time it can remain outside the possession of any human. In Roman law, perennial streams were public property and were owned by no one, though they could be used by any one.<sup>51</sup>

It is in this light that Virgil may also be alluding to the Sicilian tradition noted in the scholiast to Theocritus, who seems aware that Cephaloedia (on the northern coast of Sicily) is too far from Syracuse, where Theocritus' reference to Arethusa would seem to situate Daphnis (the protagonist of *Idyll* 1), and adds that the Syracusans called a ditch around their city Thybris after hubris. Unfortunately, there is a lacuna in the text here that makes it impossible to ascertain whose hubris it was. But Servius relates that it was the hubris of Athenian and African prisoners whom the Syracusans forced to dig a ditch around their town in the Peloponnesian War.<sup>52</sup> Though Servius could have gleaned the information elsewhere, a Syracusan link to hubris was already present in the Theocritus scholiast and hence appears to be a logical development of a story localized at the city.<sup>53</sup> The Syracusan link brings added poignancy to Evander's remark. After all, both he and Aeneas have arrived as intruders on a land that was already occupied by Latins and various other Italic peoples. The Athenian invasion of Sicily is a reminder that claims on others' land come at a high cost with the risk of failure and enslavement. Hercules was said to be angry with the Athenians invading Sicily because they came to the aid of the Segestans, who claimed to be descended from the Trojans.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>47</sup> As noted by Jenkyns (n. 32), 553.

<sup>48</sup> See *TLL* s.v. *hybrida*.

<sup>49</sup> Titans are described having animal characteristics, and Virgil exploits this in his description of Egyptian gods, who are also hybrid: *omnigenum deum monstra* (*Aen.* 8.698). See Hardie (n. 2), 98. The Tiber is described as *corniger* at *Aen.* 8.77, a significant reflection of the hybrid character of rivers in the Archaic period.

<sup>50</sup> Much ink has been spilled on this topic. See J. Marincola, 'Eros and empire: Virgil and the historians on Civil War', in C.S. Kraus, J. Marincola and C. Pelling (edd.), *Ancient Historiography and its Contexts* (Oxford, 2010), 183–204 (with references).

<sup>51</sup> *Dig.* 43.12.1. See C.J. Bannon, 'A short introduction to Roman water law', *MAAR* 66 (2021), 1–18, at 8–11 (with references).

<sup>52</sup> A.S.F. Gow, *Theocritus*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1952<sup>2</sup>), 2.25–6; Serv. *Aen.* 3.500, 8.330.

<sup>53</sup> Gow (n. 52), 25 notes that Servius perhaps had access to a fuller version of the Theocritus scholia than the version that has survived.

<sup>54</sup> Plut. *Vit. Nic.* 1.3. Hercules destroyed Troy because of Laomedon's offence. For the development of the Trojans' landing and of the Aeneas legend in Sicily, see K. Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome* (Princeton, 1969), 63–102.



## CONCLUSION

Finally, it may be useful to survey the passage discussed in this note in the wider context of *Aeneid* Book 8. Alluding to the Sicilian Thybris enables Virgil to look back to the beginning of the book where the Tiber appears to Aeneas in an ambivalent dream, promising victory but also warning of future sacrifice. The line on the giant Thybris foreshadows the making of the Shield of Aeneas later in the same book. The setting of its production is in the deep caves under Aetna where Vulcan orders his Cyclopes to get to business (*Aen.* 8.414–53). The Shield itself is full of gigantomachic imagery, from the tall ships in the Battle of Actium to the huge body of the Nile (*magno corpore* at 8.711, recalling *immani corpore* at 8.330), calling the defeated Egyptians back into the folds of his spacious mantle (*pandentem sinus et tota ueste uocantem* | ... *in gremium*, 8.711–12).<sup>55</sup> Aetna is otherwise known as the underground prison of the defeated Titans, as Virgil makes clear when describing it in Book 3 (678).<sup>56</sup>

In conclusion, Virgil depicts Thybris as a giant who drowned in the river because of his hubris, a *figura etymologica* to which he alludes using the adjective *asper* to signal aspiration, a grammatical debate current in his lifetime. Virgil read about giants emerging from the lowlands of a primeval flood in Varro's *De gente populi Romani*, a very influential work published when the poet was in his twenties. This may have influenced Virgil's description of the Tiber as a bellicose giant, alongside his desire to populate early Italy with giants to match those of Greek mythology. Another (not mutually exclusive) possibility is that the poet is pointing to Theocritus' reference to a Sicilian river called Thybris as well as to the scholiast's comments about the hubris of Athenians attacking Sicily. Thus, Virgil's giant Thybris evokes several connotations that have not been discussed so far.

Charles University in Prague

KREŠIMIR VUKOVIĆ   
vukovik@ff.cuni.cz

<sup>55</sup> Hardie (n. 2), 120–5.

<sup>56</sup> e.g. Pind. *Pyth.* 1.19. See Hardie (n. 2), 116–18.