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# THE HELICON

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# The Lupercalia:

## A Roman Rite of Passage

SIOBHAN HANLEY

The Roman festival of the Lupercalia has perplexed observers even since Roman times: “the Luperci [are so called] because at the Lupercalia they sacrifice at the Lupercal...the Lupercalia are so called because [that is when] the Luperci sacrifice at the Lupercal” (Varro 5.85; from Wiseman 1). Because of the ambiguity surrounding the origins of the festival, the Lupercalia served many different functions in the city. In addition to its typical role as a purification and fertility rite, in this paper I will argue that the Lupercalia also served as a rite of passage for the Romans, as young Roman men and women moved from youth into adulthood and accepted their responsibilities of members of the Roman state. This transition between two ages is preserved in the rituals and the myths surrounding the festival, performing acts and telling stories concerning the crossing of barriers, signifying the importance of these transitions in Roman society. I will first explore the close relationship between myth and ritual; I will then examine myths of both Greek and Roman origin concerning the Lupercalia and the rituals they seek to explain, showing how the ritual crossing of barriers pervades descriptions of the Lupercalia and demonstrating the importance of this festival as a rite of passage. While exploring Roman ritual, especially the Lupercalia, it is imperative not to underestimate the

importance of the myths related to the festival. Mary Beard argues for the symbolic importance of stories in Roman religion: “ritual actions and the narratives which purport to explain these actions together form the Roman religious experience and together construct Roman religious meanings” (Beard 276). Thus, in trying to unwind the complexity of the coming-of-age rituals of the Lupercalia, it is important to begin with Roman explanations for these actions. While it seems naïve to us to believe that Evander or Romulus established this festival, the Romans put forward these explanations; in mimicking the actions from the stories and symbolically representing these actions—such as running naked and creating goatskin whips—the Romans gave meaning to their religious practices. Therefore, in order to better understand these rituals and how they represented a Roman rite of passage, it is necessary to take a close look at

the myths of the Lupercalia and how they influenced this practice.

The rite of passage element of the Lupercalia manifests itself very clearly in the Hercules-Omphale episode of Ovid’s *Fasti* (2.303-358), in which Ovid explains why the Luperci are naked.<sup>1</sup> Ovid here presents a scene not found in other traditions of the Lupercalia that survive, in which the traditional story of Hercules and the Lydian queen Omphale, to whom Hercules was enslaved for a year for the murder of Iphitus, is tweaked. In Ovid’s account, there is no evidence of submission, but rather Hercules and Omphale are both presented at a liminal age: *iuvenis* (Ovid 2.305) is used for Hercules, “a young man in the flower of his age” (Lewis and Short), and *puella* (2.356) is used to describe Omphale, meaning “a maiden or a young wife” (*ibid.*). Instead of the lethal warrior and Barbarian queen that the reader would expect to find when reading these names, one

sees two young people on the verge of becoming adults. In the Ovidian narrative, they have become liminal figures, about to be initiated into the next step of society.

The portrayal of Hercules and Omphale as initiates is further supported by a peculiar scene of cross-dressing, in which Hercules puts on the clothes of Omphale, and Omphale dons the lion skin and club. A strange ritual not itself associated with the Lupercalia, the scene has important implications for rite of passage rituals. Omphale is described *cultibus Alciden instruit illa suis* (“she dressed Hercules in her own clothing”) and she herself *ipsa capit clavamque gravem spoliūque leonis* (“she took the heavy club and the skin of the lion”) (Ovid 2.318, 2.325; translations mine). Elaine Fantham offers two possible models for the scene, either the last day of abstinence before inauguration into the Bacchanalia (fitting with the mentions of wine in this passage [Ovid 2.317

and 2.333]) or the performance of a marriage rite, as celebrated in some ancient cultures (Fantham 196). Although she does not go on to fully explain this reasoning, the cross-dressing could symbolize the union between the two individuals, and the acceptance of a future spouse by assuming the other’s characteristics. In both cases, Hercules and Omphale, by exchanging clothes, become participants in a ritual celebrating the passage into a new stage of their lives, either the admission into a cult, or entrance into a marriage and the responsibilities that a household entails. Like the young men and women of Rome who celebrated the Lupercalia, Hercules and Omphale are symbolically transitioning into a new status in society.

Furthermore, the name Omphale, meaning “navel,” or “umbilical cord,” itself invokes a liminal and transitional state. Not only does this link her closely to motherhood (which closely ties to the rituals of

the Lupercalia, as will be explained later), but the umbilical cord itself serves as a passage between mother and child. A navel in the sense of “world navel” as at Delphi served as a break in the barrier between humans and the gods, where communication was possible. Therefore, Hercules and Omphale in many ways represent a coming-of-age through their rituals in the myth.

After this scene, Ovid finally arrives at the reason why the Lupercali run naked: the failed rape of Omphale by Pan. The failure represents a thwarted attempt at the crossing of a symbolic barrier; by requiring that his worshipers be naked, Pan ensures success in his future endeavors. This scene is overtly erotic, reflecting the sexual nature of both Pan and the naked Luperci (as they whip women with goatskins). The episode takes place in the cave (where Pan is often worshiped, as at Athens in a cave below the Acropolis [Wiseman 4]) just as the festival of the Lu-

percalia occurs in the cave of the Lupercal. Pan, in the culmination of the scene, is described as *tunicas ora subducit ab ima* (“he goes under the deepest hem”) (Ovid 2.347). Here, Ovid uses *subduco*, conveying the sense of movement, or literally “leading under” into the “deepest barrier,” in this case the hem of the tunic (*ora*). In trying to rape Omphale (or whom he believes to be Omphale), he is attempting to penetrate a barrier (i.e. her clothes). Therefore, in order to facilitate the crossing of the barrier, Pan insists his worshipers are unclothed, accounting for the provocative dress of the Luperci.

Over time, the Romans developed their own myths of the rite of passage which are distinct from, yet complementary to, the Greek myths of the festival, in order to explain why the Luperci are unclothed. Many variations of the Romulus and Remus myth survive (viz. Ovid 2.359-382, Plutarch 21.7, Dionysius 1.80), yet

all share a few elements: Romulus and Remus were participating in worship of Pan (known as Faunus in the Roman tradition), they were naked, they in some capacity chased down a herd of bulls, and in most traditions, Remus was captured (which eventually led to the overthrow of King Amulius). In some accounts such as those of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Ovid, Romulus and Remus are naked because they are worshiping Faunus. But upon closer examination, this explanation becomes problematic. Romulus and Remus were celebrating the Lupercalia according to Dionysius (θύσοντας τὰ Λύκαια τοὺς νεανίσκους or “The youths were celebrating the Lupercalia”).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, they were naked because they believed in the myth of Hercules and Omphale and knew that Pan did not wish those worshiping him to wear clothes. In that case, however, Romulus and Remus cannot be the originators of the practice of running naked,

because Romulus and Remus were themselves already Luperci. How can the nudity of Romulus and Remus be the origin of the myth, when they themselves were already celebrating the festival naked? This complicated aetiology did not seem to bother the Romans, however, and the contradiction most likely arises from the Romanization of the festival over time; the earlier Greek myth surrounding the cult of Pan turned into a festival for the founding of the city. Therefore, it is important for the reader to consider how these Roman myths shaped the rituals the Romans performed.

Plutarch gives an account of the Romulus and Remus myth that most easily explains an independent Roman origin for the nakedness of the festival, and that incorporates a rite of passage in which symbolic barriers are broken. Just as for Pan in the myth of Hercules, clothes represent a barrier for Romulus and Remus as they chase after the bulls: γυμνοῦς ... ὅπως ὑπο

τοῦ ἰδρώτος μὴ ἐνοχλοῖντο or “[They are] naked lest they be impeded by sweat” (Plutarch 1.21). In this passage from Plutarch, the sweat brought on by wearing clothes

scribed as νεανίσκους by Dionysius, Plutarch similarly calls the Luperci μεράκια (1.21), or “youths about the age of 20 (Liddell and Scott). That is, they were young, but ap-



“Free-Standing Dionysos, with a Panther,” artist unknown, ca. 150 BC - 100 AD

becomes a hindrance for Romulus and Remus as they attempt to catch the bulls, and so they remove this barrier and proceed naked. Just as Romulus and Remus are de-

proaching a transitional age in society where they must fight in the army, take a wife, and participate in the state. This myth is then represented in the ritual nakedness in the

Lupercalia: the young men symbolically remove their clothes, taking off the barriers of society, and allowing them to pass without obstruction into Roman adulthood.

Another rite-of-passage ritual manifests itself in the *lustratio* which the Luperci ran, symbolizing Romulus' growth to manhood in the act of killing Amulius. In Dionysius' version of the story, Romulus and Remus (νεανίσκοι) are worshipping Faunus naked, when they are attacked by herdsmen and Remus is taken:

οἱδ ἐκπλαγέντες τῷ παραδόξῳ τοῦ  
πάθους καὶ ἀμηχανοῦντες ὅτι δράσειαν  
πρὸς  
ῶπλισμένους, ἄνοπλοι μαχόμενοι κατὰ  
πολλὴν εὐπέτειαν ἐχειρώθησαν.

(1.80)

“They being struck by the unexpectedness of the occurrence and being at a loss of what they should do against the ones performing these things, they fighting unarmed were subdued with much ease.”

Here, Romulus and Remus

are “struck” (ἐκπλαγέντες) and are “at a loss” (ἀμηχανοῦντες) as to what they should do, being both “unarmed” (ἄνοπλοι) and “subdued” (ἐχειρώθησαν). All of these descriptions portray them in a passive role—as being the receiver of an action, especially of being “mastered” or “subdued,” or being “struck” by the sudden attack. Furthermore, both their lack of arms and complete nudity places them in a vulnerable position, unable to defend themselves against men holding arms, and their ignorance of what to do in the situation is emblematic of their young age and inexperience in battles. Therefore, Remus is captured, and Romulus must find a way to get his brother back. His brother's capture comes with the discovery of his true birth, as he is finally told by Faustulus that they are not his sons. After this revelation, Romulus develops into a leader, taking counsel (βουλευσαμένῳ), deeming things fit (ἐδόκει),s and preparing for the

coming battle (παρασκευῇ), qualities contrasting with his rash plans to make an outright attack to save his brother only a few lines before. In losing his brother, discovering his identity, and preparing for battle, Romulus becomes a man and a leader of his people, going on to kill Amulius (perhaps the first time in battle killing a man, another symbolic moment) and establish his own city. The Romans celebrated Romulus' transition to manhood by having young Roman males re-enact Romulus and Remus on that day—worshipping Faunus and running around naked, just as the two young brothers did on that day when they were forced to grow into adulthood and kill the king.

The path of the *lustratio* is furthermore indicative of the ceremonial rite of passage of this celebration. According to Plutarch, the Luperci “begin their course where Romulus originally was said to have been exposed”: ἀρχομένουσ τῆς περιδρομῆς τοὺς Λουπέρκους...

ὅπου τον Ῥωμύλον ἐκτεθῆναι (1.21). This place was typically believed to have been the Lupercal, where the she-wolf nursed the twins. Beginning here, the Luperci would run around the city in a ritual commonly considered to purify the boundary of the city. Plutarch claims this festival is a purification rite (καθάρσις), and Varro similarly describes the procession and route of the Luperci around the Palatine: *id est Lupercis nudis lustratur antiquum oppidum Palatium* or “[the Lupercalia] is when the old Palatine town is purified by the naked Luperci” (Varro 6.34). The young men begin at the Lupercal on the Palatine, running around the “ancient town,” probably referring to the first settlement of the city and the Romulean wall. Although we do not know exactly where the Lupercal was on the Palatine, we can imagine the Luperci running from the cave near the walls or even out of the gates (if the Lupercal was inside the walls), performing this



cleansing ritual by running around the walls. Through lustration, they purify and protect the walls for the upcoming year, until once again the boundaries would need to be purified at the next Lupercalia. William Fowler states that “the rite served the practical purpose of keeping the boundary clear in the memory” (Fowler 212). By successfully accomplishing this run, the young men both broke through the barrier between childhood and adulthood, and then preserved this barrier until it would be broken again in the next year. Furthermore, if we follow the path of the Luperci to its end, as T.P. Wiseman believes, then the celebration concluded in the Comitium, with “a large crowd in the Forum and Caesar on the Rostra” (Wiseman 4).<sup>3</sup> If the Luperci did end their run in the Comitium, where adult Romans men would meet to pass laws and make decisions, then this seems like the perfect *telos* for these young Luperci to finish their sym-

bolic run, as they too would be at the age where they participate in government. In addition, as the Lupercalia had a close connection to the founding of the city through the myth of the she-wolf, this path of the Luperci represents the development of Rome as a city and its own rite of passage from a town on the Palatine with mundane roots (represented by the Lupercal) to a fully functioning Republic (represented by the Comitium).

The last myth and subsequent ritual closely tied to the celebration of the Lupercalia in its capacity as a rite of passage is that concerning the barrenness of the Sabine women. Ovid informs us of Romulus’ distress over the infertility of their new brides, and he consults Juno who gives him strange advice: “*Italidas matres*” inquit “*sacer hircus inito*” (“Let the sacred goat’ he said, ‘enter the Italian mothers’”) (Ovid 2.441). Holleman notes the link between the verb *inito* and the name *Inuus* (Holleman 261), the

Roman god of copulation, whom Livy names as the god of the Lupercal (Livy 1.5). The connotation of sexual penetration makes this statement from the goddess disturbing initially. It is a nameless Etruscan who came up with the idea to whip the Sabine women, thereby linking the celebration of the Lupercalia to not only the Greek and Roman, but also to the Etruscan tradition. The women are symbolically penetrated by the goat as the goatskin whip breaks the skin, fulfilling the words of Juno (Wiseman 14). Ovid describes these married women as *puellae*, just like Omphale was described; they are women who just entered into married life, and have not yet borne children and passed into the next stage of their life — motherhood. Therefore, this act of penetration by the goat turns them into *matres*, as *Italidas matres* is the direct object of the verb *inito*. Young Roman women believing in this myth were then whipped by the young

men in fulfillment of this tradition, believing that it promoted fertility: *ἄι δ’ ἐν ἡλικίᾳ γυναῖκες οὐ φεύγουσι τὸ παιεσθαι, νομίζουσαι πρὸς εὐτοκίαν καὶ κήσιν συνεργεῖν* or “The young women do not flee the striking, they believe it to facilitate easy delivery and conception” (Plutarch 1.21). The whipping of these *ἄι δ’ ἐν ἡλικίᾳ γυναῖκες*, or “women of marriageable age” (Lewis and Short) becomes more than a fertility rite—the act is the deliberate penetration of a barrier in which the young woman is brought into the fertile stage of her life, where she can more easily bear children. Because of these traditions, the Lupercalia served as a coming of age ritual for both young Roman men and woman.

Further evidence of the important role the Lupercalia played in Roman lives as a rite of passage is dedicatory inscriptions in which a person is named as a Lupercus. In these inscriptions, Roman men would list their many

accomplishments, and included as one of these accomplishments was participation in the Lupercalia: *C(aius) Curtius...lupercus* (CIL 6.32437 [= ILS 4945]). Here, a certain Caius Curtius lists himself as a Lupercus, and the description of his role in the festival is one of the only things we know about him after his death besides his name, marking it as a defining moment in his life. These inscriptions were not limited to Rome but can be found elsewhere in Latium, Etruscan cities, and even as far as France where a Lucius Sammius is described as a Lupercus in addition to his prefecture in Narbo: *lupercus...provinciae Narbonensis praef(ecto)* (CIL 12.2183 [= ILS 5274]). These young men would travel all the way to Rome in order to participate in this ritual. In doing so, they went back to their cities proud to have come to Rome and to have celebrated the festival:

they valued the experience to the extent that they deemed it worthy enough to describe them after death and become an integral aspect of their identities. These men were part of a great tradition in celebrating a ritual closely tied to the foundation of the city. By participating in this ritual—a ritual believed to have been established before the city existed, in which even the city's founders participated—these men marked a significant step in their lives, an important passage for them in truly becoming Roman men.

Through its myths and the enactment of these myths through ritual practice, the Lupercalia served as a rite of passage for the Romans; in symbolically crossing barriers through these rituals, young Roman men and women moved from youth into adulthood, and accepted their responsibilities as members of the Roman state. In concluding

her article, Mary Beard marvels at Roman “ritual time, whose sequence had collapsed into an overlapping series of stories” (Beard 288). The Romans celebrated events that happened in their history, becoming part of that very history through enactment. In the observance of these rituals of the Lupercalia, the Romans followed in the footsteps of Romulus and Remus and many other Romans that came before them; the celebration of myths and rituals therefore truly defined what it meant to be Roman. ☞

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The lack of dress of the Luperci is a distinctive ritual that sets the Lupercalia apart from many other Roman festivals. Scholars have argued over the exact dress, whether they are actually naked, as claimed by Virgil — *nudosque Lupercos* (Aen. 8.663) — and Livy — *nudi iuvenes* (1.5) — or whether they are covered by the skin of the goat just sacrificed as in Dionysius — *γυμνός ὑπέλωσμένους τήν αἰδωταῖς δοραῖς τῶν νεοθύτων* (1.80). A.W.J. Holleman attributes the addition of the goat skin clothing to the Augustan reforms of the festival “to make the festival more decent” (224). A full discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of the paper.

<sup>2</sup> *λύκραια* is the Greek name for the Lupercalia. Dionysius 1.80.

<sup>3</sup> Main evidence of this *telos* is the famous event of the Lupercalia in 44 BC, in which Mark Antony, as a Lupercus, offers Caesar a crown in the Comitia.

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# Unhappy Dido and the *Aeneid's* Conquest of the Feminine Past

M. ALEXANDRA VAN NIEVELT



*"Wall painting fragment showing female face", artist unknown, Yale-French excavations at Dura-Europos*

In the imagination of the Vergilian epic, the warring forces of chaos and order are at least cursorily gendered feminine and masculine, respectively. The female jurisdiction over the past and what is primal often degenerates into obsessions over old wrongs, old cities and old loves, and must be overcome by a self-mastered, forward-thinking masculine authority that moves towards the actualization of fate. Dido, a widow who remains faithful to the memory of her dead husband and yet has become the sovereign queen of a burgeoning city, seems to be a peculiar hybrid of these forces—too peculiar, perhaps, to remain unchecked. As her love affair with Aeneas progresses, she is steered towards the comfortable role of the Vergilian female adversary—unrestrained and resistant to the future—that culminates in her suicide. This metamorphosis of the chaste Carthaginian ruler into a monstrous figure seemingly removes Dido as a threat to the Roman project and the overall masculine authority behind the narrative. Yet upon ending her life and submitting to the irrational and backwards-looking aspects of her persona, Dido deploys a masculine understanding of the import of the future as she condemns Aeneas' descendants to a femininely anchored repetition of the past. The queen of Carthage is a wonderfully complex character who, at every turn, resists normalization by the polarized and gendered forces of the poem.

As pointed out by S. Georgia Nugent, the *Aeneid's* most memorable women share one crucial trait: they refuse to subordinate themselves to the roles that masculine authority would see them play (Nugent 260). They refuse, also, to recognize the legitimacy and inevitability of a promised future that the poem alternatively suggests to

be Fate beyond divine jurisdiction (Vergil, I.57 and I.364), or Jupiter's will (Vergil I.378, XII.677-80, X.11, and X.20-21). Regardless, because the vision of Rome's imperial future proves triumphant, the female forces undercutting the poem are rebellious, resisting, trouble making, and, ultimately, defeated. For example, Juno, the archetype of Vergil's feminine foe, is introduced as embittered by a "sharp / and savage hurt [that] had not yet left her spirit" (I.38-9) and perhaps never will: she hates the Trojans because of the relatively recent judgment of Paris and Jove's not-so recent ravishment of Gany-mede (I.40-5). Furthermore, her efforts to impede the Trojan settlement in Italy are doomed from the start—and she knows it (X.57).

Juno's stubborn opposition to the inevitable epitomizes the irrationality of the female venture, its rootedness in the past, and its determination to put forward as

many obstacles as possible before ceding defeat. Juno's first act in the *Aeneid* is the introduction of an element of disorder that will need to be overcome by a male force—in this case, Poseidon—for the narrative to proceed (I.75-130). Other women play similar roles in temporarily hindering Rome's imperial future: the Trojan matrons attempt to burn down their own ships (V.813-96), Amata leads her people to civil war over the marriage of her daughter to Aeneas (VII.471-541), and Juturna obstinately attempts to delay his brother's inevitable death until Turnus himself must beg her to allow him to face his fate (XII.900-906). As Ellen Oliensis notes, the only unproblematic women of the *Aeneid* are those who submit to masculine authority by either allowing themselves to be buried with the past, like Creusa, or employed for the cementing of the future,

like Lavinia (Oliensis 303).

Dido defies the rather black and white pigeonholing that can be applied to the rest of the *Aeneid's* female characters, however. "Dido, ignorant of destiny" (I.422) is the way Jove first refers to the Queen of Carthage, placing her in opposition to the forward-moving forces of male authority. Even after listening to Aeneas' story and his divinely sanctioned duty to sail to the ancient Dardanian fatherland, Dido neglects to acknowledge the inevitability of this promised future, due to the love with which Cupid inflames her. Indeed, as she makes offerings to the gods so she might win their endorsement of her passion for the Trojan chieftain, the Vergilian narrator suggests the futility of her enterprise: "But oh the ignorance of augurs! How / can vows and altars help one wild with love?" (IV.86-7). Rather than bemoaning the inadequacy of an augur's prophetic

abilities, these lines seem to hint at the inability (or unwillingness) of love-stricken Dido to see what lies before her. In this way, upon learning of Aeneas' impending departure, she still inquires, "Can nothing hold you back?" (IV.412), despite the fact that she ought to know by now that, in fact, nothing can. While Dido has willfully chosen—perhaps under Amor's coercion—to take a doomed stand against the inevitable victory of the masculine authority of the epic, Aeneas has already submitted to it, and to the Fates' project, at the outset of the poem.

The risk of stagnating and past-obsessing femininity seems to be present in Dido before the Trojans arrive to her shores. In conversation with her sister Anna, she reveals that until Aeneas' arrival she considered her dead husband Sychaeus to be her love's "guardian within the grave" (IV.35), and refused to "know sweet children



or the soft / rewards of Venus" (IV.41) with any of her African suitors (IV.43-6).<sup>1</sup> It is true that Dido's surrender to the love of the Trojan hero, engineered by the latter's mother and brother, proves fatal, and indeed, the *Aeneid* seems to present passionate heterosexual love between equals as a hindrance to the empire-building project. Yet this is also a remarkably generationally oriented poem; Italy must be won for Ascanius, and Lavinia must become pregnant by Aeneas for the future of Rome to be assured.

Under this rubric, in rejecting marital alliances that could provide her nation with a firmly cemented lineage of Punic rulers, Dido is neglecting her country's future. It is furthermore significant that her motivation for remaining chaste is not the continued political independence of her people—as it was for the historical Queen Dido of Carthage—but rather the honoring of a past love.

Dido, Vergil reveals, had even built a temple for her late husband within her palace (IV.629-633), and in this, she can be likened to the heartbreaking figure of Andromache, whom Aeneas encounters in Epirus as she futilely summons Hector's shade (III.380-409). Andromache has come to rule with her new husband Helenus over a miniature replica of the fallen Troy, and lives in perpetual stagnation in the past of the defeated. For Dido, the state of the Trojan couple ought to be a cautionary tale of what the *Aeneid* depicts as a female inability to let go of the old in pursuit of a brighter future.

Yet the figure of Andromache does not exhaust the complexities of Dido. After all, while she may be mindful of the memory of her late husband, the queen is knee-deep in the project of founding a wonderfully prosperous city when the Trojans first seek her aid. Aeneas, indeed, first encounters Dido "in her

joy [...] / urg[ing] along the work of her coming kingdom" (I.710-11), where "the eager men of Tyre work steadily" (I.601) under her rule. Immediately following this scene of optimistic, forward-thinking activity, Dido sits on a throne "dealing judgments to her people / and giving laws" (I.715-16). Here, the Carthaginian queen certainly looks more like a cheerful version of Aeneas, who bears his traumatic past manfully and pulls forward for the welfare of his people, than like the mournful Andromache who exists solely to pay tribute to a long-lost past. Furthermore, in her initial offer to both provide safe passage to the Trojans and allow them to settle in her kingdom (I.803-7), Vergil props her up as a parallel to the Homeric King Alkinoös of Phaiakia and his wife Arete, who make a similar offer to Odysseus (Homer VII.309-328), and facilitate his arrival to Ithaka.

It is Dido's Cupid-induced love

for Aeneas that saps her leadership abilities, and steers her, first towards immobility, and, ultimately, to self-defeating action. Inflamed by love, the once rational, law-giving Dido who is compared to the huntress goddess Diana at the outset of the story (I.700-11) is now likened to a hunted deer as she "wanders [her city] in her frenzy" (IV.91). Her pain no longer borne with stoicism and dignity, love-struck Dido, like other Virgilian women, reflects her torments onto her community:

Her towers rise no more; the young  
of Carthage / No longer exercise at  
arms or build / Their harbors or sure  
battlements for war.  
(IV.113-5)

As Dido abandons her concerns about future safety and prosperity of her people, no longer does a linear, upwards-and-forwards tending energy drive the young city and its queen. Instead, the Carthaginians' "works are idle, broken off; the

massive, / menacing rampart walls, even the crane, / defier of the sky, now lie neglected" (IV.112-117).

As part of this assimilation of Dido into the archetype of the female adversary, the queen begins to show personal evidence of an inability to follow things through, and we see her for the first time associated with the waste of time. Indeed, as she shows Aeneas the Eastern wealth of her city, "she starts to speak, then falters / and stops midspeech. Now day glides away" (IV.100-101). Virgil also associates the queen with lethargic indolence and idle vanity as she prepares at length to go hunting with her Trojan beloved. Ominously, there is a political connotation to her belatedness in this case, for the "chieftains / of Carthage wait at Dido's threshold" (IV.177-8) while she "*still* lingers in her room" (IV.179, emphasis added), a place associated with the feminine private, vanity, sloth and sexuality.

In her interaction with Aeneas, Dido further exhibits signs of the neurotic compulsive repetitions with which the past-obsessed female forces threaten the epic:

*Again*, insane, she seeks out that same banquet, / *Again* she prays to hear the trials of Troy, / *Again* she hangs upon the teller's lips.

(IV.100-103, emphasis added)

Like Andromache and Juno, Dido has been infected with the tendency to relive the past instead of working towards a new future. She has become, like the Homeric Circe and Calypso, a threat to the hero she loves, whom she might likewise make "forgetful of what is [his] own kingdom, [his] own fate" (IV.356-57).

In the *Odyssey*, Calypso receives a visit from Hermes and ultimately obeys Zeus' will, freeing her captive lover. Dido receives no such forewarning when the divine works to separate her and Aeneas, going as far as to "make

deaf the hero's / kind ears" to her pleas (IV.606-7). She thus never knowingly resists nor upholds the will of the gods, but, rather, sarcastically questions Aeneas' claim that his departure has been divinely ordained (IV.514-21). In this way, the poem associates Dido once again with feminine forces of resistance against Rome's fated future, and her subsequent vitriol against the hero likens her to wrathful Juno and the primal, avenging Furies themselves (IV.522-32). Shockingly, Dido goes as far as to wish that she had "dragged [Aeneas'] body off, and scattered him piecemeal upon the waters [...] or butchered all his comrades, even served / Ascanius himself as banquet dish / upon his father's table" (IV.827-31). At this point, the queen of Carthage seems to have undergone a psychological metamorphosis similar to that of Procne, who murders and feeds her son to her husband in retribution

for the rape and mutilation of her sister, and whose figure—as well as that of Medea, who scatters the limbs of her brother Absyrtus on the sea as she flees her homeland with her lover Jason—mediates the reader's reception of Dido.

This moment is one of the most visible markers of Dido's transformation into an adversary figure of the kind of monstrous Polyphemus, whom—it must be noted—the Trojans had just left behind before arriving on Carthaginian shores (III.849-861). As pointed out by David Quint, the parallel between Dido and the Polyphemus—and the danger they pose to the Trojan refugees—is further emphasized by the repetition of the urgent act of cutting the anchor cables of their ships upon leaving the Cyclops' shores (III.828-29) and, later, Dido's realm (IV.795; Quint 109). The moment in which the Carthaginian queen most closely echoes the actions of the *Odys-*

sean Polyphemus is, however, in her curse of Aeneas and his “race to come” (IV.859). Just as the Cyclops asks his divine father to avenge him, Dido calls on the Sun, Juno, Hecate and the Furies to “take up [her] prayers” (IV.8.38-46). Both Dido and Polyphemus furthermore concede that the hero who has wronged them might achieve his goal, and yet demand that they suffer certain misfortunes that shall qualify and unsettle the resolution of the epic (Quint 106-11).

First, it points out that if Aeneas’ “end is fixed” and he is to arrive to Italy, it is because “the fates of Jove / demand” it (IV.847-8), inviting speculation about the different fates willed by other gods. This suggestion challenges the very idea that the masculine force of the poem advocates for an unchangeable destiny, which its feminine foil merely delays. When interpreted in light of the fame-obsessed behavior that Jove exhibits through-

out the poem, this observation suggests that the god’s plans are no more rational or justified than Juno’s. Perhaps, as Dido puts it, the Roman “Fate” in the *Aeneid* is merely Jove’s fate, which overcomes others for no reason other than the greater strength that backs it up.

The Carthaginian Queen’s curse is also distinctive in that it at least partially appropriates the forward-looking, historical aspect of the force she has come to resist. Polyphemus’ curse conditions Odysseus’ homecoming and poses a challenge to his happiness, but Dido’s goes beyond the realms of the personal, or, rather, makes the personal, political. While she immediately dooms the Trojans to the “war and struggles” (IV.850) they will undergo in Italy, and Aeneas to premature death (IV.855-6), she also calls on her people to avenge her death by warring against “all his sons and race to come [...] now and in the future” (IV.858-864).

In this way, Dido prophesies the three Punic wars in which Carthage will twice rise from defeat to challenge Rome. Fittingly, the scene of Dido’s death evokes the myth of the self-immolation and

rise up from [her] bones” (IV.862) seems to prefigure the great Punic general Hannibal as the offspring of her wrath—a military leader who will enact vengeance in the much-anticipated masculine fu-



“Fragment of a wall painting with a woman’s head”

artist unknown

Roman, ca. 50 BC to 79 AD

rebirth of the immortal Phoenix by juxtaposing Dido’s suicide upon her own funerary pyre with language and acts of unfastening and loosening of knots (IV.715-18, 970) that are suggestive of childbirth and delivery (Quint 111). Finally, her prayer that “an avenger

ture, on behalf of the unforgettable wounds of the feminine past.

This gendered duality is present in her death as well. On the one hand, she commits suicide, which is consistent with the female pole of self-defeating action and aligns her with Queen Amata,

another suicide (XII.798-810). Furthermore, her death is in itself a rebellion against the forces of order, since she willfully chooses “a death that was not merited or fated” (IV.958-9). Yet Dido’s suicidal technique itself—letting herself fall on the sword gifted by an enemy (IV.915)—is perhaps the most masculine form of self-killing, reminiscent of the suicide of Sophocles’ Ajax, who takes his life with the sword Hector once gave him. The Carthaginian queen’s dreams the night before she dies further reveal this bundling of gender dualities in death. In Dido’s nightmare, Aeneas “drives her to insanity” (IV.641) just as “Pentheus, when he is seized by a frenzy [...] sees files of Furies [...] or when / Orestes [...] flees from his mother armed / with torches and black serpents” (IV.647-52). The epic simile thus directly identifies Dido with men under female attack. More broadly, however, the queen’s state

is compared to the entire scene of crazed pursuit; she is both the rational male-gendered victim, and the female victimizer, and she fittingly finds death at her own hand.

But does Dido—resistant as she is to assimilation by the female adversarial force—manage to unsettle the story’s resolution beyond blurring the lines of fairly reductive dichotomies? She certainly unsettles her former lover, who mourns her loss, and whom she dooms to suffer much unhappiness and an early death. Yet Aeneas is not the center of the *Aeneid's* project in the way that Odysseus is the center of the *Odyssey*; his will and story are wholly in the service of the future of his son Ascanius and the nascent Roman Empire. While the second, forward-thinking part of Dido’s curse might seem to perturb this ending as well, an interpretation of her prayer and the poem’s resolution in light of a deceptively understated

passage hint at her ultimate failure.

As the reader may or may not remember, as Ascanius hunts alongside his father and Dido at the beginning of Book IV, he yearns for a more formidable foe than “the lazy herds” (IV.209) that surround him. Specifically, “his prayer is for a foaming boar or that / golden lion come down from the mountain” (IV.210-11). The Trojan boy here essentially wishes for a worthy enemy that he might heroically defeat, and this is what the poem grants him. Had Aeneas stayed in Carthage, Ascanius would not have had the opportunity to face the Latins in the second half of the epic, where the Trojan refugees reenact and rewrite their former defeat into a victory. It is significant, in light of the quarries for which Ascanius prays, that in the Italian war his father faces and slays Mezentius, Turnus’ second-in-command—who is likened to a ferocious hunted

boar (X.970-85) and a starving lion (X.989-99). The battle—and, indeed, the *Aeneid* itself—furthermore concludes with Aeneas’ killing of Turnus, who is himself compared to a lion as he charges against Pallas—and not just any lion, but, specifically, a lion rushing down “from some high point” (X.630), such as a mountain.

Most importantly, however, had Aeneas chosen to remain in Africa, the Roman race would have lost its historic nemesis in Carthage, and the “writing of such treaties” is not something that Jove or Vergil tolerates (IV.148-9). Indeed, Aeneas’s decision to leave the Libyan shores is spurred in great part by his fear of cheating his son a splendid destiny (IV.311-4, 365-9 and 481-4) grounded on warfare. By abandoning the queen, the Trojan figuratively impregnates Dido with hatred, resulting in her prophetic delivery of a future avenger, Hannibal, moments be-



fore committing suicide. Yet Hannibal Barca was one of four brothers known as the “lion’s brood,”<sup>2</sup> and famously invaded Rome by marching an army over the Alps—he might also represent the “lion come down from the mountain” that Ascanius wishes to face. Furthermore, since the boy’s prayer immediately precedes the consummation of Dido and Aeneas’ love, the affair and the age-enduring enmity that ensues from it can be structurally read as an answer to the boy’s yearning. In this way, Vergil reduces one of Rome’s greatest threats to the satisfaction of an adolescent whim—a whim, however, that figuratively carries the import of the *Aeneid*’s account of the rise of an empire that would one day subdue the peoples of the earth.

As a corollary of this interpretation, Dido’s very curse upon the Trojans seems necessary for the creation of the glorious Roman Empire. This assimilation of

the Carthaginian Phoenix-like, ever-enduring resentment into the larger forward-moving and telos-seeking history of Rome is itself a defeat both of the African queen’s hope of vindication, and the narrative’s backwards-looking feminine force. Under this reading, Vergil’s Dido dies as “un-avenged” (IV.909) as she claims she will, forcibly incorporated into the poem’s pole of the defeated feminine forces of the past, despite the evidence of her character’s enduring gender hybridity. And yet Dido, the oft-sympathetic and multifaceted adversary to the *Aeneid*’s empire-building project, remains—as famously stated by the classicist Richard Heinze—“the only character created by a Roman poet to pass into world literature” (Heinze 133). While there is no political victory in store for the Carthaginian queen in the history that lies ahead, we might discover literary

triumph for her in the poem that Vergil writes about the past. ♡

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Even if Dido’s devotion to her late husband’s memory awards her the status of a *univira*, valued in Roman culture, the *Aeneid* can nonetheless call it into question. Furthermore, our understanding of the evolution of the term problematizes its applicability to Dido. Vergil’s Rome seems to have celebrated *univirae* as fortunate women who had never suffered divorce or the death of their husbands; the concept of *univira* was not applied to chaste widowhood until Rome’s Christianization (Lightman and Zeisel, 19-32).

<sup>2</sup> The origin of the phrase is attributed to a famous Roman anecdote claiming that Hamilcar Barca, Hannibal’s father, referred to his infant sons as “the lion cubs that [he was] rearing for the destruction of Rome.” Admittedly, our reception of the anecdote comes from its collection by Roman historian Valerius Maximus in his *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium libri IX*, which was written in 30 or 31 AD—at least 39 years after Vergil purportedly finished the *Aeneid* in 19 BC. Maximus tells the story in Book IX, chapter 3, ext. 2 of his works, and the translation above is Henry John Walker’s (322).

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"Black-Figure Hydra," Tyrrhenian Group, ca. 575-550 BC

# Three Translations:

Vergil's *Eclogues* IV.31–45

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SARAH NORVELL

CONNIE CHEUNG

PETER DEWIRE

IV.31 Pauca tamen suberunt priscae uestigia fraudis,  
 quae temptare Thetin ratibus, quae cingere muris  
 oppida, quae iubeant telluri infindere sulcos.  
 alter erit tum Tiphys et altera quae uehat Argo  
 delectos heroas; erunt etiam altera bella,  
 atque iterum ad Troiam magnus mittetur Achilles.  
 Hinc, ubi iam firmata uirum te fecerit aetas,  
 cedet et ipse mari uector nec nautica pinus  
 mutabit merces; omnis feret omnia tellus.  
 non rastros patietur humus, non uinea falcem,  
 robustus quoque iam tauris iuga soluet arator;  
 nec uarios discet mentiri lana colores,  
 ipse sed in pratis aries iam suaue rubenti  
 murice, iam croceo mutabit uellera luto,  
 sponte sua sandyx pascentis uestiet agnos.

—*Vergil*

There will still remain traces of our ancient wrong,  
 which commands men  
 to test the sea with rafts,  
 to surround the towns with walls,  
 to cleave the earth with furrows.  
 Then there will be a second Tiphys  
 and a second Argo that carries chosen heroes.  
 There will also be other wars,  
 and again the great Achilles will be sent to Troy.  
 Then when the lasting age has made you a man,  
 the voyager will no longer sail the sea,  
 the pinewood boat will no longer trade goods—  
 the land will bring forth all.  
 The earth will no longer suffer the plows,  
 nor the vine the pruning-hooks.  
 Even the hardy plowman will loose the oxen from their yokes.  
 The fleece will no longer counterfeit different colors,  
 for in the meadows the ram himself will color his fleece  
 now into a reddened murex,  
 now into a yellowed saffron.  
 Red, on its own, will swathe the grazing lamb.

—*Connie Cheung*

IV.31 Pauca tamen suberunt priscae uestigia fraudis,  
 quae temptare Thetin ratibus, quae cingere muris  
 oppida, quae iubeant telluri infindere sulcos.  
 alter erit tum Tiphys et altera quae uehat Argo  
 delectos heroas; erunt etiam altera bella,  
 atque iterum ad Troiam magnus mittetur Achilles.  
 Hinc, ubi iam firmata uirum te fecerit aetas,  
 cedet et ipse mari uector nec nautica pinus  
 mutabit merces; omnis feret omnia tellus.  
 non rastros patietur humus, non uinea falcem,  
 robustus quoque iam tauris iuga soluet arator;  
 nec uarios discet mentiri lana colores,  
 ipse sed in pratis aries iam suaue rubenti  
 murice, iam croceo mutabit uellera luto,  
 sponte sua sandyx pascentis uestiet agnos.

—Vergil

But yet, of ancient fraud, some traces do  
 endure; these remnants bid good men assail  
 the seas on sinful ships and force mankind  
 to build defense and, weary, work the earth  
 There will a second Tiphys be, with him  
 will come an Argo too, which will convey  
 new champions, and then great wars again  
 will rise and Thetis' son be sent to Troy.  
 But when this hardened age has made a man  
 of you, the seas will be abandoned by  
 the sailors with their merchant boats of pine.  
 Devoid of work, the earth will yield all things.  
 Without the hoe or scythe, with bull from yoke  
 untied, the ground and vine will bear their fruit.  
 No longer must one dye the wool; in fields  
 alone, the wild ram will change its hue:  
 to pleasant purple-red or sunny gold.  
 The grazing lambs will be now scarlet-clad.

—Peter Dewire

IV.31 Pauca tamen suberunt priscae uestigia fraudis,  
 quae temptare Thetin ratibus, quae cingere muris  
 oppida, quae iubeant telluri infindere sulcos.  
 alter erit tum Tiphys et altera quae uehat Argo  
 delectos heroas; erunt etiam altera bella,  
 atque iterum ad Troiam magnus mittetur Achilles.  
 Hinc, ubi iam firmata uirum te fecerit aetas,  
 cedet et ipse mari uector nec nautica pinus  
 mutabit merces; omnis feret omnia tellus.  
 non rastros patietur humus, non uinea falcem,  
 robustus quoque iam tauris iuga soluet arator;  
 nec uarios discet mentiri lana colores,  
 ipse sed in pratis aries iam suaue rubenti  
 murice, iam croceo mutabit uellera luto,  
 sponte sua sandyx pascentis uestiet agnos.

—Vergil

E'en still shall traces of the ancient crime,  
 Force men to test in ships the salty brine,  
 To gird their towns with ramparts, safe from foes,  
 To scar the earth with furrows, ploughed in rows.  
 Another Tiphys then there shall arise,  
 And Argo, hero-laden, shall reprise.  
 Other wars shall e'en be thus engendered;  
 Once more to Troy the fierce Achilles rendered.  
 When you the strength'ning years a man have made,  
 The trav'ller o'er the sea be not conveyed.  
 Henceforth, no more the sailing pine afield  
 Shall vend its wares; all lands all crops shall yield.  
 The soil shall not endure the harrow-stroke,  
 Nor less, the vine the sharp-edged pruning hook.  
 The ploughman, hardy, strong, shall now release  
 His oxen from their collared wood crosspiece.  
 And wool shall no more learn to feign its dyes,  
 The ram in mead his own fleece shall revise  
 Now to a sweetly-blushing purple hue,  
 Now to a saffron yellow, fair to view.  
 And even grazing lambs in pasture bright,  
 Shall scarlet clothe, of its own will and might.

—Sarah Norvell

# Ancient Tragedy for Modern Ills:

## An Interview with Peter Meineck



*Bell krater: "Orestes at the Altar of Apollo at Delphi," Hoppin Painter, ca. 380-365 BC*

When Peter Meineck began his studies at University College London after serving in the marines, he considered himself a Latinist. Observing his shaved head, Professor Pat Easterling one day suggested that he study Aeschylus, a Greek playwright—but also a fellow soldier. The match was fruitful, and only a few years later, Meineck published an award-winning translation of the *Oresteia*. Now a clinical associate professor of Classics at New York University, Meineck is also the founder and Artistic Director of the Aquila Theatre and the director of a theater project called Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives (AGML).

Meineck's recent scholarly work—highlighted in his recent talk at Yale as part of the Franke Lectures in the Humanities' "Greece and Rome, Continued" series—focuses on how Greek tragedy might have functioned as a communal mechanism to deal with social traumas, and perhaps combat trauma in particular. In Meineck's view, the collective catharses offered by dramatic performances might have functioned as a way to reintegrate war veterans to civilian lives—a useful exercise in a time when most of the actors and audience members of the plays on stage had been or soon would become soldiers. Meineck's work in theater is grounded on the assumption that Greek tragedy can still serve such a need. The AGML program aims to make classical literature accessible and has come to focus on creating spaces for personal and communal restoration in the context of war trauma.

—*M. Alexandra van Nievelt*



## INTERVIEWER

Your academic field is Classics, but you've also worked on modern productions ranging from *I Am Legend* to your own adaptation of *Catch-22*. How did you wind up doing both Classics and contemporary theater?

## MEINECK

It's funny, because I read Classics as an undergraduate in London, and then I went to work in the theater. I originally didn't have any interest in being a professional scholar—I wanted to be a professional in theater. My impulse to do theater was because I felt that the classics in England at that time—the mid-80s—were very elitist: impenetrable to most people, or so avant-garde that audiences were not understanding the power of these plays. I'd had such a transcendental experience with the Greek tragedy when I went to

university that I wanted to share that experience with others—and so I founded a company [the Aquila Theatre] to do classical works. I've always seen them as dramatic pieces, however, and was never scholarly about them, except when I purposefully study them as an academic.

As my career developed in professional theater, I started to come back more and more to scholarship because I was translating, speaking, teaching—and I realized that was really my love. In a way, I think that I was doing theater as a form of teaching. So now I do more scholarly than theater work, but I'm still on the board of a theater company, I still get involved with projects and I still translate plays. I think I'll always be a theater person; it gets in your blood, really. So to me, it's funny, [to reflect on the tensions between art and academia] because for

a long time the two things struggled with each other, but now I've managed to forge a career where they really work hand-in-hand.

## INTERVIEWER

Would you speak more about this idea of “theater as a form of teaching” and the pedagogical aspect of your plays?

## MEINECK

Aristotle said the same thing. The irony is that I was poisoned against Aristotle for years, but I've come to realize that he actually has brilliant things to say about plays that he never saw. He understood the pedagogical power of plays. That [approach] can make them seem stuffy, but I think that if you're emotionally compelled to feel something, to have empathy with someone, or to understand an experience you might never live through

yourself, then that's the best education. And that's the power of drama.

Until very recently, it was very unfashionable to talk about the origins of Greek drama. This phenomenon originated then and there for a reason, however, because that culture had a need to express certain tensions. And perhaps they can help us explore and work through modern tensions too. Classical works have a power as received texts—something people know is important. But if you can get beyond that, and you can start to feel something for these characters and situations, then you can have something really transcendental. And that's what makes them “classic.” As classicists we have to keep that in mind. Let's not teach the *Iliad* because someone told us it's important; let's find why it's important now and why it still

speaks to us. Luckily these texts make that really easy, because they're really good. But I think that gets forgotten sometimes in the classical tradition.

INTERVIEWER

How does your work as a theater director influence your translations of drama?

MEINECK

Ultimately, the final translation I produce is the performance text. It involves about a year of scrutinizing the Greek, and then I have to have a reason to translate. I've also become more radical as a translator. I don't want to be slavish to the Greek; I want to translate feelings, not words. It's more important for plays to work than to be accurate. The *Oresteia* is the best translation I ever did, and this was back when I was 24 years old. I felt like I was the

Aeschylus of England—it was the arrogance of youth, of course, but it might have worked for the better of the translation.

INTERVIEWER

Is staging a work of classical drama more difficult than, say, staging Shakespeare? Is it challenging to present classical drama to audiences with no exposure to classical civilization/culture?

MEINECK

Certainly. The Aquila Theatre was actually founded to stage productions of Greek drama, but it's most famous for its Shakespearian plays. When it comes to Greek drama, people come with too many preconceived ideas. At the end of the day, you have to find something that speaks to the individual person. If you have something to say and you say it

loudly and proudly, maybe the public will go with it and smell that truth. There's a balance between taking the audience to something new and dangerous, and also communicating with them—the best art does both. But that's a hard balance to strike. For example, I am now facing a big dilemma regarding the use of masks in tragedy—do they work for my audiences in the same way they would for a Japanese or an ancient Greek audience?

INTERVIEWER

What are some of the challenges you face when adapting classical works for modern audiences?

MEINECK

The biggest challenge is forgetting I'm a classicist. The problem within the Classics is that we're hyper-professionalized; we only write

books to each other. But these texts are not just important for their status in canon and scholarly history—they have meaning today, and we shouldn't shy away from the fact that we need to communicate that. A classicist should be a leader in his or her field, but also be able to translate the meaning of his or her work for other people. ♣



# More than a Manor House:

## Roles and Representations of the Villa in Republican Rome

SOPHIE GOULD

In his essay “On Duties,” Cicero encourages Romans to recognize “how base it is to give one’s self up to luxury, and to live voluptuously and wantonly, and how honorable it is to live frugally, chastely, circumspectly, soberly” (Cicero 1.30). Yet this was the man who owned more than four villas — defined here as country estates — in at least three towns outside of Rome, and wrote frequently to his close friend Atticus, urging him to bring home famous works of Greek art from his travels for decorative purposes (Marzano 91). Should we thus understand Cicero’s rhetoric as tantamount to hypocrisy? The answer depends in part on our conceptual-ization of the Roman villa. In this paper, I will weave together several discussions, examining the development and architecture of the villa, the role the structure played in Roman society, the attitudes with which Romans approached the villa, and the way in which the villa illustrated various dichotomies—town/country, Roman/Greek, public/private, *negotium/otium*—prevalent in Roman society at the time. Through reviewing selected writings of Cicero, Vitruvius, Varro, Cato, and various modern scholars, I will attempt to answer how did the Roman elite reconcile the apparent hypocrisy of villa-owning? I will ultimately argue that the Roman elite held a nuanced

understanding of *mos maiorum* (loosely translated as “ancestral tradition”) that, at least in their minds, justified their double lives.

Roman villas did not just spontaneously appear throughout the countryside in the second century B.C.; they were a direct outgrowth of conquest. As Roman armies ventured further afield and expanded Rome’s sphere of political influence throughout the Mediterranean, elite Roman politicians returning from military campaigns brought home not only tales of exotic lands, but also slaves and booty. This influx of labor and capital, combined with the large swaths of land left unfarmed by conscripted peasants, led to the development of the Roman villa as Roman elites began channeling their excess wealth toward large-scale land acquisition (and simply annexed the small peasant farms in their way) (Wallace

43). Land was the preferred purchase, because, as I will discuss later, the social standards of the time regarded its acquisition and management as the only proper way for the elite to invest (Marzano 225). Though the remains of slave quarters have been identified in recent excavations of the Villa Settefinestre in Tuscany, not all villas were latifundia (“slave-run estates”) (ibid. 129). The stereotypical villa comprised farmland and gardens, with residential and agricultural buildings grouped around a courtyard, and served as a center for both the management of agricultural production, and for the leisurely, cultural refinement of the owner.

Because Roman villas have largely been destroyed, remodeled or restructured over the centuries since the Republic and relatively few sites have been excavated, much of our knowledge about Roman villas relies on evi-

dence from literary sources. Cicero mentioned many of his villas in his letters, giving us a sense of how long he spent at each one and his activities there, and Cato and Varro wrote about the idea of the villa relative to agriculture, which I will discuss later. But we cannot always take these writings at face value because some of our sources directly contradict archeological findings. Vitruvius, for example, a first century B.C. architect, tells us that country villas are structured as inversions of city houses:

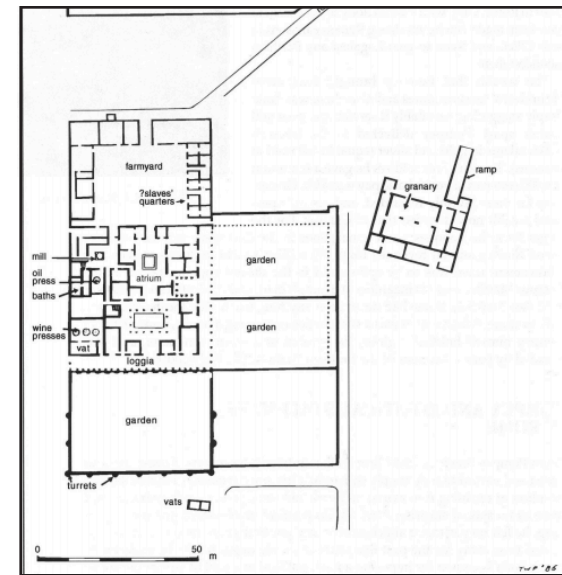
In town atriums are usually next to the front door, while in country seats peristyles come first, and then atriums surrounded by paved colonnades opening upon palaestrae and walks.

(Vitruvius 6.5.3)

Though Vitruvius thus portrays the country villa, which he claims subverts the traditional order of atria and peristyle, as the opposite of a town house, the plans of

most excavated villas, with the notable exception of the Villa dei Misteri at Pompeii, do not comply with his assertion. Nevertheless, Wallace-Hadrill argues that we can see the architect's statement, though inaccurate, as an attempt to make sense of the villa by defining it in binary opposition to the urban domus (Wallace-Hadrill 47). As we will see, establishing the country house and its associated lifestyle as a direct inversion of the urban home and its own sphere is essential to the framework Romans used to understand the villa. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, it is far more important to use sources in order to illuminate the way in which Romans perceived the villa than to attempt to recreate the physical characteristics of the villa with precise historical accuracy.

In one sense, the Roman villa can be understood as a simple status symbol. Villa owners were



Ground plan of the villa Settefinestre, (Boatwright et. al., 2004; 228).

largely members of the upper echelons of Roman society — a group that, by the late Republic, was no longer limited to the patricians, but instead comprised all the *nobiles* (families with members who held a consulship). For the *nobiles*, owning properties in the countryside was a form of conspicuous consumption — an opportunity for showing off their considerable wealth both to each

other and to the plebs (Marzano 95). The villa was a physical manifestation of one's status, but it could also enhance one's standing if the villa and its interior, which will be discussed later, were sufficiently impressive.<sup>1</sup> Thus, for Cicero, a *novus homo* who did not have family ties to the consulship, owning multiple villas was likely a method of asserting himself as a member of the elite. In owning

villas, Cicero strengthened associations between himself and the upper class and distanced himself from the plebeians who worked in his fields. Villas can thus be understood, in part, as illustrative of competitive displays of wealth among the Roman elite.

But the villa owner also had to straddle the power politics of town and country. By the late Republic, owning villas was common among politicians, who favored properties located within a few days' travel from Rome. In periodically withdrawing to the country to escape the strains of the city and *negotium* ("work and business"), these political figures physically and symbolically distanced themselves from the increasingly unscrupulous Roman political scene, and put their influence to use in a more virtuous sector of society — agriculture. These sojourns in the country could actually have pos-

itive effects on a politician's career, because he could increase his political influence by gaining the favor of the plebeian countrymen, who would then vote for him or his preferred candidate. Thus popularity in the country could be beneficial to political influence in the city. But it is also worth noting that clout in the city was what enabled one to command the respect necessary to manage a country villa in the first place (Wallace-Hadrill 52). Away from the turmoil of city politics, villa owners could feel in control, molding and governing their surroundings according to their own preferences. Even the physical layout of the villa put the owner in a position of power relative to others: in one of his letters, Cicero describes his villa near Pompeii, from which he could look out over the hustle and bustle of the estate (Marzano 91). Thus villa-owning put

Romans in a unique political position in society that involved both rural and urban elements.

Though the very possession of a villa was sufficient to make a statement about its owner's status, the most elite owners subsequently turned their attention to developing the interior of their villas. The most prestigious interiors were designed to allude to famous Greek buildings and contained lavish collections of Greek art. But Greek art had not always represented the height of good taste: when pieces of Greek art first found their way back to Rome from conquered foreign cities, Romans likely saw them as vaguely interesting but unremarkable war booty. However, as Greek scholarship on art history also made its way to the Italian peninsula over the years, Romans gained appreciation for these artifacts and began to see them as more significant. The

value of Greek art rose, (as did the wealth required to purchase it,) and Greek art collections soon became associated with high social standing (Neudecker 78). We can see this phenomenon in looking at Verres, a first century B.C. magistrate who crammed his home in Rome full of original Greek sculptures, prioritizing those created by famous artists, even though he spent no time there (*ibid.* 80). Many Roman politicians, Cicero included, housed their art collections in their villas, and even designed the villas themselves to evoke images of Greek *gymnasia* and *palaestra* (Marzano 97). In his treatise on architecture, Vitruvius states that such practices had become standard enough to constitute architectural rules:

Men of rank who, from holding offices and magistracies, have social obligations to their fellow-citizens [should have] lofty

entrance courts in regal style, and most spacious atriums and peristyles, with plantations and walks of some extent in them, appropriate to their dignity. They need also libraries, picture galleries, and basilicas... The rules on these points will hold not only for houses in town, but also for those in the country.

(Vitruvius 6.5.2-3)

But Varro cynically wrote that elite Romans were getting excessive with their villas' interiors: "In these days one such *gymnasium* is hardly enough, and they do not think they have a real villa unless it rings with many resounding Greek names, places severally called *procoetion* (ante-room,) *palaestra* (exercise-room), *apodyterion* (dressing-room), *peristylon* (colonnade,) *ornithon* (aviary), *peripteros* (pergola,) *oporotheca* (fruit-room)" (Varro 2.1). Designing a lavish interior for one's villa was thus a way of

asserting one's cultural superiority over less civilized peers.

But the interiors of villas were not just for show; many villa owners derived pleasure from the accumulation, arrangement, viewing, and study of Greek paintings, sculptures and books. Figures like Lucullus, Sulla and Cicero built comprehensive libraries in their villas, in which they engaged in thoughtful scholarship and contemplation (Marzano 97). Thus the residential part of the villa, which served as the scene for these activities, can also be understood as a center for active cultural and intellectual refinement. Villas thus embody the concept of *otium* ("culture of leisure") that arose during the late Republic, for they were the perfect place for Romans to both indulge and enlighten themselves for personal as well as conspicuous purposes. Indeed, Zanker argues that, for Romans, *otium* cre-

ated a new way of understanding one's *raison d'être*: "Previously, it was only through service to the Republic that a Roman aristocrat could hope to achieve a rewarding life. Now, however, the world of *otium* offered the possibility of fulfillment outside the political arena" (Zanker 31). We can see the conflict between *otium* and *negotium* in a letter that Cicero sent to Atticus in which he reminded his friend not to give away books to anyone else: "Reserve them, as you say in your letter, for me. I am possessed with the utmost longing for them, as I am with loathing for affairs of every other kind, which you will find in an incredibly worse position than when you left them" (Cicero 1.11). The villa offered a lifestyle of rural *otium* that was much more pleasant than urban *negotium*, incentivizing villa owners to retreat to the private sphere increasingly often. Indeed,

Zanker argues that *otium* directly contributed to the decline of the Republic, because politicians became so distracted by their private cultural and social pursuits at their villas that they became passive in the political arena, enabling the rise of a system of "one-man rule" (Zanker 31). The consequences of *otium* thus transcended the private sphere.

Interest in Greek culture did not come without its controversies, however, because openly embracing all things Greek was bound to incite accusations of philhellenism, which carried anti-Roman connotations. This widespread disdain for Greek culture was perhaps a defensive reaction caused by Romans' feelings of cultural inferiority. Greek influence was generally seen to be subversive: critics of villa culture, for example, attributed the villa's rustic, agricultural features to Roman tradition and its luxuri-

ous, urban elements to Greek influence (despite the fact that the luxury villa was a purely Roman innovation) (Wallace-Hadrill 46). Roman elites were perfectly aware of this view, and modern scholars pose differing theories as to how they managed the situation. Gruen argues that Roman elites contrasted their endeavors in private with the way they portrayed themselves in public. At their villas, the Roman elite engaged in Greek-style pursuits such as banqueting, listening to literary works, writing and appreciating art. They surrounded themselves with Greek iconography; Zanker notes that most excavated villas from the Republic show “no depictions of Roman legends, no portraits of distinguished Romans of the heroic or historical past, nor of great Roman thinkers of the previous 150 years, no allegorical representations of Roman values and

virtues. Instead of these there are portraits of Greek poets, philosophers, and orators, alongside those of Hellenistic rulers” (Zanker 27-8). But in the public sphere, these same villa owners downplayed their knowledge about the Greeks and derided Greek culture, criticizing its emphasis on luxury, a concept they associated with decadence and decline (Gruen 264). As Gruen states, “Despite the prevalence of Greek learning among the senatorial aristocracy, it was never quite respectable to be identified as a philhellene” (ibid. 263).

Thus villa owners kept their Greek pursuits private to avoid accusations of effeminacy and moral bankruptcy. But I would also argue that villa owners might have seen their interactions with Greek culture as ultimately harmless because, in reinterpreting and remolding that Greek culture to fit within Roman frame-

works such as the villa, they were effectively asserting Roman dominance over that Greek culture. Beard cites several examples of Greek art that Romans adapted to their own purposes, including an old Greek painting of Alexander reinterpreted as a floor mosaic, and a bronze sculpture of Apollo taken from Polybius’ house and made into a lamp stand (Clark, Review). In acknowledging that Greek culture was worth collecting and understanding in the first place, a villa owner recognized the significance of Greek culture, but this only made the conquest of the Greek city-states all the more of a triumph for Rome. Villa owners who collected Greek art could thus claim to be loyal to those Romans who, in the words of Wallace-Hadrill, had “in conquest reduce[d] the Greek east to their personal booty” (Wallace-Hadrill 43). Thus we have seen how the cogni-

tive dissonance of the Greco-Roman identity as it related to the villa could be resolved in various ways, including the public/private binary and a theory of ultimate Roman dominance.

The reason why “Greek” can be understood as luxurious and morally bereft and “Roman” can be understood as rustic and honorable is inextricably intertwined with Romans’ conceptualization of *mos maiorum*. In essence, Romans of the late Republic believed that their ancestors had been the epitome of virtue, and that contemporary Romans were vice-ridden in comparison. This faith in their ancestors can be explained in two ways. First, it had become an intrinsic part of the Roman foundation myth and, therefore, the Roman identity. Van der Blom argues that, in Roman social memory, the perceived virtue of early Rome “legitimized” Roman supremacy, justifying



Rome's rise to power in the Mediterranean (van der Bloom 14). Secondly, the Roman elite had a vested interest in upholding this impression of the past, because they derived much of their political influence from the ability to boast about famous early Romans in their family tree. Those who could trace their lineage back to the patricians needed to perpetuate the conceptualization of the past that made this connection prestigious. As van der Blom succinctly summarizes, "the tradition justified the continued power of this group" (ibid. 13). Thus Romans glorified their ancestors for their old-fashioned virtues and portrayed Greece as the "other," attributing to it every negative, non-Roman quality because Greece was the enemy.

Having discussed *mos maiorum*, we now turn to the ways in which this concept influenced the role of the Roman villa.

When Romans considered *mos maiorum*, the activity that they associated most with Roman virtue was farming, perhaps because working the fields constituted good, honest work, and had enabled early Romans to be self-sufficient. Over the centuries, however, the virtuous connotations of agriculture were transposed onto landowning as well as the physical act of farming. It was for this reason that landowning constituted a respectable investment for the Roman elite, who considered themselves too noble to engage in aggressive commerce and were furthermore explicitly forbidden from doing so under the 218 B.C. Lex Claudia, which prevented them from owning large ships (Marzano 82, Livy 21.63). As the Roman economy became more advanced, family-owned farms gradually gave way to larger, more centralized villa systems, and the idea of *mos maiorum* fol-

lowed. Thus the villa, despite its associations with Greek luxury, was also intrinsically linked to good, Roman morals because of its agricultural role. The more productive villas benefitted the most from this link, however. Regardless of the level of luxury of its interior, a productive villa was morally superior to an unproductive one. At the very least, villas were expected to produce enough food to feed the people that lived and worked there, and villas that could not meet this measly requirement were the butt of many jokes based on the amusing image of a villa owner forced to import produce from the city (Marzano 88). Martial, for example, skillfully lampoons the inversion of town/country and producer/consumer inherent in this situation, which became increasingly common during the Empire:

But you, Bassus, possess in the suburbs of the city a splendid man-

sion, where your visitor is starved, and where, from lofty towers, you look over mere laurels secure in a garden where Priapus need fear no thief. You feed your vinedresser on corn which you have bought in town, and carry idly to your ornamental farm vegetables, eggs, chickens, fruits, cheese, and wine. Should your dwelling be called a country-house, or a town-house out of town?

(Martial III.58.43-51)

Though some villa owners evidently neglected the agricultural component of their properties, others put extensive thought into the management of their farms. Writing for elite audiences, Cato the Elder and Varro advised villa owners at length on how to build and manage their properties to maximize productivity and profit (Cato Chapter 3, Varro 1.13). Indeed, archaeological evidence shows that many villa owners directed significant

capital towards improving their estates' productivity — building drainage and water collecting systems and adding wine and oil presses, for example (Marzano 100). In some cases, these technologies were even a source of pride for the villa owner. Archaeological remains have revealed an olive oil-settling vat with the consular date inscribed on it, implying that the addition of the vat to the villa was an important occasion and a testament to the owner's involvement in the inner workings of his estate (ibid. 92).

The villa occupied a complex position in the culture of the late Republic. A villa owner who understood all of these disparate elements knew he had to walk a fine line: a balance had to be struck between Greek and Roman, luxury and productivity, private and public, urban and rural, *otium* and *negotium*, etc. Though significant mental ac-

robotics, so to speak, must have been required in order for figures like Cicero to justify owning villas, I have argued that the concept of *mos maiorum*, which constituted the core of the Roman identity, made this feat possible. Though villas were associated with "Greek" extravagance, their "Roman" productivity was their redeeming feature. *Mos maiorum* allowed owners of successful villas to see themselves, and paint themselves, as true Romans because they were making agricultural production and self-sufficiency possible. *Mos maiorum* thus forged a connection between villa owners, their land, and Roman virtue that was strong enough to bolster villa owners' reputations against accusations of philhellenism and the negative connotations that accompanied their passion for Greek culture. Thus villa owners were able to get away with "Greek" behavior

as long as they kept it within the private sphere — the villa — and aligned their public rhetoric with the "Roman" side of their split personality, as we saw with Cicero in "On Duties." We can therefore understand successful villa owners such as Cicero, not as hypocrites, but as experts in exploiting the different tensions at play during the late Republic to their own advantage. ♀

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The bar for what constituted an impressive villa probably rose as more and more nobles came to own estates in an effort to "keep up with the Joneses," as we now call it.

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