New Classicists

Themed issue: Human and Non-Human Animal Relationships in Antiquity

11 | June 2024

Supported by

ICS INSTITUTE OF CLASSICAL STUDIES | SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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ISSN 2732-4168

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Editor's Foreword

By Guendalina Daniela Maria Taietti

In memory of Zhang Tianyuen

Non-human animals (henceforth: animals) have been part of the daily life of human animals (henceforth: humans) since the very beginning of our own existence. Animals have played a fundamental role in our sustenance, e.g. as consumption and clothing; in the development of economic activities, such as agriculture and commerce; and, above all, in the cultural, literary, artistic and religious expressions of populations throughout the centuries.

This *New Classicists* Animal-themed issue presents five selected papers read at the international conference *Human and Non-Human Animals Relationships from Antiquity to the Modern Age* held online in April 2023 and hosted by the University of Liverpool, UK. The conference was co-organised by me and a colleague based at the New University of Lisbon, Dr Alice Tavares, and is the result of our love for animals and curiosity about their history.

The five selected papers showcase animals' ubiquity in ancient sources, such as different genres of literary texts, vases, mosaics, papyri and inscriptions, which span from the very beginning of Greek civilisation down to Rome's Imperial period. These papers discuss the relationship between humans and animals in an optimal era, the so-called Golden Age (Flores Rivas); the political interpretation of lions and their symbolic value in fifth and fourth-century texts as a warning against figures who endangered the *polis* (Bernardini); the strong bond between dogs and their owners attested in both ancient Greek literary sources and art (Margariti); the pivotal role of race horses in the creation of a global market in the Roman Empire (Houston); and Achelous and Heracles' association to, and assimilation with, mythological and wild beasts, which blurs the boundaries between gods, humans, and animals in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Gargano).

I would like to finally thank the authors who have submitted their work to *New Classicists* for this Animal-themed issue, and I hope there will be more to follow. A special thank also goes to Michael Iliakis and my fellow *New Classicists* chief-editors for supporting my project on Ancient Animal studies and, last but not least, to Professor Christopher Tuplin, who has been my mentor since my doctoral studies in Liverpool.

I hope you enjoy this Animal-themed issue and continue to take a keen interest in *New Classicists*. We are already at work getting articles ready for the next issue.

Best regards,

Guendalina Daniela Maria Taietti

University of Liverpool

New Classicists Editor-in-chief

All That Glitters Is Not Gold: The Role of Animals in the Golden Age through Greek Texts

By María Flores Rivas

Abstract

The preserved accounts of the myth of the Golden Race or Age—also known as the reign of Cronus—in the Greek world typically depict a time in the distant past when humanity lived in an ideal manner. In these texts, humans are portrayed as free from concerns related to death, labor, or sustenance thanks to the favor of the gods. However, what about the animals? In general, modern studies somewhat extend this 'Edenic' way of life to them as well, considering vegetarianism and a harmonious relationship between humans and animals as key features of the Golden Age. A closer analysis of the animals, their roles, and the relationships they establish with humans in each of the Greek versions of the myth will reveal that their significance varies considerably. This paper will show that animals actually play a secondary role within the general framework of Golden Age narratives. At the same time, it will provide insight into the various attitudes held towards animals in Ancient Greece, as the accounts of the Golden Age also offer a faithful reflection of the societies in which they were composed.

1. Introduction

The Golden Age is a conventional term used to describe one of the recurring themes found in various myths concerning the origins of the world in ancient texts. This motif alludes to a time of ideal happiness and well-being that humanity either experienced in a bygone era, currently enjoys in a distant location, or could potentially attain in the future. Additionally, it takes on different forms: in Graeco-Roman literature, it can appear, on the one hand, within the context of myths related to a succession of human races or ages associated with metals. On the other hand, it is linked to the reign of Cronus, the Titan god responsible for ruling the world before

his son, the god Zeus, overthrew him and established the current order of the world.[1] In fact, it is common to find both concepts within the same narrative.[2]

The motif of the golden age particularly portrays humans as free from concerns related to death, work, illness, or sustenance, thanks to the favor of the gods, with whom they usually maintain a close relationship.[3] Ancient authors primarily construct this idealization of the past by negating the characteristics they perceive as being typical of their own time.[4] In texts describing a golden age, therefore, humans are the main protagonists. But what about animals? What role do they play, and what condition do they possess in these types of narratives? A significant number of modern studies that broadly address the golden age motif, and even some that examine it based on specific texts, argue that one of its main characteristics is the harmony between humans and animals. This harmony is based on humans abstaining from consuming animal flesh and on a gentle and affectionate attitude of animals toward humans—and among animals themselves.[5] In general, these studies seem to extend the 'Edenic' state of human life to animals, at least to some extent. However, when we examine the earliest Greek author on this subject, Hesiod, who offers a relatively detailed narrative about this ideal period and serves as a significant influence on later authors, we observe the absence of these characteristics.[6] In fact, the

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[1] By the end of the 1st century BC, the Roman god Saturn came to be identified with Cronus. Hence, the term 'reign of Saturn' also came to denote the golden age, cf. Baldry 1952, 87; Guthrie 1957, 70-71 and Blundell 1986, 136-137.

[2] In *Works and Days* 109-126 Hesiod actually refers to a 'golden race' (*Op*. 109), and subsequent authors similarly speak of a 'race' (γένος, *genos*), not an 'age'. It was not until around the first half of the 1st century BC that Latin authors coined the expression 'Golden Age' (*saecula aurea, aetas aurea, tempus aureum*). Its frequent usage led to the term being widely employed, starting from the 1st century AD, to denote any time—past or future—that was considered better than the current one, cf. Baldry 1952, 87-90; Gatz 1967; Blundell 1986, 136 and Van Noorden 2015, 24-33.

[3] According to Guthrie 1957, 69, there are two primary branches in the tradition concerning the history of the human race, often perceived as contrasting. One focuses on the growth and development of life and institutions from primitive and wild origins, while the other, as explored in this article, is the golden age narrative. The golden age presents an idealized view of the past, contrasting it with the harshness of contemporary life and the perceived degeneration of human character.

[4] Blundell 1986, 135-136. Regarding the patterns of negation followed by this type of narrative, cf. Davies 1987.

[5] For instance, see Blundell 1986, 137; Gera 2003, 57-61 and Heath 2005, 12-14.

[6] Regarding the original source of the myth of the ages, cf. Van Noorden 2015, 30-31, which includes additional bibliography.

scholar Bodo Gatz, in his 1967 study, argued that vegetarianism is absent from the accounts of the golden age not influenced by specific ideas of the Orphic and Pythagorean movements. Consequently, he regarded vegetarianism and its logical consequences as secondary elements within the texts about this ideal period.[7]

In each of the existing golden age versions, animals assume different roles and establish various types of relationships with humans. Indeed, through their examination, one can discern a reflection of the diverse attitudes held toward animals in the societies where these narratives were composed.[8] Therefore, this article will undertake a comprehensive analysis of animals and related elements in various Greek narratives depicting the golden age.[9] Special attention will be dedicated to exploring the interactions and bonds between animals and humans. This endeavor aims to contribute to a clearer understanding of the relationships established between the two in antiquity.

2. Hesiod's Golden Race: A Vegetarian Race?

As mentioned earlier, Hesiod is the author of the oldest surviving Greek text about the concept of the golden age, or more precisely, of a 'golden race' (*χρύσεον γένος*, *chryseon genos*) created by the gods during the era of Cronus. This concept is found in his version of the 'ages of man' myth in *Works and Days* (106-120):

[7] Cf. Gatz 1967, 165-171.
[8] Specific analyses on animals or related aspects within the context of the golden age motif have only been found in Gatz 1967, 165-174; Dombrowski 1984, 19-34; Gera 2003, 57-67 and Harden 2013, 110-121.
[9] Due to the extensive nature of the material, this paper will focus on the Greek language versions of the golden age that place this ideal period within a specific chronological framework. Isolated mentions of Cronus' reign or the golden age, as well as texts that locate them in a remote geographical space are not within the scope of this examination. Nor is the myth of the ages of Orphism addressed here, as the difficulties it poses for its interpretation would require a separate study. For a comprehensive study of the golden ages in Graeco-Roman literature, see Gatz 1967.

> If you wish, I shall recapitulate another story, correctly and skillfully, and you lay it up in your spirit: how the gods and mortal human beings came about from the same origin. Golden was the race of speech-endowed human beings which the immortals, who have their mansions on Olympus, made first of all (χρύσεον μὲν πρώτιστα γένος μερόπων ἀνθρώπων ἀθάνατοι ποίησαν Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες). They lived at the time of Cronus, when he was king in the sky; just like gods they spent their lives, with a spirit free from care, entirely apart from toil and distress. Worthless old age did not oppress them, but they were always the same in their feet and hands, and delighted in festivities, lacking in all evils; and they died as if overpowered by sleep. They had all good things: the grain-giving field bore crops of its own accord, much and unstinting, and they themselves, willing, mild-mannered, shared out the fruits of their labors together with many good things, wealthy in sheep, dear to the blessed gods (οἳ δ' ἐθελημοὶ ἥσυχοι ἔργ' ἐνέμοντο σὺν ἐσθλοῖσιν πολέεσσιν. ἀφνειοὶ μήλοισι, φίλοι μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν).[10]

Right from the outset of his discussion on these races, it becomes apparent that Hesiod emphasizes his focus on humans and gods;[11] in contrast, animals receive only brief mentions.[12] Specifically, in his portrayal of the first race, animals are seemingly referenced in verse 120, where it is noted that the people of this race were 'rich in flocks' (ἀφνειοὶ μήλοισι, *aphneioi meloisi*). However, it is worth mentioning that this verse is generally considered spurious. It is found exclusively in Diodorus Siculus (5.66.6), a text that diverges in some respects from the Hesiodic version preserved in the manuscript tradition, in addition to other sources.[13] Furthermore, some scholars have proposed that Alexandrian philologists omitted this verse because they believed that the mention of a flock implied notions of private ownership and herding, which appear to be more in line with the characteristics of the fourth race, i.e. the race of heroes. Nevertheless,[14] West, while not confirming its authenticity, suggests that it bears a Hesiodic style and may

[10] Translated by Most 2018.
[11] For an examination of verse 108, which contains the controversial claim that both humans and gods share a common origin, cf. Van Noorden 2015, 69-70.
[12] The only references to animals that appear in the myth of the ages are, in principle, two, and both are related to flocks: one is found in verse 120 (μήλοισι), and the other in verse 163 (μήλων ἕνεκ' Οἰδιπόδαο).
[13] Verdenius 1985, 84.
[14] Initially suggested by Rosenmeyer 1966, as cited in Verdenius 1985, 84.

represent more than a mere recollection from Diodorus or his source. According to him, this verse could have been inserted into a 'wild text', potentially borrowed from a similar passage in the *Catalogue* or another poem.[15]

The apparent absence of animals, combined with other factors, is indeed what has led the majority of modern scholars to attribute a vegetarian diet to the golden race.[16] Among these contributing factors are the following: firstly, the reference to the abundance of spontaneously growing fruits implies that the primary sustenance of this race consists of a vegetarian diet. Secondly, this type of diet is linked to their almost 'divine' life. The text describes the golden race as living a life similar to that of the gods (*Op*. 112), leading to the interpretation that, during this period, humans and gods not only shared the absence of work, hardships, and illnesses, but also shared meals and food. This is believed to explain the longevity of the golden race. Furthermore, some scholars, in their attempt to reconcile the myths of Pandora and Prometheus with that of the ages, postulate that the golden race existed before the episode of Prometheus' sacrifice, when gods and humans separated at Mekone.[17] Thirdly, another argument supporting the vegetarianism of the golden race is based on the description of the bronze race, of whom it is said that they 'did not eat bread' (*Op*. 146-147: οὐδέ τι σῖτον / ἤσθιον, *oude ti siton / esthion*). This statement implies not only that this generation consumed meat but also did so because they had not yet practiced agriculture. Moreover, the meat they consumed presumably did not come from livestock they had raised, but from that which had been obtained through plunder during the numerous wars they waged. This condition is understood as a contrast to the preceding races, at least the golden one. Lastly, it is worth noting that some later authors' reinterpretations of the motif have favored this view by clearly ascribing a vegetarian diet to humans in this ideal period, as it will be explored throughout these pages. For this reason, given Hesiod's influence on the

[15] West 1978, 179, 181.

[16] Within the bibliography I have been able to review, the only work that questions the vegetarianism of Hesiod's golden race is Graf 1855, 13, as cited by Guthrie in 1957, 137. See also Saunders 2001, 244.

[17] Attempts to reconcile both myths, as well as those aiming to assert their incompatibility, have been numerous. Therefore, I provide a brief selection of references: Vernant 1960, 21-54d; Fontenrose 1974; Rudhardt 1981, 245-281 and Sourvinou-Inwood 1997. For further bibliographical citations, see Nelson 1998, 190, n. 42.

accounts of these authors, the abstention from meat has often been assumed as an inherent concept in his version and, therefore, inherited from him in some way.

However, although these arguments convincingly suggest that Hesiod's golden race was vegetarian, I believe there are other elements in the text that seem to contradict this idea. After all, it is somewhat peculiar how Hesiod supposedly implies this vegetarianism. As Davies points out, Hesiod's golden age fits into the category of narratives describing a blissful life using negative terms (*Op*. 111-115).[18] Given this framework, it is curious that the abundance of fruits is not reinforced by a negation emphasizing the abstention from animals, in contrast to the later races.[19] Additionally, there are two references that, in my view, are crucial. First, in verse 115, we read that this race 'delighted in banquets' (τέρποντ' ἐν θαλίῃσι, *terpont'en thaliesi*), which parallels works like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In these narratives, not only do gods indulge in banquets rich with nectar, but humans also offer animal meat to the divinities during their feasts.[20] Secondly, in verse 136, there is a reference to the absence of sacrifices by the silver race, one of the reasons Zeus eliminates them. According to Gatz, who argues for the compatibility of the Prometheus and Pandora myth with that of the ages, the silver race is marked by the introduction of sacrifice, but Hesiod is merely reproducing the final phases of this race when it departs from this practice.[21] From my perspective, however, this interpretation seems somewhat forced, especially because this reference to sacrifice is problematic only if one attempts to find correspondence between both myths. I agree with Bernabé when he states that both myths "coexist, albeit without cohabitation. Hesiod does not aim to construct a coherent narrative but rather to tell stories and present things from diverse perspectives. What unites these perspectives is the theme of the transition from an initial state of happiness to the present condition of unhappiness, from an era of communion with the gods to another wherein it appears that these

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[18] Davies 1987.

[19] Graf 1885, 13, in fact, suggests that if Hesiod had wanted to contrast the vegetarianism of the golden race with the diet of the bronze race, he would have somehow described their abstention, but he does not.

[20] Cf., e.g., Hom. *Il*. 1.595-604 and *Od*. 8.75-76, 11.602-604.

[21] Gatz 1967, 40-41.

deities have forsaken humanity to their fate".[22] For this very reason, at the beginning of the myth (*Op*. 106), Hesiod specifies that he is going to tell 'another story' (ἕτερόν τοι ἐγὼ λόγον, *heteron toi ego logon*) about the origin of the current race of men.[23] In this second narrative, it seems that he places less emphasis on specifying when cultural markers that define the human condition are introduced.

This imprecision can indeed be observed in various textual details. For example, as previously mentioned, the golden race celebrates banquets, but it is important to note that even though its members live like gods (ὥστε θεοὶ δ' ἔζωον, *hoste theoi d'ezoon*), these banquets consist of perishable foods, like the human species itself, regardless of whether they include meat or not. Another representative example can be found in the description of the silver race, where the existence of women and the practice of sacrifice as an act of due worship to the gods are taken for granted. In contrast, in the previous myth Hesiod presented, it is specified that the actions of Prometheus led to the creation of Pandora, a decisive factor in humanity's downfall.[24]

All of this leads me to believe that it is not possible to affirm or deny the vegetarianism of the golden race because Hesiod himself has no interest in reflecting it, just as he does not dwell on the topic of animals, at least in this part of his work.[25] Other details and ideas in the narrative capture his attention. For this reason, one cannot extract the vision of a harmonious and friendly relationship between humans and animals.

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[22] Bernabé 2023. I thank Professor Bernabé for sharing his paper with me to ensure accurate citation.
[23] Regarding the various interpretations of this expression, cf. Van Noorden 2015, 68-72.
[24] It is said that the bronze race also possesses houses, weapons, and tools (*Op*. 150-151), but it has not been specified when they acquired the *τέχνη* (*techne*, skill) to build them. Regarding the contradiction posed by the possession of tools by this race, considering that they are not engaged in agricultural work, cf. Vernant 1960, 34-40.
[25] After the myth of the ages, however, the fable of the hawk and the nightingale is narrated (*Op*. 202-285), from which Hesiod speaks to Perses about *Δίκη* (*Dike*, justice) and introduces a clear distinction between animals and humans when he states that Zeus granted justice to humans, and animals, not possessing it, devour each other.

3. Post-Hesiodic golden ages

Subsequent to Hesiod, we have versions of the golden age dating from the 5th century BC onwards that feature a greater presence of animals.

3.1. Empedocles of Acragas and the Reign of Cypris

The fragments of Empedocles of Acragas provide the following extensive account of a golden age.[26] Empedocles reinterprets the motif to incorporate it into his complex cosmogonic system.[27] One of his contributions is to present the goddess Cypris, i.e., the personification of one of the driving forces of his cosmic cycle, Love (Φιλότης, *Philotes*), as the symbol of the golden age in fragment DK 31 B 128 (F 134 Graham):

> They had no Ares as their god, nor Tumult, not Zeus the king, nor Cronus nor Poseidon, but Cypris the queen . . . whom they propitiated with reverent statues, with painted pictures, delicate perfumes, and offerings of undiluted myrrh and fragrant frankincense, pouring to the ground libations of yellow honey. The altar was not moistened with the pure blood of bulls, but this was the greatest abomination to men, to take away their life and devour their goodly limbs.[28]

Vegetarianism in this text clearly emerges as a predominant feature of this ideal period. Offerings made to the goddess are bloodless, unlike those customary in the philosopher's time.[29] Furthermore, this vegetarianism appears to be accompanied by harmony among species, as reflected in fragment DK 31 B 130 DK (F 136 Graham):

> They were all tame and gentle towards men, both beasts and fowl, and friendly feelings radiated.

[26] After Hesiod's version, there would supposedly be one transmitted in the *Alcmaeonid*, according to a testimony by Philodemus (*De pietate* p. 51 Gomperz). However, no further information or fragments about it are preserved.
[27] Cf. Guthrie 1957, 72-73.
[28] The translations of the fragments of Empedocles are by Graham 2010.
[29] Furthermore, it does not even seem that there is a use of plants that involves their destruction; instead, their derivatives, myrrh (σμύρνα, *smyrna*) and frankincense (λίβανος, *libanos*), are utilized.

Abstinence from consuming animals and respect towards them are essential aspects of Empedocles' philosophical doctrine, and these fragments depicting one phase of the cosmic cycle are evidence of that. Empedocles believed that all living beings formed a community by virtue of sharing 'life'—understood as ψυχή (*psyche*). Hence, it was not permissible for them to devour each other, not only in that phase of the cycle but also in the present time. Additionally, his theory of daimon transmigration postulated that daimons who had committed bloodshed must transmigrate into different living beings until they were completely purified. Therefore, reverence for life also ensured respect for these daimons.[30]

On the other hand, Gatz considers that Empedocles possibly integrated Orphic and Pythagorean ideas, positioning him as a successor to Orphic thought in relation to the golden age. In fact, from his perspective, the vegetarianism that appears in these types of narratives would be grounded in Pythagoreanism and its theory of metempsychosis. However, he posits that the assimilation of vegetarianism to the golden age primarily stems from the idea of abstinence promoted by the Orphic doctrine and linked to the myth of the ages of man that the movement itself teaches.[31] On the contrary, I think that this argument does not carry sufficient weight. Empedocles' doctrine, although influenced by Pythagoreanism and Orphism, presents an original and distinct system that could well have contributed to the inclusion of the ἀποχὴ τῶν ἐμψύχων (*apoche ton empsychon*, 'abstinence from the consumption of the living beings') in the accounts of the golden age. Additionally, it is worth considering that the motivations behind the type of vegetarianism and animal welfare that Empedocles and these movements proposed were different from each other.[32] For these reasons, I do not believe that Orphism can be

[30] Due to limitations in space, I cannot delve into his doctrine here. Therefore, I recommend referring to my work, Flores Rivas 2023, 257-277, for an extensive elaboration and specific bibliography, particularly with a focus on animals.

[31] Gatz 1967, 165-168, who asserts also that, in contrast to the Orphics, the teachings of Pythagoras are not associated with myths about the ages of man.

[32] Cf. De Paz Amérigo and Flores Rivas 2019 and Flores Rivas 2023, 209-241, 257-277.

considered the sole introducer of the idea of abstinence in the reign of Cronus. It is possible that this phenomenon was equally linked to the Pythagoreans and Empedocles.[33]

3.2. Old Comedy and Spontaneous Food

The reign of Cronus was a motif often employed by authors of Old Comedy. One of its most distinctive features, the αὐτόματος βίος (*automatos bios*, 'a spontaneous way of life'), was particularly highlighted.[34] The depiction of food and comforts that arise without labor and in abundance is varied and, compared to traditional narratives, it tends to be exaggerated, as it is natural in comedy. However, unlike what was observed in earlier authors, in these comedies *automatos* food also includes animal meat on the menu.

Nevertheless, even though in the plots of these comedies animals generally serve as food,[35] one work stands out in which they seem to play a role that goes beyond becoming edible beings: Crates' *Theria* (Θηρία, Beasts). Based on the testimonies and fragments that have been preserved, it can be deduced that the chorus was composed of animals, which appeared to possess the power to establish a golden life for humans in the future.[36] One of the requirements they ask for is precisely that humans abstain from consuming them—although fish constitute an exception[37]—as found in *Theria* PCG IV fr. 19 *apud* Ath. 119c1-2:[38]

[33] In fact, it seems more feasible to me, basing on the research works cited in the preceding note. In any case, this topic deserves to be thoroughly addressed elsewhere.

[34] A passage from Athenaeus (6.267e-270a) is quite illustrative in this regard, as it presents several 'gastronomic utopias' related to an *automatos bios*. In these utopias, animals are sometimes described as cooking themselves and leaping into the mouths of diners. While not all of these utopias are directly related to the reign of Cronus, they are equally associated with idealized places and times, cf. Pellegrino 2000; Ruffell 2000 and Farioli 2001.

[35] Fragments of two comedies of this kind are preserved, which specifically seem to set their plot during the reign of Cronus: *Amphiktyones* by Teleclides and *Ploutoi* by Cratinus. However, regarding *Ploutoi*, it is not possible to ascertain whether a vegetarian golden age actually existed, due to the scarcity of material.

[36] Cf. Farioli 2001, 57-58, 67-68.

[37] For Empedocles, vegetarianism also appears to extend to fish, as can be inferred from fragment DK 31 B 117 (F 124 Graham), in which the philosopher claims to have transmigrated into a fish. In contrast, concerning Pythagoreanism, the testimonies are not as clear; see, e.g., Alex. fr. 27 Kassel y Austin, D.L. 8.33 (Pythag. DK 58 B 1a), D.L. 8.34 (= Arist. fr. 157 Gigon) and Iambl. *VP* 21.98.

[38] Cf. also *Theria* PCG IV fr. 16 *apud* Ath. 6.267e.

> (A) Also you may boil cabbages and roast fresh and salted fish, but keep your hands away from us.
> (B) So, as you [pl.] say, we won't be eating meat any more, no tripe any more, no meat pies, no sausages?[39]

Nonetheless, due to the scarcity of preserved fragments, it cannot be affirmed whether this new animal order was established at the end of the play or not.[40] In this fragment, we also find the expression 'keep your hands away from us' (χρὴ … / ἡμῶν δ' ἄπο / χεῖρας ἔχεσθαι, *chre … / hemon d'apo / cheiras echesthai*), a comic parallel to Empedocles' fragment DK 31 B 141, which concerns abstaining from eating beans.[41] Furthermore, the abstention from animal meat, preached by Empedocles, was also, as has been already noted, a philosophical precept of the Pythagorean and Orphic movements,[42] indicating that this line of dialogue constituted a satirical allusion to the principles and precepts of both these movements and Empedocles.[43] At the same time, this plea for 'vegetarianism' seems to accompany an attempt to establish a friendly, or at least respectful, relationship between humans and animals. This is further supported by the fact that these *theria* have the ability to communicate with humans.[44]

3.3. Plato's Divine Shepherds

Plato employs extensively the golden age motif in two of his works: *Statesman* and *Laws*. Both dialogues depict this period with similar characteristics, although the former provides more details.[45] In *Statesman*, the reign of Cronus is integrated into the explanation of the periodic reversal of the universe and its consequences for life on Earth (*Plt*. 268e-274e): during the period

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[39] Translated by Storey 2011.
[40] Ceccarelli 2000, 455.
[41] According to Farioli 2001, 69, rather than an imitation, as argued by Bonanno 1972, 100, it is more of a formula. This restriction was also characteristic of Pythagoreanism, cf., e.g., Burkert 1972, 183-185.
[42] See Flores Rivas 2023, 229-241 with bibliography.
[43] It is difficult to assert whether the satire was confined to specific jokes or if the theme of vegetarianism was connected to a broader philosophical controversy in this comedy, according to Farioli 2001, 71, n. 112. In any case, in Attic comedy in general, it is common to find parodies of Orphic and Pythagorean beliefs; see, e.g., Battezzato 2008; Bernabé 2011, 197-201 and 2014, including bibliography.
[44] Dillon 1992, 29-30, n. 17 suggests that the ability of animals to speak was a traditional feature of the golden age.
[45] See Vidal-Naquet 1978; Dillon 1992 and El Murr 2010 for a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the golden age in Plato's work.

when the god governed the circular revolution of the universe, humans and animals were cared for by divine shepherds.[46] Animals, grouped by species and in herds, were tended to by specific daimons. For this reason, Plato mentions that they coexisted peacefully and did not devour each other (*Plt*. 271e). Furthermore, when he describes the life of humans, who in this case emerge from the earth, he specifies that they could communicate with animals.[47] This detail suggests that humans in the reign of Cronus did not consume animal meat, especially when considered alongside the fact that animals themselves respected one another and the traditional description of abundant vegetation in the context of human diet. In *Laws* 782c, although it is not specified that the discussion pertains to the golden age, there is indeed mention of a distant past in which an 'Orphic life' was practiced, meaning that beings with soul (*psyche*) were neither sacrificed nor consumed.[48]

However, in *Statesman*, there is also a detail about animals that deserves special attention: unlike Hesiod's account, Plato's interpretation of the reign of Cronus, as understood by El Murr, presents a closer relationship between humans and animals than between humans and divinities. In contrast to Hesiod's golden age, on the one hand, the humans living under Cronus' rule do not live 'like gods' but are shepherded by the gods. Therefore, the distinction between deity and human is equated with that between shepherd and flock. On the other hand, the *automatos* aspect of life not only affects vegetation or food production in general but also humans, who spring from the earth, setting them apart from the successive races of humans created by the gods in *Works and Days*. Hence, the generation of humans is more related to the growth of plants than to any divine creation.[49]

[46] Cf. *Leg*. 713c-714b.
[47] Moreover, depending on the type of conversation that men engage in with each other and with animals, whether it is focused on philosophy or not, it is implied that they were happier or less happy than the men who lived under the rule of Zeus (*Plt*. 272b-c). In fact, El Murr 2010's interpretation of the text reveals that Plato is presenting a rather ambiguous reign of Cronus.
[48] Cf. Bernabé 2011, 51-53.
[49] El Murr 2010, 290-291.

3.4. Dicaearchus and the Abstention from Living Beings

The description of the golden age provided by Dicaearchus is transmitted through Porphyry (fr. 56A Mirhady *apud* Porph. *Abst*. 4.2). Although it is a biased account, where Porphyry's main interest is to support the central idea of his own work, i.e. the abstention from animal meat, it remains a reliable testimony. Dicaearchus' account of Cronus' reign bears similarities to Hesiod's text, but it presents a rational and natural version that emphasizes the provision of food by humans.[50] Regarding animals, Dicaearchus only seems to mention them when he states that the people of this era did not kill any living creature (μηδὲν φονεύειν ἔμψυχον, *meden phoneuein empsychon*).[51] Therefore, this assertion, coupled with the fact that people are described as having a frugal diet, suggests that Dicaearchus was proposing a vegetarian golden age.[52]

3.5. The Deprivation of Animal Speech in Callimachus

The following text that mentions a reign of Cronus is the *Iambics* 2 (fr. 192 Pfeiffer) by Callimachus, a critique of the verbosity and loquacity characteristic of men, specifically certain authors and artists of his time:

> It was in that time, when the winged
> and that which dwells in the sea, and likewise the four-footed
> used to give utterance as does the Promethean clay
> . . . .
> in the time of Cronus' rule, and still before[
> and [saying] how [.]υ c[.]νημεναιc. [5
> just is Zeus, but not justly ruling,
> he cut off the voice of those which crawl,
> yet the race τ. υτ. [.]. ρον—as though we had

[50] Cf. Saunders 2001, 241-254.
[51] I agree with Saunders 2001, 243-244 when he remarks regarding the prohibition of harming living beings: "One must, I think, accept that as a genuinely Dicaearchean position, though whether it had a Pythagorean inspiration, and whether he dwelt on it with Porphyry's messianic zeal, is much less certain—indeed wholly improbable, in my view, or Porphyry would have reported as much, probably at some length".
[52] Saunders 2001, 244 points out that Hesiod does not explicitly state that the golden race did not consume meat; this idea must be inferred from the way in which he describes how this race obtained food (cf. Gatz 1967, 40-41). Therefore, the scholar argues that such an inference is attributed to Dicaearchus and has, in turn, been emphasized by Porphyry in the text.

> not enough power to give the first fruits even to others—
> . . .]ψ [he turned] to [the race] of men. And Eudemus has 10
> the voice of a dog, and Philton that of an ass, and of the parrot[
> and the tragedians have that of those
> who dwell in the sea. And all men
> are both wordy and babbling
> from that time, Andronicus. These things Aesop 15
> from Sardis said, whom the Delphians
> did not receive well as he sang his tale.[53]

This version presents animals endowed with articulated language, just like humans. Nevertheless, as a result of the daring actions of the swan and the fox, for which we have details within the *Diegesis*,[54] Zeus deprives animals of the ability to articulate speech and also transfers their voices to humans. This, in turn, leads to the talkative nature that humans possess today.

Given the fable-like nature of the poem, no further details are provided about the characteristics of the golden age. However, the idea that both humans and animals use the same language implies a sense of mutual respect among different species, indicating that it is reasonable to assume that these conversational partners did not become prey for one another. Nevertheless, one should not automatically infer a community stemming from possessing the same faculty.[55] It is only known that the animals seem dissatisfied with what they have been given and demand more, which constitutes an act of *hybris* that leads to their punishment by Zeus. This punishment, in turn, leads to a rift between humans and animals and implicitly marks the end of the golden period, which is also indicated by Zeus's assumption of power.[56]

[53] Translated by Acosta-Hughes 2002.
[54] Callim. *Ia*. 2, fr. 192a Pfeiffer.
[55] Gera 2003, 31.
[56] Gera 2003, 32. Regarding the Hesiodic and Aesopic influences evident in Callimachus' text, see, e.g., Sistakou 2009 and Scodel 2011.

3.6. Aratus and the Agricultural Golden Race

In Aratus' *Phaenomena* (96-136), the myth of the ages from Hesiod is reworked. In his version, the golden race is described as engaging in agriculture, the only context in which animals are mentioned in relation to this ideal period (*Phaen*. 100-114):

> There is, however, another tale current among men, that once she actually lived on earth, and came face to face with men, and did not ever spurn the tribes of ancient men and women, but sat in their midst although she was immortal. And they called her Justice: gathering together the elders, either in the market-place or on the broad highway, she urged them in prophetic tones to judgements for the good of the people. At that time they still had no knowledge of painful strife or quarrelsome conflict or noise of battle, [no] but lived just as they were; the dangerous sea was far from their thoughts, and as yet no ships brought them livelihood from afar, but oxen and ploughs and Justice herself, queen of the people and giver of civilised life, provided all their countless needs. That was as long as the earth still nurtured the Golden Age.[57]

Thanks to agriculture, which is carried out by oxen and the plow, and thanks to Justice, the protagonist of the text, men have an abundance of sustenance. In this case, there are also no direct references regarding the consumption of animals, but the interpretations of Aratus' text once again led to associating a vegetarian diet with the golden race. Overall, this association stems from previous interpretations of Hesiod's golden race, the influences of Empedocles detected in the text, and the interpretation of the lines in which Aratus describes the bronze race (*Phaen*. 129-134)[58]:

> But when these men also had died and there were born the Bronze Age men, more destructive than their predecessors, who were the first to forge the criminal sword for murder on the highways, and the first to taste the flesh of ploughing oxen, then Justice, conceiving a hatred for the generation of these men, flew up to the sky ...

[57] The translation of the *Phaenomena* passages is by Kidd 1997.
[58] See, e.g., Traglia 1963; Nelis 2004 and Harden 2013, 110-111.

However, I believe that, as in Hesiod, there are elements in the text that cast doubt on the idea of a vegetarian golden race. On the one hand, regarding the act of killing and consuming the flesh of the ploughing-oxen, it has normally been extrapolated as the beginning of animal sacrifice in general, both by some ancient authors and by some modern scholars.[59] However, it is important to note that this animal held a special value as one of the primary tools for agriculture, as specified by the accompanying adjective, 'for ploughing' (ἀρότρων, *arotron*).[60] Killing an animal that was closely collaborating with humans was already considered an impious act.[61] Furthermore, this act later came to be referred to as βοοκτασία (*booctasia*, 'the slaying of an oxen') and was considered a criminal offense.[62] Additionally, it should also be considered, as pointed out by Kidd, that the decision not to kill the working oxen was probably for a practical reason: they were too valuable to be used as food. Nonetheless, later tradition associated this practice with the vegetarianism of the Orphics and Pythagoreans.[63]

On the other hand, the second reason that leads me to doubt the vegetarianism of Aratus' golden age is that, although the text does not explicitly mention Cronus or Zeus,[64] the presence of Justice could imply that there was already a separation between humans and animals. This separation would align with the idea that Zeus granted justice exclusively to humans, as described in Hesiod's *Works and Days* 274-280.[65]

[59] Cf., e.g., Plut. *De esu carnium* 998A; Gatz 1967, 61-62; Dombrowski 1984, 28-29; Blundell 1986, 144-147; Kidd 1997, 228; Gera 2003, 63-64 and Harden 2013, 111. However, once again, like in Hesiod's work, Aratus' text does not specify each and every characteristic identifying each race, which, in my opinion, leaves open the question of when the relevant cultural markers, such as sacrifice, were established.

[60] Βοῦς ἀροτήρ (*Bous aroter*) is a Hesiodic expression (*Op*. 405).

[61] Porph. *Abst*. 2.31. There is indeed a testimony in which Aristoxenus claimed that Pythagoras allowed the consumption of any living being, with the exception of the ram and the ox (Diog. Laert. 8.20).

[62] Calderón 2004, 145. Cf. also Varro, *Rust*. 2.5.4; Columella, *Rust*. 6.*praef*.7.; Pli. *HN* 8.180 and Val. Max. 8.1.*damn*.8.

[63] Kidd 1997, 229.

[64] These gods would be part of the genealogy of Justice if Aratus is thinking of Zeus as her father (Hes. *Theog*. 902); cf. Kidd 1997, 217-218.

[65] The passage would also be inspired by Hesiod's description of Justice in *Op*. 220-262; cf. Kidd 1997, 216.

3.7. Philo of Alexandria and the Animal Tower of Babel

A narrative similar to Callimachus' golden age can be found in Philo of Alexandria (*De confusione linguarum* 6-8).[66] However, unlike the version by Callimachus, Philo does not seem to attribute a common language to humans and animals. Instead, animals are endowed with a universal language that allows them to communicate only among themselves, even across different (non-human) species. This linguistic interaction, enabling them to share their experiences and emotions, results in the formation of a community. This, in consequence, grants them the privileges of that time. Nevertheless, their satiety with this abundance of goods also leads them to desire more, specifically eternal youth, which results in the fragmentation of their common language and the inability to understand each other. It is from this incapacity that the rupture of their community can be inferred, and therefore, the end of the golden age.[67]

It is also worth noting that while the Callimachean tale aimed to explain human loquacity through animals, in Philo's narrative, animals are the main subject. Consequently, in this case, we should rather refer to it as a specifically animal golden age, above all, since humans are not mentioned within this period. This distinction is likewise in line with the fabulistic nature of the text.[68]

Conversely, in Philo, as in Callimachus, we see the motif of the animal embassy again, although this time it is not specified which animals lead it or to whom it is directed.[69] Instead,

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[66] It is highly likely that Philo constructed his text based on Callimachus' version and the original fable, cf. Acosta-Hughes 2002, 179-180.

[67] See *infra* note 69.

[68] According to Gera 2003, 20, "… animal fables conventionally took place in the age of Kronos. Various fables actually refer to the time when animals had a common language with each other or with men. We find, for instance, the fable opening 'when the animals spoke' ὅτε φωνήεντα ἦν τὰ ζῷα (*hote phoneenta en ta zoa*) already in Xenophon (*Mem*. 2.7.13), a passage which pre-dates extant Aesopic collections".

[69] It is possible to think, however, that the embassy is once again directed towards Zeus, as in Callimachus' text. This detail also seems to imply that animals had the ability to communicate with the gods. Philo does not explicitly state that his narrative takes place in the reign of Cronus, but this context can be inferred if one considers the way he begins it: "Another similar story is to be found in the writings of the mythologists, telling of the days when all animals had a common language. The tale is that in old days all animals, whether on land or in water or winged, had the same language …" (*De confusione linguarum* 6). Translation by Colson and Whitaker 1939.

the serpent is mentioned, a symbol of eternal youth and reincarnation.[70] Furthermore, Philo, who places this text within his discourse on the biblical history of the Tower of Babel, does not deprive animals of language as Callimachus does. Their punishment, by contrast, consists more of a fragmentation of language similar to what occurs in the Tower of Babel.[71]

3.8. The Gildest Golden Age: The Prologue of Babrius' *Fables*

The prologue of Babrius' *Fables* goes a step further in its description of the golden age in relation to animals:[72]

> 'Twas a race of just men who lived first on the earth, Branchus my boy, the race that men call Golden. After them there came, they say, a different generation, the one of Silver; and we are third in descent among these, and ours is the generation of Iron. Now in the Golden age not only men but all the other living creatures had the power of speech and were familiar with such words as we ourselves now use in speaking to each other. Assemblies were held by these creatures in the midst of the forests. Even the pine tree talked, and the leaves of the laurel. The fish swimming about in the sea chatted with the friendly sailor, and quite intelligibly, too, the sparrows conversed with the farmer. Everything grew from the earth, which made no demands on men, and good fellowship prevailed between gods and mortals. That this was so, you may learn and fully understand from wise old Aesop, who has told us fables in the free manner of prose. And now I shall adorn each of those fables with the flowers of my own Muse. I shall set before you a poetical honeycomb, as it were, dripping with sweetness, having softened the hard chords of the stinging iambic.[73]

In this narrative, humans converse with both animals and gods. Moreover, not only do animals possess articulated voices, but even nature itself, as stones and leaves are also granted speech. This expands the community of beings, which is further reinforced by the fact that

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[70] For a deeper analysis of the serpent in Greece and Rome, see Ogden 2013.
[71] Gera 2003, 31.
[72] There are two different versions of the text in question, cf. Gera 2003, 19, n. 6. However, the variations do not affect the current subject of study.
[73] Translated by Perry 1965.

Babrius seems to attempt to eliminate linguistic boundaries between gods, humans, and animals, although he does not place them in the same conversational group.[74]

Given that members of these three groups are able to converse with each other, one can imagine again that they did not consume each other. However, it cannot be ruled out that some animals were used as tools for work. The text mentions elements that would be characteristic of later ages, such as the farmer (γεωργός, *georgos*) and the sailor (ναύτης, *nautes*), figures who could have made use of them. Nevertheless, given the idealized scenario, it would be expected that, in any case, there was a friendly collaboration between humans and animals.

3.9. The Prepared Banquets of Lucian

The latest accounts of the reign of Cronus that should be considered within the scope of this study belong to Lucian: *Saturnalian Letters* 1.20 and *Saturnalia* 7. Both texts revolve around the Roman festival of the Saturnalia as their main theme, and it is in this context that the reign of Cronus is briefly described, who is identified with Saturn.

In the first text, there is no mention of any animals as such. The passage mainly focuses on a land that generously yields its fruits, along with rivers of wine, milk, and honey. However, it also speaks of meals or banquets already prepared (δεῖπνον ἕτοιμον, *deipnon hetoimon*), which could include animal-based foods like meat and fish. This possibility appears likely when considering *Saturnalia* 7 as well. In this text, Lucian also includes the privileges mentioned in the previous passage while explicitly stating that ready-baked bread and ready-cooked meats emerged directly (ἕτοιμος ἄρτος καὶ κρέα ἐσκευασμένα, *hetoimos artos kai krea eskeuasmena*).

[74] Cf. Gera 2003, 20.

4. Conclusions

The analysis conducted in these pages reveals that the characteristics associated with animals in Greek narratives about the golden age are diverse and vary in their significance. When it comes to human attitudes towards animals, two characteristics stand out: firstly, the abstention from sacrificing and consuming animals, which is mentioned in some texts, either explicitly or implicitly; and secondly, animals endowed with articulate speech. This ability normally enables them to interact with each other, humans, and potentially even with the gods. Furthermore, when communication is established between human and animal species, it often leads, though not always, to the formation of a community or a harmonious relationship between different species. This is not only because humans usually do not include their dialogue partners on the menu, but also because the animals have a gentle nature, facilitating interaction. The friendly nature of animals can sometimes exist even without the capacity to speak. However, the respectful treatment of animals does not always exclude their use as tools for work or potential sources of resources (such as milk, wool, etc.), as can be found in, for example, Aratus, or can probably be inferred from the prologue of Babrius' *Fables*.

Now, can any of these characteristics be considered fundamental to the golden age motif? In my opinion, it is not possible, as the presence and significance of animals in each narrative differ greatly. In the texts of Crates, Callimachus, Philo, and Babrius, all the mentioned characteristics are clearly present, with only minor exceptions. In fact, animals play a central role in each of these stories—a role which is also linked, at least in the case of the latter three authors, to their association with the fable genre. However, in Crates' fragments, the prominence of animals is related to the possibility that *Theria* contains a satire of Orphic, Pythagorean, and Empedoclean beliefs regarding abstaining from animal flesh.

Concerning the texts of Empedocles and Plato, animals, despite not acting as protagonists, constitute one of their central elements. This role is consistent with Empedocles' philosophical doctrine, where animals occupy an essential position. In Plato, their significance is more

contextual. In the passage from the *Statesman*, animals are equated with humans to some extent, but this occurs within an ambiguous representation of the reign of Cronus.[75]

Between the mentioned philosophers and the subsequent authors, we find Dicaearchus. In the surviving testimony about his golden age, while there seems to be a consideration of abstaining from living beings, the importance of animals cannot be definitively assessed, as it is unclear to what extent Porphyry's thought influenced the transmission of his ideas.

In a very different line from the authors discussed so far are Hesiod, the ancient comediographers in general, Aratus, and Lucian, whose texts barely feature animals. Aratus presents the ox as an animal suitable for agricultural tasks, but the question of vegetarianism, as seen, remains ambiguous. Ancient comedies and Lucian's works on the Saturnalia, on the other hand, view animals as nothing more than a source of food. And lastly, in Hesiod, with whom this study began, curiously, animals are conspicuous by their absence.[76]

It can be concluded, then, that ideas about animals are applied and developed in a heterogeneous manner within each version of the golden age. These ideas mainly revolve around the function that the motif serves within the narrative that contains it. While Gatz rightly noted at the time the anthropocentric nature of these narratives, where animals often serve as secondary elements defining human condition and position in the world, this analysis has also aimed to provide an alternative perspective on some of the arguments discussed by this scholar in reaching this conclusion.[77] It has particularly reconsidered two points: the apparent vegetarianism of the Hesiod's race of gold and how the idea of this practice was introduced into the following narratives of the golden age.

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[75] I follow the interpretation of El Murr 2010.
[76] In any case, if their presence is accepted (Hes. *Op*. 120), they appear as livestock, that is, animals that ultimately serve a practical purpose for humans.
[77] Gatz 1967, 165-168.

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Giovani Leoni nella Letteratura Greca del V e IV secolo a.C.: Autori a Confronto

By Maria Luisa Bernardini

Compendio

Nel *Gorgia,* dialogo di Platone, uno dei personaggi antagonisti di Socrate, il giovane Callicle, per ribadire la sua tesi che la natura premia il migliore (483 d 2 sg.), cioè che, secondo natura è giusto che il più forte prevalga, sostanzia il suo discorso con due esempi, uno dei quali appare preso dal mondo animale (483 e 4), e descrive cosa accade ai leoni catturati ancora giovani e addomesticati. Ad un esame più attento, che prescinda dall'abilità retorica del discorso di Callicle, il quadro dei leoni, fatti prigionieri e soggiogati da incantesimi all'idea di giustizia derivata dal τὸ ἴσον χρὴ ἔχειν, non ha niente di realistico e diventa la metafora di una condizione umana di asservimento, più che la descrizione di una situazione che è possibile trovare in natura. Questa nel *Gorgia*, non è la prima volta che 'giovani leoni' appaiono nella letteratura greca: Eschilo aveva inserito nel secondo stasimo dell'*Agamennone* (717-736) la favola del cucciolo di leone, il quale, accolto in una casa e allevato come qualsiasi altro cucciolo, una volta cresciuto, rivelava la sua vera natura e ripagava con il sangue le cure ricevute, come un ἱερεύς τις ἄτας inviato da un dio. Nel coro, il leoncino, che, con il suo aspetto innocuo—da cucciolo—aveva fatto dimenticare a chi lo aveva accolto la sua natura pericolosa, simboleggia in primo luogo Elena, la causa della rovina di Troia. Dietro la rappresentazione del leoncino si trovano anche Paride e gli appartenenti alla casa di Atreo—Agamennone e Oreste—che avevano perpetrato il male di generazione in generazione, tanto che *l'imagerie* leonina, in quanto simbolo degli Atridi, attraversa tutta la trilogia. Il cucciolo di leone riappare, sul calare del V secolo a.C., in una commedia di Aristofane, le *Rane*, per descrivere Alcibiade.

In alcune opere della letteratura greca del V e IV secolo a.C. spicca la rappresentazione di leoni e leoncini. Può stupire questa apparente dimestichezza con un animale considerato 'esotico'; quindi volgere l'attenzione a questa presenza permette di aprire una finestra sul rapporto intertestuale e il gioco di rimandi significativi che vengono a crearsi tra brani di opere del periodo classico ateniese e appartenenti a generi letterari differenti: si tratta infatti di una tragedia, di una commedia e di un dialogo platonico. Dal confronto di questi passi, Aristofane e Platone, utilizzando l'immagine dei leoncini, appaiono dialogare con i versi di un coro di Eschilo, che diventano il sostrato su cui il commediografo e il filosofo si muovono per definire il carattere, indomabile e non riconducibile ad un consesso civile, di Alcibiade, il protagonista della scena politica ateniese sullo scorcio del V secolo. Pertanto, questo lavoro vorrebbe mettere in evidenza come l'*Agamennone* di Eschilo, le *Rane* di Aristofane e il *Gorgia* di Platone, in alcuni passaggi, si trovino in relazione tra di loro proprio grazie all'impiego dell'*imagerie* collegata alla figura del leone, simbolo di potenza, fierezza e maestà, ma pur sempre un animale selvaggio, pronto a rivoltarsi contro chi lo accolga e lo curi.

Per primo Eschilo ha inserito in un canto del secondo stasimo dell'*Agamennone* (717-736) la favola del cucciolo di leone, accolto in una casa e allevato come qualsiasi altro cucciolo fino al momento in cui, una volta cresciuto, rivela la sua vera natura e ripaga le cure ricevute con il sangue come un ἱερεύς τις ἄτας (*hiereus tis atas*, 'un sacerdote di Ate', antica figura divina, dea dell'accecamento, giudice e vendicatrice delle cattive azioni), inviato da un dio. Il leoncino, infatti, con il suo aspetto innocuo—da cucciolo—aveva fatto dimenticare a chi lo aveva accolto la sua natura ferina:

> ἔθρεψεν δὲ λέοντος ἶ-
> νιν δόμοις αγάλακτον οὕ-
> τως ἀνὴρ φιλόμαστον,
> ἐν βιότου προτελείοις
> ἅμερον, εὐφιλόπαιδα
> καὶ γεραροῖς επίχαρτον.
> πολέα δ'ἔσχ'ἐν ἀγκάλαις
> νεοτρόφου τέκνου δίκαν,

φαιδρωπὸς ποτὶ χεῖρα σαί-
νων τε γαστρὸς ἀνάγκαις.
Χρονισθεὶς δ'ἀπέδειξεν ἦ-
θος τὸ πρὸς τοκέων· χάριν
γὰρ τροφεῦσιν ἀμείβων
μηλοφόνοισιν [ἐν] ἄταις
δαῖτ'ἀκέλευστος ἔτευξεν·
αἵματι δ'οἶκος ἐφύρθη,
ἄμαχον ἄλγος οἰκέταις
μέγα σίνος πολυκτόνον.
ἐκ θεοῦ δ'ἱερεύς τις ἄ-
τας δόμοις προσεθρέφθη.

Così talvolta nella propria casa un uomo alleva un cucciolo di leone appena staccato dalla poppa materna; che nei primi giorni è domestico, gioca coi fanciulli, anche i vecchi lo amano; e spesso lo prende fra le braccia come fosse un bambino e quello lo guarda con occhio gaio e muove la coda e gli lambisce le mani perché vuole mangiare. Ma, subito cresciuto, scopre la natura dei padri e ricambia le cure di chi lo allevò, preparando a se stesso, ospite non invitato, un convito di bestie sgozzate, e la casa è inondata di sangue, dolore ineluttabile, strazio grande di morti innumerevoli. Un sacerdote di Ate è colui che un dio mandò a quella casa perché vi fosse allevato.[1]

Nei versi di questo coro tragico si riconosce la derivazione da una favola tradizionale che metteva in guardia dall'accogliere e aiutare chi, a causa della propria natura selvaggia, avrebbe arrecato danno invece che riconoscenza al proprio benefattore. Con questa favola Eschilo, nello stasimo, pone sul medesimo piano il leoncino ed Elena: anch'essa, accolta da Priamo nella sua reggia, porterà rovina e morte. Dietro alla rappresentazione del leoncino si trova altresì Paride,[2] riammesso nella casa del padre dopo esserne stato allontanato in seguito alla profezia che lo indicava come causa della distruzione di Troia.

[1] Il testo riproduce Page 1972, la traduzione è di Valgimigli in Valgimigli, Di Benedetto, Ferrari 1980.
[2] Knox 1952, 17-25. L'analisi di Knox mostra che, oltre a Paride, dietro la rappresentazione del leoncino si trovano anche gli appartenenti alla casa di Atreo–Agamennone e Oreste–che avevano perpetrato il male di generazione in generazione, tanto che l'*imagerie* leonina, in quanto simbolo degli Atridi, attraversa tutta la trilogia.

Il cucciolo di leone riappare, sul termine del V secolo, verso la fine di una commedia di Aristofane, le *Rane*. La trama della commedia, rappresentata alle Lenee del 405, vede Dioniso scendere nell'oltretomba per riportare in vita Euripide, il suo poeta preferito, che è morto da poco tempo. Una volta nell'Ade, il dio rimane confuso, non sa più se riportare ad Atene Euripide oppure Eschilo. Dopo l'agone tra i due poeti, vera e propria battaglia di parole, e la pesatura dei rispettivi versi, Dioniso si trova ancora nella condizione di non saper decidere se ricondurre sulla terra Euripide, il poeta capace di deliziarlo con i suoi versi, oppure Eschilo, il tragediografo rappresentante della generazione dei combattenti a Maratona, che avevano respinto l'invasione persiana. Per poter giungere ad una decisione, Dioniso chiede infine ai due personaggi un giudizio sulla figura controversa di Alcibiade, il figlio difficile della città di Atene che lo ama e lo odia allo stesso tempo,[3] ma che continua a desiderarlo: infatti Alcibiade, al momento della rappresentazione delle *Rane*, si trovava in esilio ormai da due anni, ma ciò nonostante gli Ateniesi sembravano riporre in lui una speranza di salvezza nel momento in cui Atene era ormai prossima alla disastrosa sconfitta finale nella guerra contro Sparta. Alla richiesta di Dioniso il personaggio di Euripide risponde (1427-1429):

> μισῶ πολίτην, ὅστις ὠφελεῖν πάτραν
> βραδὺς φανεῖται, μεγάλα δε βλάπτειν ταχύς,
> καὶ πόριμον αὑτῷ, τῇ πόλει δ'ἀμήχανον.[4]

'Odio quel cittadino che si mostra lento nell'essere utile alla patria, ma veloce nel danneggiarla molto e attivo nell'arricchire se stesso, mentre è inutile alla città'.

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[3] Cfr. Ar. *Ran*. 1425: ποθεῖ μέν, ἐχθαίρει δέ, βούλεται δ'ἔχειν. Il verso è la parodia di un frammento del tragediografo Ione di Chio (*Phrouroi*, fr. 44, 2 *TrGF* I) in cui Elena, rispondendo ad Odisseo il quale era penetrato come spia in Troia, diceva (...) σιγᾷ μέν, ἐχθαίρει δέ, βούλεταί γε μήν. Del Corno 1985, 242 nota che "la geniale variazione di Aristofane diventa il prototipo dell'*odi et amo* catulliano, e dei suoi discendenti". Più interessante mi sembra il fatto che Elena, parlando di se stessa–e non importa se il soggetto dei verbi sia Ecuba, o la città di Troia, anche se in questo secondo caso la relazione tra i versi di Ione e quelli di Aristofane sarebbe ancora più stringente–si descrive come Dioniso descrive il rapporto di Atene con Alcibiade e questa rappresenta una prolessi quanto mai cogente del giudizio di Eschilo sul giovane, che conferma l'assimilazione delle due figure–Elena e Alcibiade–come motivo di rovina per le città che le accolgono.

[4] Il testo greco delle *Rane* impiegato riproduce l'edizione di Dover 1993.

Aristofane, in questi versi, riesce, attuando un peculiare procedimento mimetico, a far parlare il ‘suo’ Euripide con il tratto stilistico[5] proprio del tragediografo: il poeta esprime chiaramente un giudizio che si qualifica in linea con la precedente esortazione della parabasi,[6] in cui il coro invitava gli ateniesi a servirsi dei cittadini saggi, di buona nascita, educati secondo la παιδεία (*paideia*, educazione) tradizionale, giusti ed onesti, invece che dei mascalzoni, sotto la cui guida Atene, dilaniata da gravi crisi interne, non era in grado di far fronte al nemico esterno.

Il giudizio di Eschilo appartiene, invece, a tutto un altro ambito concettuale (1431ab-1432):

> οὐ χρὴ λέοντος σκύμνον ἐν πόλει τρέφειν·
> μάλιστα μὲν λέοντα μὴ ’ν πόλει τρέφειν·
> ἢν δ’ἐκτραφῇ τις, τοῖς τρόποις ὑπηρετεῖν.
>
> Non bisogna nutrire un cucciolo di leone nella città, soprattutto non bisogna nutrire un leone nella città. Nel caso qualcuno lo allevi, deve sottostare al suo carattere.

Contrapposto alla chiarezza icastica della risposta di Euripide, il giudizio di Eschilo si presenta configurato come la risposta di un oracolo:[7] l’impiego di un riferimento al mondo animale,[8] (l’immagine del leone, in quanto metafora del coraggio del combattente, ma anche di un carattere non addomesticabile), e l’oscurità,[9] anzi l’ambiguità, che permetteva varie interpretazioni, il cui significato per lo più si chiariva solo con il concludersi degli eventi, ammiccano proprio alle risposte oracolari in cui, come insegnava Eraclito, a proposito

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[5] Del Corno 1985, 243: “Se non sono una citazione letterale da Euripide–come alcuni credono, i tre versi sono una perfetta parodia dal punto di vista stilistico: Euripide suole iniziare le sue sentenze con drastiche affermazioni in prima persona, e travestire in retoriche antitesi l’ovvietà dei concetti. Comunque, la sua diagnosi qualifica inesorabilmente i motivi di sfiducia, che si dovrebbero provare per Alcibiade”.

[6] Ar. *Ran*. 718-737; in notizie che originano da Dicearco (fr. 84 Wherli)–riportate in Dover 1993, *hypoth*. 1(c) e in una *Vita di* Aristofane (Aristophanes Test. 1. 35-39 K.-A.)–si dice che per i buoni consigli della parabasi le *Rane* vennero premiate con una replica del dramma e con l’incoronazione pubblica con una corona di olivo.

[7] Per la presenza negli oracoli di animali che simboleggiano particolari tipi di uomini, cfr. Fraenkel, 1950, commento al v. 1224: “it should not be forgotten that in Cassandra’s words, as in other oracles, the various beasts take the place of definite individual men precisely because of their characteristic qualities”.

[8] Cfr. Sommerstein 1996, 286. Si ricordi, per di più, che questo tipo di oracoli preannunciavano, di solito, la nascita di importanti uomini di stato o di tiranni: si veda, per esempio, Hdt. V. 9.3 (Cipselo); VI. 131 (Pericle); Plut. *Alex*. 2 (Alessandro); Ar. *Eq*. 1037-1044 (Cleone). Cfr. Dyson 1929, 186-192.

[9] Cfr. Cannatà 2003, 280, nota 48.

dell’oracolo di Delfi, ὁ ἄναξ, οὗ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς, οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει (‘il signore [Apollo], la residenza del cui oracolo è a Delfi, non ordina e non nasconde, ma indica’).[10]

Può sembrare superfluo ricordare che sulla scena si trovano due personaggi teatrali e non Eschilo ed Euripide stessi, anche se la loro rappresentazione da parte di Aristofane è del tutto verosimile e in linea con la poetica dei rispettivi tragediografi. Questa puntualizzazione, invece, è da tenere ben presente in questo passaggio delle *Rane*: infatti l’Eschilo storico morì ben prima degli eventi intorno ai quali Dioniso chiede giudizi e consigli, quindi il suggerimento espresso nella commedia, grazie all’abilità di Aristofane, ha un aspetto *eschileo* (e in questo senso è veramente un capolavoro), ma è tutto del commediografo. Anche l’apparente ripetizione contenutistica nei versi 1431a e 1431b, che quasi tutti gli studiosi considerano l’uno il doppione dell’altro, rientra nel novero degli stilemi propri della dizione oracolare. Cannatà[11] affronta il problema e mostra come invece il testo tràdito sia da mantenere, sia per rispettare la simmetria tra la risposta di Euripide e quella di Eschilo, sia perché tra i due versi non c’è identità di contenuti—una tra le condizioni necessarie per riconoscere un’interpolazione—poiché il v. 1431a e il v. 1431b veicolano un messaggio diverso: anche se entrambi mettono in guardia dal nutrire un leone nell’ambito cittadino, in v. 1431a il riferimento è ad un cucciolo, mentre in v. 1431b si parla di un leone ormai cresciuto,[12] condizione che si rapporta meglio con lo stato di Alcibiade all’epoca della rappresentazione delle *Rane*, poiché il discepolo di Socrate, nel 405, era ormai un uomo adulto.

Fraenkel[13] sostiene che non c’è niente che dimostri che i vv. 1431-1432 delle *Rane* alludano alla favola del coro dell’*Agamennone*, mentre Vidal-Naquet[14] è di avviso diverso e non

[10] Heracl., fr. 93 D.K. [Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 21.404d].
[11] Cannatà 2003, 272-280.
[12] In v. 1431b si parla di un λέων, non più di uno σκυμνός e Dover 1993, 372 nota che al verso seguente: “the aorist aspect with ἐκ denotes the completion of a process”.
[13] Fraenkel, 1950, II 342: “There is nothing to show that the advice of Aeschylus in Ar. *Frogs* 1431 alludes to the employment of the αἶνος in the chorus of the Agamemnon and not rather to the underlying αἶνος itself”.
[14] Vidal-Naquet, 2002, 16: “I versi (*Rane*, 1430-32) sono una limpida allusione al celebre coro dell’*Agamennone*”.

ha dubbi sul fatto che i versi di Aristofane si riferiscano al coro dell'*Agamennone*. Può aiutare a confermare questa ascendenza osservare che Aristofane fa pronunciare i versi che paragonano Alcibiade ad un leone proprio al personaggio di Eschilo, cioè all'autore del brano richiamato. Aristofane, nel rendere omaggio al tragediografo, lo fa parlare con parole che potrebbero essere le sue, almeno da un punto di vista formale, dispiegando un procedimento intertestuale che focalizza immediatamente il pericolo rappresentato da Alcibiade, il quale, proprio come il leoncino—e proprio come Elena—non può che portare rovina a chi lo accolga e lo nutra. Inoltre, considerando il testo, Aristofane fa in modo che il suo Eschilo usi un soggetto indeterminato (nel v.1431a e 1431b troviamo una proposizione impersonale, nel v. 1432 il soggetto è un τις (*tis*, qualcuno), tipico delle favole, mentre nel canto del coro dell'*Agamennone,* il soggetto è un ἀνὴρ (*aner*, uomo) imprecisato, e lo stesso verbo τρέφειν (*trephein*, nutrire): queste particolarità sintattico-lessicali non possono, a mio avviso, non richiamare immediatamente la favola del II stasimo. Aristofane, tuttavia, opera uno spostamento rispetto ai versi di Eschilo: avverte i suoi concittadini che non bisogna nutrire un leone nella città, non nella casa, come avviene nella favola, perché il suo intento è di segnalare la pericolosità di Alcibiade in quanto cittadino e mostrare tutta la potenziale minaccia di un carattere provvisto di una natura, per così dire, 'leonina', coraggiosa ma impossibile da addomesticare. Alcibiade viene dunque descritto come il leoncino che avrebbe aggredito chi lo aveva allevato, dichiarandone quindi immediatamente la carica distruttiva, motivo di rovina per Atene. Viene inoltre puntualizzato il pericolo che rappresenta con l'affermazione che un leone ormai cresciuto non deve essere nutrito nella città per non dover sottostare alla sua natura irriducibile ad un contesto civile democratico. Riguardo a questa dislocazione dell'αἶνος (*ainos*, favola), può essere interessante ricordare un passo delle *Supplici* di Euripide (1222-1223): πικροὶ γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἥξετ', ἐκτεθραμμένοι / σκύμνοι λεόντων πόλεος ἐκπορθήτορες ('crudeli infatti per loro [per i Tebani] arriverete una volta cresciuti, cuccioli dei leoni, distruttori della città'). I versi fanno parte del discorso finale di Atena e i cuccioli, che cresciuti distruggeranno Tebe, configurano gli Epigoni, i figli dei sette eroi morti nell'attacco contro la città della Beozia, che vendicheranno i padri. È da notare come questi versi

rappresentino un anello di congiunzione tra il passo di Eschilo e quello di Aristofane: ἶνις (*hinis*) di Eschilo è diventato σκύμνος (*skymnos*), che ritroviamo nei versi delle *Rane*, e già Euripide sposta dalla famiglia alla città la distruzione che i cuccioli ormai cresciuti potranno arrecare. Vickers,[15] inoltre, nota che la carica distruttiva dell'immagine del leone in Euripide è amplificata quando applicata agli esseri umani.

La favola del cucciolo di leone doveva essere, del resto, molto diffusa: secondo Vickers,[16] Aristofane stesso impiega il riferimento all'αἶνος nelle *Thesmophoriazousae*: nel repertorio di comportamenti femminili sconvenienti, include la storia di una donna che finge per dieci giorni il travaglio fino al momento in cui riesce a comprare un bambino. La vecchia che l'ha assecondata nell'inganno, al v. 514, annuncia al marito credulone 'λέων λέων σοι γέγονεν' ('un leone, un leone ti è nato').[17] Se da una parte, per compiacere il *padre* e fargli accettare il bambino, le parole della vecchia mettono in risalto una presunta natura leonina del piccolo, che lo accomuna a personalità eccezionali quali Pericle,[18] dall'altra gettano una luce ambigua, che ricorda la natura ferina dell'animale.

Passiamo adesso a considerare il *Gorgia* di Platone. Il *Gorgia* è un dialogo che ha come manifesto programmatico lo scontro tra retorica e filosofia: uno dei personaggi antagonisti di Socrate, il giovane Callicle, si configura come un seguace delle teorie retoriche di Gorgia e si contrappone al filosofo ateniese con un lungo discorso (482c4-486d1) che rappresenta forse il

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[15] Vickers 2019, 2-3: "Throughout the twenty-six uses of the word λέων in extant Euripides, the lion's destructive, often monstrous, ferocity is emphasized, particularly when the 'lion' is really a human. The prominence of the lion's threatening attributes implies a rather more uncertain symbolic status for the creature than a purely 'positive' reading would denote".

[16] Vickers 2019: "However, I suggest that the specific juxtaposition of a young lion with the introduction of a suppositious son into the household simultaneously recalls the famous fable of the maturing cub, in what is doublespeak. The *Thesmophoriazousae* lines do not recall the precise words in Aeschylus' choral treatment of the story, but rather, like contemporary mentions of lion births, the passage recognizes and utilizes the same original αἶνος, 'fable', one evidently so memorable it may have become something close to proverbial".

[17] Cfr. Vickers 2019, 2: "The declaration that the smuggled child is a lion can initially be taken, understandably, as a positive one, as indeed the husband himself, apparently hears it: a good omen or wish for the baby's future. [....]. the boy in question will, seemingly, grow up to be leonine in such a way. But other references to lions in Aristophanes and Euripides (to take an accessible dramatic contemporary) suggest a rather more ambiguous symbolism for the *Thesmophoriazousae*".

[18] Per il sogno di Agariste, madre di Pericle, che le annuncia la nascita di un leone cfr. Hdt. 6.131.

luogo più affascinante del dialogo, alla cui seduzione continuano ad arrendersi i lettori di tutti i tempi. Il discorso di Callicle, pur nella rappresentazione dell'impeto giovanile, è costruito retoricamente ed è divisibile in due parti: nella prima (482c4-484c3), Callicle si impegna a rivelare la sostanza della legge di natura, mentre nella seconda parte (484c3-486d1) trova luogo un violento attacco alla filosofia.

Callicle, dunque, per controbattere le dichiarazioni di Socrate nei precedenti confronti con Gorgia stesso e con Polo, non esita ad affermare, anche contro la morale comune, che il più forte ha il diritto di prevalere nei confronti del più debole e che ciò avviene *κατὰ νόμον γε τὸν τῆς φύσεως* (*kata nomon ge ton tes physeos*, 'secondo la legge di natura', 483e3), espressione in qualche modo ossimorica ed anche paradossale:[19] mentre la parte più debole della società si appella al *νόμος* (*nomos*, legge) per contenere lo strapotere dei più forti, Callicle si rivolge al mondo della natura per supportare la sua tesi che il più forte deve comandare ed avere di più del più debole.[20] La sua spregiudicatezza si svela nel capovolgimento dei valori della città democratica in cui il *νόμος*—*legge* convenzionale posta dagli uomini—rappresenta la realizzazione della φύσις (*physis*, natura) umana, diversa da quella degli altri animali perché capace di darsi regole idonee alla convivenza civile; per lui, invece, il νόμος non è altro che 'un impedimento alla piena realizzazione della propria natura',[21] imposto ai più forti dalla massa dei più deboli. Il νόμος quindi è imposto dalla massa dei più deboli non tanto per realizzare l'*eunomia* insita nell'*isonomia*, ma per arginare il naturale emergere delle personalità superiori.

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[19] Guthrie 1969, 104: "In this first appearance of the phrase 'law of nature', it is used as a deliberate paradox, and of course in neither of its later senses, neither the *lex naturae* which has had a long history in ethical and legal theory from the Stoics and Cicero down to modern times no the scientists' laws of nature which are 'simply observed uniformities'. But it epitomized an attitude current already in the late fifth century, and the Athenians in Thucydides's Melian dialogue came close to it even verbally, when they put forward the principle that he should rule who can as a matter of 'natural necessity' and at the same time an eternal law". Franco 2015, 193: "Agli occhi di Callicle gli umani che preferiscono affidarsi ai *nomoi* 'contro natura' (*νόμοι οἱ παρὰ φύσιν*) lo fanno o perché sono incapaci di difendersi da sé, oppure perché, pur forti, hanno subito da piccolo il lavaggio del cervello dell'educazione democratica, che li ha 'stregati' inducendoli a pensare che l'uguaglianza sia cosa buona e giusta".

[20] Pl. *Grg.* 483 c 9.

[21] Bonazzi e Capra 2003, 221.

Callicle, quindi, per supportare la sua posizione, ricorre ad un esempio tratto dal mondo animale perché, chiaramente, questo non è soggetto alla legge convenzionale disposta dagli uomini, ed è quindi possibile rintracciarvi i segni di una presunta *vera* legge di natura.[22] Callicle, afferma che (483e4):

> πλάττοντες τοὺς βελτίστους καὶ ἐρρωμενεστάτους ἡμῶν αὐτῶν, ἐκ νέων λαμβάνοντες ὥσπερ λέοντας, κατεπᾴδοντές τε καὶ γοητεύοντες καταδουλούμεθα λέγοντες ὡς τὸ ἴσον χρὴ ἔχειν καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ δίκαιον.
>
> '(infatti che cosa facciamo noi uomini?) Prendiamo i più forti e i migliori tra noi e cerchiamo di addestrarli fin da piccoli, come si fa con i leoncini: con formulette e incantesimi li trasformiamo in schiavi, insegnando che tutti devono avere la stessa parte e che il bello e il giusto consistono in questo'.[23]

Il giovane, con queste parole, paragona cosa accade ai migliori e più forti tra i cittadini al destino di leoni catturati ancora giovani e addomesticati, ma ad un esame più attento, che prescinda dall'abilità retorica del discorso, il quadro dei leoni, fatti prigionieri e soggiogati da incantesimi all'idea di giustizia derivata dal τὸ ἴσον χρὴ ἔχειν (*to ison chre echein*, 'è necessario che tutti abbiano una parte uguale'), non ha un intento realistico. Nello slancio appassionato di chi porta un modello a sostegno delle proprie tesi, il richiamo ai giovani leoni addestrati perde completamente qualsiasi aggancio con la realtà stessa della natura per diventare la metafora della condizione *contro natura* dei βέλτιστοι (*beltistoi*, i migliori tra gli uomini), assoggettati dalla massa dei più deboli.[24]

Già nel brano precedente all'introduzione dell'immagine dei giovani leoni, Callicle aveva scelto di procedere cercando di colpire l'interlocutore con un'immagine forte e tale da creare una specie di impressione violenta. Infatti, prima di presentare un esempio dal mondo animale, per confermare le sue teorie, propone una dimostrazione tratta dalle relazioni sovrastatali: il giovane

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[22] Plut., *de amore prolis*, 493 c 13.
[23] Il testo è quello dell'edizione di Dodds 1959, la traduzione di Zanetto 1994.
[24] Norden 1986, 79, spiega questo modo di procedere nel discorso, tipico di Gorgia e della sua scuola: "Esagerati e innaturali come lo stile erano i pensieri i quali, spesso in forma di γνῶμαι, salivano come un brillante fuoco d'artificio per poi subito spengersi".

spinge la provocazione fino a dichiarare esemplare della legge di natura, cioè della natura del giusto, Serse,[25] che nella percezione ateniese del tempo rappresentava il modello dell'uomo empio, poiché il Re Persiano aveva invaso la Grecia e distrutto i luoghi più sacri di Atene solamente a causa della sua tracotanza. Appellandosi alla legge di natura intesa come la legittimazione della prevaricazione del più forte nei confronti dei più deboli, Callicle può giustificare le aggressioni dei Re Persiani, Serse e Dario, rispettivamente ai Greci ed agli Sciti. Nell'economia del dialogo, la menzione di Serse sembra operare una sorta di klimax, rispetto al contradditorio tra Socrate e Polo, in cui il discepolo di Gorgia aveva portato Archelao I—re di Macedonia dal 413 al 399 a.C., che per ottenere il potere si macchiò di delitti orribili—come esempio di uomo felice, ma anche come dimostrazione della possibilità di uno schiavo di ribaltare il suo destino fino a diventare re. Callicle riprende l'esempio del successo di un uomo spregiudicato e lo amplifica, affermando che la sua superiorità, sancita dalla legge della φύσις, gli conferisce il diritto di prevaricare su coloro che sono più deboli, in virtù del fatto ὅτι οὕτω τὸ δίκαιον κέκριται τὸν κρείττω τοῦ ἥττονος ἄρχειν καὶ πλέον ἔχειν[26] ('che così è valutata la giustizia, chi è più forte comanda sul più debole e ha di più'), e che il vero νόμος è quello posto dalla natura, non quello stabilito dagli uomini. Questo sviluppo retorico pare mostrare, nelle intenzioni di Platone, la differenza tra un personaggio come Polo ed uno come Callicle. Polo, infatti, non è pericoloso, perché offre argomentazioni aggressive, ma lo fa rozzamente e infine non ha neppure la sfrontatezza per sostenerle fino in fondo, per cui è facilmente smascherabile. Callicle, invece, pur estremizzando le teorie del suo predecessore, sembra risultare accettabile o persuasivo, perché possiede le qualità e le capacità per inserire un esempio tanto inaccettabile in un discorso che riesca persuasivo. Insieme al pericolo costituito da Callicle è delineato il pericolo derivante

[25] Bonazzi e Capra 2003, 218: "con i suoi cupi bagliori Serse condensa nella sua persona il nemico per eccellenza della democrazia e l'emblema del destino che tocca a chi osa violare le leggi della natura e degli dei. L'ideologia democratica si salda così con la morale del limite tipica del pensiero greco: in Solone, e prima ancora in Esiodo, la regola che guida il mondo fisico e umano trova la sua ragione nell'eliminazione di ogni eccesso e prevaricazione".
[26] Pl. *Grg.* 483 d 5.

dall'insegnamento di Gorgia, poiché relativizza la realtà, senza ancorarla ad un fondamento morale che costituisca un discrimine e guidi le coscienze.

Presentare il tentativo di invasione di Serse come dimostrazione del diritto del più forte a prevalere per natura aveva portato già Olimpiodoro[27] a sottolineare come Callicle avesse in realtà impiegato un esempio di empietà. Le parole del giovane dovevano procurare nel pubblico un turbamento tale da abbagliare la capacità di ragionamento per qualche istante. Non è, inoltre, sfuggito ai commentatori che, anche se portato ad esempio del diritto del più forte di prevalere, Serse, nonostante i colpi inflitti ai Greci, infine tornò in fuga in patria senza essere riuscito a sottomettere gli avversari. Perché dunque, portare un fallimento a dimostrazione di una tesi, considerato che anche la spedizione di Dario contro gli Sciti non ebbe il successo che il Re Persiano aveva sperato? Socrate non riprende né corregge questo esempio, anche se l'insuccesso di queste imprese era diventato paradigmatico dell'esito negativo cui era destinato colui che era mosso da ὕβρις (*hybris*, insolenza).[28] Forse per questo Socrate non sente il bisogno di controbatterlo? Fussi[29] risponde a questa domanda affermando che questi esempi sono la prova che la legge del più forte, infine, è descrittiva, ma non prescrittiva: l'esempio della prepotenza dei Re Persiani nei confronti degli altri popoli, servirebbe così, dato che non produce gli effetti auspicabili da chi la mette in atto, a dimostrare l'esatto contrario di ciò che sembrerebbe

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[27] Olimpiodoro (*In Plat. Gorg.* 26, 9, 1-4; Westwrink 1970, 141) commentando l'espressione Ξέρξης περὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα (483 d 6-7) rileva che ὁ Καλλικλῆς δίκαια πεπραχέναι τὸν Ξέρξην· ma specifica, rispecchiando il sentire comune, ὅτι δὲ ἀδικίᾳ καὶ πολλῇ ἐχρήσατο, δῆλον ἐκ τοῦ ἀμοιβὰς αὐτὸν ἀξίας δεδωκέναι τῶν αὐτοῦ ἀθεμίτων πράξεων.

[28] Eschilo aveva rappresentato, nei Persiani, Serse come la personificazione umana della ὕβρις, della tracotanza oltraggiosa che non sa riconoscere i propri limiti e che porta l'uomo che sfida gli dei, alla rovina.

[29] Fussi 2006, 11-12: "intendo sostenere, cioè, che gli esempi, spesso in forma di immagini, contengono elementi che invitano a mettere in questione la teoria che vorrebbero avvalorare, e in molti casi mettono in luce le sue debolezze. In quest'ottica riflettere sulle immagini proposte dai vari personaggi significa accettare una sorta di sospensione teorica…si tratta di osservare come queste rimandino ad altre immagini del testo, interagiscono con esse, e infine, possano lasciar intravedere crepe argomentative, o salti teorici significativi nell'andamento discorsivo…il discorso di Callicle, che dovrebbe difendere l'esistenza di una legge di natura per cui il più forte deve dominare chi è più debole, è 'smontato' proprio a partire dalle immagini che egli stesso adotta: le invasioni persiane, il rapporto servo-padrone, e, infine, l'immagine dei giovani leoni addomesticati dalle parole del *nomos*"; 213: "Che la cosiddetta legge di natura sia non solo descrittiva ma anche prescrittiva non è comprovato dagli esempi, che, semmai, suggeriscono una sorta di ottusa resistenza del mondo (o, ironicamente, di una natura matrigna?) al prevalere di chi è migliore".

affermare. Se da una parte chi è più forte, per indole e per mezzi, cerca di sottomettere colui che ritiene più debole, dall'altra parte gli esempi provenienti dalla realtà, dalla storia, non garantiscono la riuscita di tali imprese, anzi ne raccontano il disastro. Callicle, quindi, continua il suo discorso, teso a impressionare più che a convincere, portando l'esempio dei leoncini ammansiti con incantesimi e poi sottomessi.

In questo brano del *Gorgia*, il discorso di Callicle si impenna: nello sforzo di tenere dietro ad un pensiero pienamente assertivo, la sonorità quasi onomatopeica delle parole di Callicle, che appaiono riprodurre le litanie magiche usate negli incantesimi,[30] produce un effetto formale che realizza i dettami della retorica gorgiana, fino a citare pressoché *ad verbum* un passo dell'*Encomio di Elena*:[31] le parole sembrano 'incatenare' il lettore e trascinarlo dentro il sentire di Callicle tanto da rendere assai difficile distaccarsi dal punto di vista del giovane ateniese per coglierne le contraddizioni. Il 'noi inclusivo',[32] che opera fin da τοῦτον ὅν ἡμεῖς τιθέμεθα (483e4) *le leggi convenzionali degli uomini,* e in cui Callicle si riconosce, sembra attirare per magia anche il lettore fino al verbo καθαδουλούμεθα[33] (483e7) del periodo successivo, la cui diatesi media si presta ad interpretare il passo sia come *noi rendiamo schiavi*, sia come *noi ci rendiamo schiavi*, *noi siamo resi schiavi,* un *noi* inclusivo, in cui si sovrappongono il significato attivo e quello medio.[34] Callicle, rappresentando i migliori e i più forti come leoni, rappresenta anche se stesso come un giovane leone.

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[30] Damos 1999, 45 nota 18. "Note the sonorous quality of Callicles' words in 483e4-6. The onomatopoeic sound of Callicles' own lines mimics the bewitching effect of those spells and incantations which he says are used by the weak to enslave the strong. Compare *Meno* 80a2-3 for the collocation of the verbs γοητεύω ('beguile') and κατεπᾴδω ('subdue by enchantment')".

[31] Diels-Kranz, Gorg., *Enc. El.,* fr. 11, 59 sgg: Αἱ γὰρ ἔνθεοι διὰ λόγων ἐπωιδαὶ ἐπαγωγοὶ ἡδονῆς, ἀπαγωγοὶ λύπης γίνονται· αἱ γὰρ ἔνθεοι διὰ λόγων συγγινομένη γὰρ τῆι δόξηι τῆς ψυχῆς ἡ δύναμις τῆς ἐπωιδῆς ἔθελξε καὶ ἔπεισε καὶ μετέστησεν αὐτὴν γοητείαι. γοητείας δὲ καὶ μαγείας δισσαὶ τέχναι εὕρηνται, αἵ εἰσι ψυχῆς ἁμάρτημα.

[32] Zuretti 1927, 113.

[33] Nonvel Pieri, 1991, 416, commenta καθαδουλούμεθα: "Callicle crede d'essere anch'egli, per natura, uno di questi leoni: onde καθαδουλούμεθα, noi siamo ridotti servi", in cui anche la studiosa riconosce 'un *noi* inclusivo'.

[34] Per questo tipo di sovrapposizione della diatesi attiva e di quella media in Platone, cfr. *Leg* .638 b 1; *Resp*. 351; *Menex*. 240-244 d 1.

Platone smaschera, con il discorso di Callicle, il pericolo insito nei λόγοι καλοί, nelle *parole belle*, che in quanto ἐπῳδαί (*epodai*, incantesimi), a causa del loro potere suasorio, posseggono una natura duplice: possono essere una cura per l'anima se usati in modo appropriato, ma diventare un pericoloso strumento di menzogna e di soggiogamento qualora impiegati da volontà non moderate da un'educazione adeguata.

Già Dodds,[35] nel suo commento al *Gorgi*a, collega l'immagine del leone nel discorso di Callicle all'*Agamennone* di Eschilo: la citazione non è affatto casuale, poiché in questo passo, come del resto nel brano delle *Rane*, è riflessa la luce ambigua di Alcibiade, con cui il giovane antagonista di Socrate ha molti tratti in comune. Platone, nel presentare così il personaggio del suo dialogo (al di fuori di quest'opera, ricordiamo, assolutamente sconosciuto), lo inscrive nella cerchia della gioventù che, ruotando intorno ad Alcibiade, ne ha assimilato ideologia e comportamenti. Alcibiade stesso, del resto, si compiacque di collegare la sua personalità alla natura leonina, come narra Plutarco nella *Vita di Alcibiade* 2.2. Lo stesso storico ci informa anche che Alcibiade chiamò Leotichide il figlio avuto da Timea, moglie del re di Sparta Agide, presso il quale si era rifugiato. Non è possibile non ricordare, inoltre, che nella cultura letteraria greca Achille è altresì associato al leone[36] e al carattere che si fa trascinare dal θυμός, (*thymos*, animo in quanto sede delle passioni), come pure Alcibiade. Quindi, pur essendo probabilmente un personaggio inventato da Platone, nella figura di Callicle si riconoscono i tratti del giovane Alcibiade, di Achille[37]—il rappresentante per antonomasia dell'animo θυμοειδής, (*thymoeides*, coraggioso/impetuoso)—e forse anche quello del giovane Platone.

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[35] Dodds 1959, 268: "There were travelling menageries in Plato's day, where same lions and bears were exhibited (Isocr. *Antid*. 213). But he is doubtless thinking primarily of the fable of the Lion's Whelp which is told by Aeschylus, *Ag*. 737 ff., and alluded to by Aristophanes, *Ranae* 1431 οὐ χρὴ λέοντος σκύμνον ἐν πόλει τρέφειν. This explains why the comparison is introduced so casually".

[36] Fussi 2006, 189: "Se il leone, l'animale tanto spesso invocato nell'*Iliade* a rappresentare Achille (nota 11: *Iliade* XI.183; XVIII.318; XX.164-175; XXIV.41-43), ricompare anche nella *Repubblica* (588d3), non è al solo scopo di esaltarne la forza indomita, ma anche, e soprattutto, la pericolosa distanza dalla ragione".

[37] Fussi 2006, 188: "...nello *thymos* si condensano le riflessioni di Platone sulle caratteristiche dell'eroe omerico. Il modello centrale è Achille, l'eroe degli eroi. L'impulsività, l'ira che fa tutt'uno con l'impulso a combattere, il desiderio di gloria, la fisicità dell'energia aggressiva rappresentano un modello guerriero intrinsecamente competitivo e volto al successo".

Esplodono le contraddizioni di una tale personalità, ma non solo: Callicle, nonostante la sua gioventù e gli influssi della *giovane* cultura sofistica, rappresenta qui *il vecchio modo di pensare e di costruire il discorso, vale a dire la vecchia cultura* in cui, accanto ad una visione della società dove l'individuo trova la sua collocazione in base al rispetto che suscita per le sue qualità, i mezzi retorici sono utilizzati per 'muovere' emotivamente gli ascoltatori e così persuaderli, senza portare attenzione e cura alla razionalità interna del discorso. Ne è prova il fatto che gli esempi che Callicle porta e 'incatenano' il lettore con il loro fascino non reggono davanti ad un'analisi razionale. Callicle, quindi, appare come l'esponente di una cultura ancora orale/aurale, erede di quell'*epos* la cui critica è uno dei nodi della polemica platonica nei confronti della poesia. Potremmo dire, con una battuta, che il discorso di Callicle esemplifica nella sua magnificenza i pericoli di quel *canto delle Sirene* già conosciuti da Ulisse:[38] le sue parole si mostrano come la magia della retorica in atto, ma anche come la dimostrazione del pericolo rappresentato dalla retorica, che rende accettabili anche i discorsi ingiustificabili. Platone svela, quindi, con il discorso di Callicle, la forza del *dulce* delle τέχναι (*technai*, arte) della parola, che diventano un pericolo quando veicolano e rendono accettabili contenuti persino inattendibili o, addirittura, altrimenti incredibili.

Quindi, sebbene le parole di Callicle siano irragionevoli (Serse ha tentato di conquistare la Grecia non in base al diritto che gli proveniva dall'essere il più forte, ma perché spinto da tracotanza; i leoni non si domano con i canti o con le leggi) e contraddittorie (Callicle, se è corretta l'interpretazione qui proposta di καταδουλούμεθα, si sente parte allo stesso tempo del novero dei cittadini che stabiliscono le leggi e dei giovani leoni che le subiscono), appaiono 'credibili', benché 'incredibili', e necessitano di un'attenta disamina per essere smascherate.

Socrate impiegherà il resto del dialogo per 'smontare' non tanto la ῥῆσις (*rhesis*, discorso) di Callicle, a cui potrebbe far notare facilmente le difficoltà emergenti dalle sue parole, ma l'aspetto più profondo e pericoloso dell'incanto che ne scaturisce e che si espande su tutto il

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[38] Cfr. Hom. *Od.* XII.

dialogo: Platone mostra così il pericolo insito nella τέχνη ῥητορική (*techne rhetorike*, arte della retorica) che, con la sua magnificenza, può oscurare la ragione e rendere necessario un duro lavoro dell'intelletto per smascherarne gli inganni.

Platone riprende il nesso intertestuale appena considerato, probabilmente attraverso la mediazione della commedia, per tratteggiare a sua volta il carattere di Callicle: la natura 'leonina' del giovane rappresenta un pericolo perché, essendo un giovane ben dotato e ben motivato, ma restio, per questo suo carattere 'selvaggio', ad un'educazione che modelli il suo spirito in vista di un inserimento nel contesto politico, si muove senza arginare la spinta individualistica, slegata dal presupposto moderatore della virtù.

La presenza dei 'giovani leoni' nel *Gorgia*, quindi, è funzionale al gioco di rimandi significativi esistenti tra i passi appena considerati, collegati dalla volontà di Aristofane e di Platone di dialogare con l'opera di Eschilo, per utilizzare il clima creato da lui in *Ag.* 717-736 e farne il sostrato di brani delle loro opere, del tutto funzionale alla creazione di una temperie artistica. La citazione di un autore precedente, infatti, in una letteratura come quella greca che vive di un alto grado di intertestualità fin dall'epoca arcaica non rappresenta solo un atto di omaggio nei suoi confronti. Il richiamo ad Eschilo, nelle *Rane,* in un momento drammatico della storia ateniese, assume il significato della volontà di appellarsi ad un modello autorevole, in quanto poeta e in quanto cittadino, che sia in grado di orientare il giudizio degli ateniesi in senso virtuoso e di recuperare il valore della parola poetica. Il passato rappresentato da Eschilo, il poeta che aveva messo in scena la celebrazione delle istituzioni ateniesi e che aveva combattuto per difenderle contro il tentativo di invasione dei Persiani, viene richiamato dalla connessione con il coro dell'*Agamennone*. Aristofane *guarda indietro* per recuperare la possibilità di offrire un consiglio in grado di mettere in guardia i concittadini dall'affidare la propria salvezza ad una personalità come quella di Alcibiade. Platone, a sua volta, nel momento in cui disegna la figura dell'antagonista di Socrate, alludendo ai brani dei suoi predecessori, può descriverne il carattere e metterne a fuoco chiaramente le peculiarità. Il 'giovane leone' Callicle critica la pretesa di insegnare ai 'leoncini' a lasciarsi imbrigliare dal νόμος: egli si schiera dalla parte dei giovani leoni

con parole che tradiscono la loro ascendenza dall'*αἶνος*, non tanto direttamente da Eschilo, ma attraverso la mediazione di Aristofane, che aveva identificato Alcibiade con questa natura selvaggia e che aveva spostato il teatro dell'azione drammatica dalla famiglia alla città. Platone ottiene il massimo vantaggio muovendosi sullo sfondo creato da Eschilo, e poi da Aristofane ed esalta la nozione di pericolo di cui investe Callicle, poiché gli attribuisce una peculiarità che era stata caratteristica di Elena, rovina per antonomasia di amici e nemici, a causa della quale la miglior gioventù sia greca sia troiana era stata annientata. Il giovane rivendica il diritto degli uomini, per così dire superiori, a non essere soggiogati alle leggi della città, in virtù di una presunta legge di natura; i precedenti letterari di questo passo gettano su Callicle immediatamente una luce sinistra, che non ha bisogno di essere specificata ulteriormente poiché la connotazione negativa di questo passo del *Gorgia* emerge dal rapporto con gli ipotesti. Il gioco intertestuale, così, rimandando il fruitore ad un significato già esplicitato, permette all'artista di inserire il suo discorso in un'atmosfera che, essendo già sperimentata, non ha bisogno di ulteriori specificazioni e si appoggia su di un dato che, creando una sorta di dialogo tra autori, si avvantaggia anche di una particolare economia che permette di 'risparmiare' nel descrivere una situazione già precedentemente chiarita.[39]

[39] Cfr. Schiesaro1997, 75: "Esiste però una dimensione dell'intertestualità che non di rado passa inosservata: se tutta la poesia guarda naturalmente ai suoi modelli, certi tipi di poesia in certi momenti si dimostrano ossessionati dal fascino del passato". […] "L'intertestualità accorda al passato, un passato fatto di testi e parole, un ruolo decisivo nel difficile compito di modellare il presente, spesso anche il futuro"; 103: "L'intertestualità, la forma di coinvolgimento con il passato che risulta più evidente nel testo, si configura come una modalità di significazione problematica e complessa, inevitabilmente coinvolta nei dilemmi etici connaturati all'iterazione e al rovesciamento: 'andare indietro' nel tempo della letteratura diventa uno dei modi in cui il testo tematizza un rapporto ideologicamente problematico con il passato e rivela al suo interno un profondo contrasto irrisolto"; 105: "Il metadramma, insomma, non fa che rafforzare la tendenza regressiva dell'intertestualità, anzi diventa lo strumento con cui l'intertestualità ribadisce il suo messaggio implicito: bisogna guardare indietro, non avanti" […] "L'attivazione di un forte contatto intertestuale non può mai essere un'operazione neutra per i contenuti o per le dinamiche con cui si presenta e viene percepita. Offre al lettore 'ideale', il piacere dell'agnizione, la possibilità di condividere con l'autore il controllo, magari illusorio, del testo e del suo significato".

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Portraying the Dog in Archaic and Classical Athens: Image versus Text

By Katia Margariti

To Ken Kitchell,
in friendship and gratitude

Abstract

There are nearly 10,000 references to the dog in ancient Greek texts, not counting inscriptions. This number alone testifies to the importance of the animal in Greek culture and life. The present paper examines the relationship between Athenians and their dogs during the Archaic and Classical periods, through the evidence provided by ancient texts, sculpture and vase-painting.

The textual evidence presents an ambivalent image of the dog. Canines are described as intelligent, faithful, brave, affectionate and noble, valued for their use in hunting, guarding flocks and households, but also for their role as pets. At the same time, they are considered to be shameless, sexually licentious, gluttonous (and notorious food thieves), as well as unpredictable. There is always some fear that the dog, descending from the wolf, might suddenly become aggressive and launch an attack. However, the positive views on dogs prevail upon the negative ones, since the dog is valuable as a working animal and its undying devotion never fails to move humans.

Dogs appear in more than 2,000 painted and sculpted scenes of Athenian art, serving a variety of roles: they are the faithful companions of departing warriors, valuable collaborators in the hunt, cherished pets, and even status symbols. They are present in the gymnasium, the symposium and in domestic scenes. They are shown playing with children, enjoying music, and participating in various aspects of everyday life. They are also depicted on funerary reliefs,

accompanying their humans in death. A discrepancy between image and text is noted, since in contrast to the textual evidence, Athenian artistic representations hardly ever present a negative image of the dog. Furthermore, Athenian art largely focuses on depicting the relationship between humans and dogs, as well as their collaboration in the hunt.

Sometime in the third quarter of the fourth century BC, a dead dog was laid to rest behind the Stoa of Attalos in the Athenian Agora. The walls and floor of the grave that was discovered during the excavations of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens were lined with clay.[1] A large beef bone was placed near the dog’s nose, unquestionably a fitting burial gift for every canine. A miniature squat lekythos discovered nearby may have been deposited in this grave as a funerary offering. The care with which this dog was buried indicates that it was someone’s beloved canine companion, a cherished pet whose death was the cause of genuine sorrow. Was this kind of affection for one’s dog a common sentiment in ancient Athens or was it a rare exception? In this paper, we will examine the relationship between Athenians and their dogs during the Archaic and Classical periods, through the evidence provided by ancient texts, sculpture and vase-painting.[2] We shall begin by exploring the textual evidence and then turn to art, so that eventually the two can be compared.[3]

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[1] Thompson 1951, 52. See ‘Agora Deposit: R 10:3’ in the Athenian Agora Excavations Website: https://agora.ascsa.net/ (last accessed on 29.03.2024). Abbreviations follow the conventions of the *American Journal of Archaeology* and in the case of ancient authors those of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. I am truly grateful to the editor of this special issue, Guen Taietti, as well as the anonymous reviewers of this article for their extremely useful feedback. Heartfelt thanks are owed to friends and colleagues whose help, advice, encouragement and moral support has proven invaluable for my ongoing research on ancient Athenian dogs: Kenneth Kitchell, Ann Merriman, Spyros Mallis, Lora Holland, Rosie Mack, Carolyn Willekes and Andrew Silverstone. For the photos illustrating this article and permission to publish them I am indebted to Leonidas Bournias and Nikolaos Petrocheilos of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens, Maria Hidiroglou, Kalliopi Bairami, and Anna Vasiliki Karapanagiotou of the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, Mario Iozzo, Stefano Casciu and Claudia Noferi of the National Archaeological Museum of Florence, Jeff Steward and Katie Kujala of the Harvard Art Museums.

[2] For a different take on the treatment of animals–especially dogs and birds–in ancient Greece, see Calder 2017.

[3] For a detailed discussion of the relevant ancient texts, see Franco 2014.

In Aristophanes' *Wasps*, Labes the house-dog is accused of having stolen a Sicilian cheese from the kitchen (*Vesp*. 835-994). In the mock trial that follows,[4] Bdelycleon defends the accused, even though his father Philocleon seems determined to convict the canine (*Vesp*. 952-960):

> Bdelycleon: 'He is a good dog, and he chases wolves finely'.
> Philocleon: 'He is a thief and a conspirator'.
> Bdel: 'No, he is the best of all our dogs; he is capable of guarding a whole flock'.
> Phil: 'And what good is that, if he eats the cheese?'
> Bdel: 'What? He fights for you, he guards your door; he is an excellent dog in every respect. Forgive him his larceny! He is wretchedly ignorant, he cannot play the lyre.'
> Phil: 'I wish he did not know how to write either; then the rascal would not have drawn up his pleadings'.[5]

In the end, Labes is acquitted. But is he a good dog or a bad dog? This passage by Aristophanes is indicative of the duality characterizing Athenian attitudes towards canines in the ancient texts, as we will see next.

Dogs are valued for their use in hunting, guarding flocks, houses and property. According to Xenophon, hunting dogs are possessions worthy of a man (*Ages.* 9.6.1-4). Plato quotes Solon in saying that a man who has dear children, horses, hounds, and a foreign guest is happy (*Lysis* 212e.3-4). Fine hunting dogs, henceforth referred to as hounds, were prized possessions that could only be afforded by the wealthy, thus functioning as status symbols.[6] In *Plutus*, Aristophanes speaks of honest male whores who ask their patrons for a fine horse or a pack of hounds, instead of money (157). For Aristotle, the dog is an honorable animal, since to be without one is most dishonorable (*Rh*. 1401a.20).[7] As for sheepdogs, Xenophon observes

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[4] On this, Konstantakos 2021; Pütz 2023, 40-46, 51-52.
[5] Transl. O'Neill 1938.
[6] Kitchell 2004, 179, 180; 2014, 49; 2020, 10.
[7] Transl. Freese 1926.

that when a shepherd has a good sheepdog, the other shepherds keep their flocks near his, so that they may also benefit from this dog (*Mem.* 2.9.7). Plato praises the dedication of these canines to their guarding duty, by arguing that the possibility of the gods being open to bribes is as unlikely as sheepdogs being bribed by wolves in order to allow them to ravage the flocks (*Leg.* 906d). Aristophanes mentions the large and fierce Molossian dogs guarding Athenian houses in order to keep adulterers away (*Thesm*. 416-417). In Xenophon, we find a reference to savage dogs that are tied up by day and let loose by night in order to perform their guarding duties (*An.* 5.8.24). As Plato points out, the natural disposition of dogs to be friendly with the people they know, but fierce towards strangers, makes them ideal guards (*Resp.* 375e).

Xenophon (*Cyn*. 3.9.2) calls the dog φιλάνθρωπον (*philanthropon*, loving humans); Plato believes that dogs are the gentlest of animals and possess true love of wisdom (*Soph.* 231a.6; *Resp.* 375e-376a); Aristotle describes canines as 'spirited, affectionate and fawning' (*Hist. an.* 488b.21-22) and praises them for turning away from those who sit down, never attacking them, since they respect humility (*Rh*. 1380a). The dog's unwavering loyalty and devotion is greatly admired, as is indicated by the many stories of faithful canines narrated by ancient Greek authors. Among them, we find the story of an unnamed Athenian dog that belonged to Xanthippos, the father of Perikles.[8] During the evacuation of Athens taking place under the threat of the invading Persian army in 480 BC, the loyal canine refused to stay behind without its master. Jumping into the sea, it swam all the way to the island of Salamis, which lies one nautical mile away from Piraeus, following the ship on which Xanthippos was sailing. Upon reaching the island, the dog collapsed and died of exhaustion. Moved by this display of loyalty, the Athenians buried the canine. Centuries later, in the time of Plutarch, the spot was still known as 'Kynos Sema', the dog's grave. Equally touching is the story regarding Augeas, the Molossian dog of Eupolis, the Athenian poet of Old Comedy (Ael. *NA* 10.41). When Eupolis died, his dog refused to eat and pined away in grief, dying on its master's grave. A loyal canine even appears in Athenian mythology: Maera, the female dog of the maiden Erigone, who hanged herself out of despair for

[8] Plut. *Them*. 10.10 and *Cat. Mai*. 5.4; Ael. *NA* 12.35.

the murder of her father Icarios.[9] Maera followed her mistress in death and all three of them were set among the stars by the gods. This kind of love and devotion has earned dogs a unique place in the domestic life of humans, as cherished pets and faithful companions. They are members of the household (*oikos*) and the only animals that are allowed to share the food of their masters’ tables (τραπεζῆες κύνες, *trapezees kynes*).[10]

However, one does not only find praise for dogs in the ancient texts. They are frequently accused of being gluttonous, thus resorting to food theft.[11] Let us not forget that Labes, the dog in Aristophanes’ *Wasps*, is put on trial because he stole a Sicilian cheese from the kitchen. In another of Aristophanes’ comedies, the *Acharnians*, the Chorus curses the poet Antimachos to crave a cuttle-fish that has just been cooked and served, but the moment he stretches his hand to help himself a dog runs off with it (*Ach.* 1156-1161). Even Kerberos, the formidable three-headed canine guarding the gates of Hades, is described by Aristophanes as a canine food thief who sneaks into the kitchen at night and licks the dishes (*Eq*. 1030-1034). Anyone who has ever owned a dog knows only too well that such references are not exaggerated in the slightest. Furthermore, dogs were considered to be shameless, impudent and sexually licentious.[12] As a result, the word *κύων* (*kyon*, dog) and its derivatives can be also used as insults.[13]

Sophocles and Demosthenes use the epithet *laithargos* to describe the dog as an unpredictable animal that may turn aggressive suddenly and without warning;[14] in the *Iliad*, Priam fears that his own house-dogs will devour his dead body after the fall of Troy (22.66-76). The law of Solon concerning biting dogs in Athens reflects an awareness of the dog’s nature (Plut. *Sol*. 24.3) and, as Plato reminds us, ‘the wolf is similar to the dog, the wildest like the most

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[9] Apollod. *Bibl*. 3.191-192; Ael. *NA* 6.25.6-7.
[10] Hom. *Il*. 22.69, 23.173, *Od*. 17.309; cf. Ferrari 2002, 195; Franco 2014, 23-27; 2019, 36.
[11] Aesop 134, 136, 138, 265; Ar. *Pax* 481-483, 641; Ath. 7.55.20-21; cf. Franco 2014, 28; Pevnick 2014, 158-159; Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones 2018, 180.
[12] Eust. *Il*. 2.326.7-9, 2.583.16-17; cf. Franco 2014, 9 (and notes 12-13), 80-81, 85-89; Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones 2018, 180.
[13] Hom. *Il*. 1.159, 1.225, 8.299, 8.527, 13.623; Hom. *Od*. 17.248, 22.35; cf. Franco 2014, 3, 7, 10, 75-120 and note 94.
[14] Soph. *fr*. 885; Dem. *In Aristogitonem* I 40.8.

tame of animals' (*Soph.* 231a.6). He speaks of herding dogs 'that from indiscipline or hunger or some other evil condition … shall attack the sheep and injure them and be likened to wolves instead of dogs' (*Resp.* 416a.1-7).[15] Similarly, Demosthenes refers to canines devouring the sheep they are supposed to be guarding (*In Aristogitonem* I 40.8). Euripides himself was said to have been killed by a pack of dogs in Macedonia (*Schol. Eur. Vita* 4). The fact that dogs descend from the wolf is not forgotten and there is always a certain degree of anxiety regarding the wild instincts of canines. This is partly due to the fact that they are carnivore scavengers, eaters of raw flesh (ὠμησταί, *omestai*), and as such they are known to feast on the bodies of the dead in the battlefield.[16] The cruel punishment imposed on Antigone's brother Polynices by Kreon was to remain unburied, his dead body devoured by dogs and birds of prey.[17] This horror is frequently mentioned in the *Iliad* (22.66-71, 22.74-76), but it was certainly not unknown to the Athenians of the later fifth century BC, as is indicated by Thucydides' statement about dogs either not touching the corpses of the Athenians who died from the plague or dying after tasting them (2.50).

Dogs also have a special connection to women (Franco 2014): Aeschylos likens a faithful wife to a watchdog, guarding her husband's house, always remaining loyal to him, turning against his enemies (*Ag*. 606-608, 914). Female dogs are symbols of fecundity and motherhood;[18] this becomes evident in the myth of Hecuba, who has given birth to many of Priam's children: she is a fiercely protective mother who does not hesitate to blind the murderer of her son Polydoros and is finally transformed into a female dog.[19] At the same time, the epithet κυνῶπις (*kynopis*, dog-eyed or dog-faced) is employed for shameless females, such as the murderess Clytemnestra and her adulteress sister Helen.[20] In Aeschylos, the terrible Erinyes are associated

[15] Transl. Shorey 1937.
[16] Lilja 1976, 17-19, 34-35, 54, 57-58, 60-61, 64-65, 68, 126, 127; Kitchell 2004, 177-178, 181; Franco 2014, 54-67, 69-71; Kostuch 2018, 116, 118-119, 121-123, 127-129, 135.
[17] Soph. *Ant*. 205-206, 697-698, 1016-1018, 1081, 1198.
[18] Hom. *Od*. 20.14-17; *Anth. Pal*. 7.425; cf. Pippin-Burnett 1994, 154-155, 157; Franco 2014, 108-112, 151-152.
[19] Eur. *Hec*. 1265, 1273; Pippin-Burnett 1994.
[20] Hom. *Il*. 6.344, 6.356, 18.396; *Od*. 4.145, 8.319; Aesch. *Ag*. 1228; Eur. *Andr*. 630; cf. Franco 2014, 4, 102-106, 110, 125-126, 128-129, 136, 140-142.

with the dog, since they act like hounds constantly pursuing their prey, even barking (*Eum*. 131-132).

The ancient texts present us with both positive and negative views concerning dogs. Even though the positive views—especially the dogs' undying love and devotion for humans—prevail upon the negative ones, the textual evidence regarding canines can be more accurately described as dual and ambivalent. Does the same apply to canine depictions in Athenian art? This is what we shall explore next, seeking to answer this question.

Dogs appear in more than 2,000 painted and sculpted scenes of Archaic and Classical Athenian art; nearly 400 of them are hunting scenes painted on vases. Images of the hare hunt are particularly abundant, which is not surprising, since it was the type of hunting more often practiced in ancient Greece.[21] The majority of these scenes depict hounds pursuing hares without the presence of hunters (**Fig. 1**);[22] both hounds and hares are portrayed running at full speed. Despite the popularity of the so-called 'hare and hound' scenes, Athenian males hunting hares with the help of their hounds are shown on a smaller number of vases (**Fig. 2**)[23] where they are normally depicted running behind the speeding hounds, in pursuit of the hares. Given the great speed and agility of the hare, the natural speed of the hounds made them truly valuable for the hare hunt and this is clearly indicated in the iconography. The two hunters of a black-figure lekythos by the Edinburgh Painter have not yet released their hounds.[24] One of the canines is portrayed sniffing the ground, a reminder that it is not only the swiftness of the hounds, but also their ability to track their prey with their amazing sense of smell that makes them extremely useful in hunting.

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[21] MacKinnon 2014, 205; Barringer 2001, 95-97.

[22] For examples, see Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 1971: *CVA*, Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum 1, 39-40, Pl. 48.2.5 (BAPD 12089); Oxford, Ashmolean Museum V542: *CVA*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1, 37, Pl. (137) 45.4 (BAPD 213117); Athens, Agora Museum P5330: Moore, *Agora* 30, no. 1154, pl. 109 (**Fig. 1**).

[23] Malibu, J.P. Getty Museum 87.AE.93: *CVA*, Malibu, J.P. Getty Museum 10, 57-64, fig. 13, Pls. (2115-2124) 564.1, 565.1, 567.1, 568.1-2, 569.1-3, 570.1-3, 571.1-4, 572.1-5, 573.1-7 (BAPD 44230 – **Fig. 2**); Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia 74966: Schnapp 1984, 70, fig. 101 (BAPD 5515); London, British Museum B678: Mertens 2006, 194, no. 50 (BAPD 3566).

[24] Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 194: Barringer 2001, 99, figs. 59-60 (BAPD 7480).

The second most popular type of hunting scene is the boar hunt.[25] Such scenes are more often mythological, depicting the Calydonian boar hunt.[26] The most famous example is the François vase in Florence (**Fig. 3**):[27] the boar occupies the center of the composition, surrounded by the male heroes and the single heroine, Atalante, who participated in the mythical hunt. They are accompanied by seven black and white hounds, all of them named. One hound is on the boar's back biting the beast, while another attacks the animal from the rear; on the ground beneath the boar, the corpses of a hunter and a disemboweled hound serve as reminders of Xenophon's warning regarding the perils of the boar hunt (*Cyn*. 10.21): 'Many hounds are killed in this kind of sport, and the huntsmen themselves run risks'. Regardless of whether they depict the Calydonian boar hunt or simpler, non-mythical boar hunting scenes from everyday life, these vases portray the hunters and hounds fighting side by side against the attacking boar, facing the perils of the hunt together and on several occasions, dying together.

Even though pastoral scenes are far from prominent in Athenian vase-painting, a goatherd and his two dogs are shown tending a herd of goats on a black-figure kyathos in the Louvre.[28] On a remarkable red-figure cup shaped like a cow's hoof, a young herdsman tends his cows assisted by a large dog (**Figs. 4a-b**).[29] In several vase-painting scenes depicting the Judgement of Paris, a dog accompanies the young Trojan as he tends his father's flock on Mount Ida.[30] Such images testify to the usefulness of sheepdogs whose dedication to their guarding duty was so admired by Plato.

[25] Barringer 2001, 4, 15-38, 42, 60-63, 147-161, 172-173.
[26] Apollod. *Bibl*. 1.66-71; Daltrop 1966; Schnapp 1979; *LIMC* VIII (1997), s.v. Canes, 549 (G. Berger-Doer); Barringer 2001, 147-161.
[27] Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco 4209: Shapiro, Iozzo and Lezzi-Hafter 2013 (BAPD 300000 with extensive bibliography).
[28] Paris, Louvre F69: Tonglet 2015, 211, fig. 1A-B (BAPD 301977).
[29] New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 38.11.2: Richter 1938 (BAPD 5968).
[30] For example, Copenhagen National Museum 731: Lund and Rasmussen 1995, 102 (BAPD 7928); Palermo, Museo Archeologico Regionale 1506: Moscati and Di Stefano 1991, 109, no. 125 (BAPD 217490); Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum B36: *CVA*, Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum 1, 28-29, Pls. (320-322) 22.4-5, 23.1, 24.1-5 (BAPD 220515).

In Athenian art, dogs are not shown guarding houses, but something far more important: funerary statues of large dogs were set up over graves, functioning as tomb guards. The most famous example is the majestic Molossian from the Athenian Kerameikos cemetery, one of a pair of marble canines set up as watchful guardians at the two corners of the burial precinct of Lysimachides (**Fig. 5**).[31] Regardless of their varying sizes and poses, dogs guarding tombs are depicted alert and vigilant as eternal guards of their masters' final resting places.

Hunting dogs frequently appear in scenes related to the world of masculine aristocracy, where they function as markers of aristocratic status and wealth (see p. 50). Besides images of the hunt, hounds are also shown in warrior, chariot, symposium, and gymnasium scenes. Particularly popular among the warrior scenes of Athenian vases depicting dogs are the so-called 'warrior departure' scenes.[32] On a beautiful red-figure stamnos by the Achilles Painter, the departing warrior is portrayed in full armour, bidding his father farewell.[33] His wife or mother stands behind him, holding the phiale and oinochoe for the traditional libation; a lean hound wearing a collar stands beside the hoplite. The warrior's dog will accompany him when he leaves for war. Canines did not participate in battle, but were very useful as guards for a military camp: they provided companionship for their warrior masters, thus creating a pleasant, albeit temporary diversion from the horrors of war. Another departing warrior's hound on a red-figure amphora by the Kleophrades Painter is shown sniffing the ground—presumably sniffing the liquid that is being poured on the ground as the libation is being performed.[34] A red-figure amphora attributed to the Dikaios Painter depicts a hoplite and an archer, both of them fully armed (**Fig. 6**):[35] the young hoplite is accompanied by a large hound wearing a red collar. The

[31] Kerameikos P670: Banou and Bournias 2014, 218. For other examples, see Athens, National Archaeological Museum 3574: Kaltsas 2002, 186, no. 366; Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek 2447: Poulsen 1951, no. 238b. Depictions of Molossians in Athenian funerary art are limited to funerary statues. Since these large canines were formidable guards, they were considered ideal for guarding their masters' tombs. For the possible connections between the behaviour of dogs and their function in funerary art, see Tanganelli and Masseti 2019.

[32] For warrior departure scenes, see Matheson 2005; Seifert 2014.

[33] London, British Museum E448: *CVA*, London, British Museum 3, III.Ic.9, Pl. (187) 22.3A-C (BAPD 213886).

[34] Munich, Antikensammlungen J411: *CVA*, Munich, Museum Antiker Kleinkunst 4, 17-19, Pls. (551-555, 566) 173-177, 188.7 (BAPD 201657).

[35] London, British Museum E 254: *CVA*, London, British Museum 3, III.Ic.3, Pl. (167) 2.2A-B (BAPD 200166).

dog is turned towards the warrior's father, an elderly man who is shown wiping a tear. Utterly absorbed with their final preparations before leaving for war, the warriors have not noticed the man's plight; only the canine has sensed his sorrow and is clearly affected by it. One is here inevitably reminded of Aristotle, who speaks of the affectionate and gentle nature of dogs (*Hist. an.* 488b.21-22).

Armed riders accompanied by hounds have been variously interpreted. When the horsemen are depicted wearing helmets, there is no doubt that they are warriors.[36] In the case of non-helmeted riders however, there is a controversy among scholars regarding whether they are meant to represent warriors or hunters. Such a scene decorates a black-figure white-ground hydria in the Louvre, where two hounds accompany three armed horsemen and a male figure on foot.[37] On the third example, a black-figure plate from the Athenian Kerameikos, the armed rider is identified as a hunter by the dead animals hanging from a pole carried by the male figure walking behind his horse.[38] This rider is returning home after a successful hunting expedition, accompanied by his hound. Hunting dogs appear in chariot scenes as well, albeit less frequently, but most of these scenes depict the departure of warriors (**Fig. 7**).[39] The war chariot is employed by Athenian vase-painters as a heroizing feature, since it was no longer used in warfare during the Archaic and Classical periods.[40] Whether ridden or yoked in chariots, horses were symbols of high social status and signs of wealth, for poor Athenians could not afford to buy and keep horses.[41] Consequently, the horsemen portrayed on these vases accompanied by their hounds were members of the city's elite.

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[36] For example, Tübingen, Eberhard-Karls-Universität, Archäologisches Institut D4: *CVA*, Tübingen, Antikensammlung des Archäologischen Instituts der Universität 2, 47-48, fig. 26, Pls. (2132-2133) 31.1, 32.1-2 (BAPD 300758); London, British Museum B419: *CVA*, London, British Museum 2, IIIHe.4, Pl. (69) 11.4A-B (BAPD 13250); Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano 383: BAPD 9032803.

[37] Paris, Louvre CA 4716: Mertens 2006, 201-202, no. 53 (BAPD 3018).

[38] Kerameikos Archaeological Museum 4692: Callipolitis-Feytmans 1974, Pl. 46.10 (BAPD 7905).

[39] For instance, Paris, Louvre G 41: *CVA*, Paris, Louvre 6, III.Ic.39, Pl. (430) 51.1-5 (BAPD 200182); New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 56.171.29: Mertens 2014, 135, fig. 1, pl. 16 (BAPD 302025 – **Fig. 7**); Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 41.55: *CVA*, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 2, 28, Pl. (919) 85.2-3 (BAPD 77).

[40] Matheson 1995, 271; Sinos 1998, 75-76.

[41] Pl. *Lysis* 205c; Van Wees 2002, 64; Bell and Willekes 2014, 478.

Hounds depicted in the symposium scenes of Athenian vases and banquet reliefs are normally shown beneath the *klinai* or tables (**Figs. 8a-b**).[42] They are portrayed looking at their masters in anticipation of some food, sniffing the ground searching for anything edible the symposiasts may have dropped, or happily chewing a juicy bone. As Cristiana Franco has noted, ‘the banquet is the space that both unites men and dogs and distinguishes them, by fixing a definite hierarchy’ (2014: 26). Thus, dogs and humans become dining companions, but the dogs only receive what the symposiasts decide to give them, which are often bones or other undesirable parts of the food.

Dogs are occasionally depicted in gymnasium scenes. These are not only hounds, but also Melitaeans, a famous breed of small-sized dogs that served no other function than being pets and were much loved in ancient Greece (**Fig. 9**).[43] Since they were not working dogs like the hounds, the Melitaeans were typically associated with the wealthy elite and its lifestyle of leisure. The canines of these scenes have accompanied their young masters to the gymnasium, often watching them exercise, like the hound of a red-figure krater attributed to Myson, which is shown observing the three athletes with great interest.[44] On a red-figure oinochoe by the Chicago Painter, the strigil handed by a naked youth to another nude athlete indicates that they are portrayed cleansing their bodies after exercise.[45] The alert hound standing between them seems to know that their training session is over and that they will be soon leaving the gymnasium. A red-figure hydria by the Triptolemos Painter depicts a young athlete who has just finished using the strigil and is cleaning it with his finger (**Fig. 10**).[46] The Melitaean standing before him is

[42] For examples, see Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig BS2405: *CVA*, Schweiz, Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig 10, 37-42, Pl. 27-33 (BAPD 9048339); Paris, Louvre F2: *CVA*, Paris, Louvre 3, III.He.9, Pl. (147) 10.1.4 (BAPD 10707); Athens, National Archaeological Museum 1501 (**Figs. 8a-b**) and 3872: Kaltsas 2002, 136 (no. 161) and 230 (no. 483).
[43] On the Melitaeans, see Aesop 75.1-2 and 93; Busuttil 1969; Merlen 1971, 44-45; Phillips 2002, 86, 94; Calder 2017, 68-69.
[44] Malibu, J.P. Getty Museum 86.AE.205: *CVA*, Malibu, J.Paul Getty Museum 10, 1-4, Pls. (2069-2071) 518-520 (BAPD 352504).
[45] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 13.191: Filser 2017, 385, fig. 233 (BAPD 207322).
[46] Berlin, Antikensammlung F2178: *CVA*, Berlin, Antikensammlung 9, 24-26, fig. 6, Pls. (3697, 3746) 7.1-3, 56.6 (BAPD 203815).

shown sniffing the ground, probably attracted by the smell of the *gloios*, the mixture of sweat, oil and dirt the athlete has scraped off his skin using the strigil.[47] The *gloios* cleaned off the strigil has landed on the ground, where it was instantly detected by the canine's powerful sense of smell.

The presence of canines in (mostly pederastic) courtship scenes has been variously interpreted (**Fig. 11**).[48] Scholars have suggested that it constitutes a reference to courtship as a metaphorical hunt (with the roles of hunter and hunted often becoming interchangeable), noted the association between hunting, pederasty, warfare, athletics and the symposium, pointed out that the dogs may be erotic gifts offered by the *erastai* to their *eromenoi*, and proposed that the former became role models for the latter, educating them in the art of hunting and the lifestyle of Athenian aristocracy.[49]

Above all, however, Athenian art depicts the special relationship, companionship and affection between humans and dogs. Images from the world of children decorate the small red-figured choes associated with the Anthesteria.[50] Plenty of these miniature vases portray boys and girls happily playing and interacting with their pet Melitaeans.[51] A chous from the Athenian Agora deserves special mention, as it shows a young naked boy crawling on the ground, tenderly kissing the nose of his white Melitaean (**Fig. 12**).[52] This is undoubtedly the most charming depiction of the loving relationship between a child and his dog in Athenian art. On another delightful scene decorating a chous in Erlangen, a Melitaean wearing a collar accompanies a

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[47] On the *gloios*, see Potter 2012, 135-136; Pevnick 2014, 160-161.
[48] For examples, see Rhodes, Archaeological Museum 1350: CVA, Rodi, Museo Archeologico Dello Spedale Dei Cavalieri 1, III.H.E.7, Pl. (445) 13.5 (BAPD 1350); Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia: *CVA*, Firenze, Regio Museo Archeologico 1, III.I.15, Pl. (387) 12.16 (BAPD 203960 – **Fig. 11)**; Boulogne, Musée Communale 134: Koch-Harnack 1983, 109, fig. 44 (BAPD 203021).
[49] For various theories on the subject, see Koch-Harnack 1983, 90-97; Schnapp 1989 and 1997; Barringer 2001, 70-73, 85, 88-89, 104-111, 116-117, 119-124; Lear and Cantarella 2008, 72, 105, 189-193; Haworth 2018.
[50] For the choes, see Van Hoorn 1951; Rühfel 1984; Hamilton 1992. On the Anthesteria, see *Suda* 370; Van Hoorn 1951; Burkert 1983, 213-247; Hamilton 1992, 1-62; Robertson 1993; Parker 2005, 290-316.
[51] For example, Athens, National Archaeological Museum 1322: Kaltsas and Shapiro 2008, 306, no. 135 (BAPD 4188); Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig BS1941.122: *CVA*, Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig 3, 68, Pls. (354, 356) 42.5-6, 44.3 (BAPD 16283); Athens, Third Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities A15272: Parlama and Stampolidis 2000, 356, no. 389 (BAPD 9024922).
[52] Athens, Agora Museum P20090: Moore, *Agora* 30, no. 375, pl. 77 (BAPD 16255).

mother and her young boy, observing with fascination the child's attempt to reach a bunch of grapes.[53] Pet Melitaeans like this one were beloved companions of males and females, children and adults, alike. A woman feeding her pet dog appears on a red-figure lekythos by the Providence Painter:[54] the small Melitaean is raised on its hind legs, as dogs often do when they are trying to reach something. This is a timeless image, the kind of interaction between dogs and humans we still see nowadays. A similar scene decorates the tondo of a red-figure cup by the Brygos Painter, only in this case a youth is shown instead of a woman.[55] On the famous Vatican amphora by Exekias depicting the return of the Dioskouroi, Pollux is being welcomed by his hound (**Fig. 13**).[56] The dog jumps at him full of enthusiasm and joy in the familiar manner of canines greeting their humans upon returning home. Xenophon speaks of hounds that abandon the pursuit of their prey and go back because of their love and devotion to their masters (*Cyn*. 3.9.1-2). As Kenneth Kitchell has pointed out, a hound kept at home served two roles: it was employed in hunting, but inevitably became a pet as well, providing companionship and affection (2014: 53). The loving bond between Pollux and his dog is obvious; not only in the canine's excited behavior, but also through the intimacy the two of them share in the painted scene.

The special bond between humans and dogs becomes particularly evident on the funerary reliefs that marked the graves of Athenian males and females of all ages, preserving their memory through time.[57] Grave stelai commemorating prematurely lost children depict girls and boys with their toys and beloved pets, happily playing with their Melitaeans, usually by lowering their hand holding a bird towards the small canines that are trying to reach it (**Fig. 14**).[58] Such scenes

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[53] Erlangen, Friedrich-Alexander Universität I 321: Lewis 2002, fig. 4.18 (BAPD 10227).
[54] Rome, Accademia di Lincei 2478: Oakley 2020, 16, fig. 1.10 (BAPD 207462).
[55] Brussels, Musées Royaux R 350: *CVA*, Brussels, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Cinquantenaire) 1, III.I.C.2, Pl. (031) 4.4 (BAPD 3997).
[56] Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano 344: Mackay 2010, pls. 77-78, colour plate I (BAPD 310395).
[57] See also, Woysch-Méautis 1982, 53-60; Zlotogorska 1997.
[58] For example, Harvard, Art Museums (A.M. Sackler Museum) 1961.86: CAT 0.915; Athens, National Archaeological Museum 3661: CAT 0.871; Palermo, National Museum N.I. 1545: CAT 0.873a; Athens, National Archaeological Museum 1980: CAT 0.870 (**Fig. 14**).

are reminiscent of the joyful carefree times of their brief lives shared with their furry friends, thus placing special emphasis on the tragedy of their early death.[59] On the grave stele once marking the tomb of a dead woman, the deceased is portrayed seated, involved in wool-working.[60] Her servant-maid standing before her holding a *pyxis* is shown with one hand raised to her face in a gesture of grief, mourning the death of her mistress. The woman's child, a toddler, is depicted seated on the ground before his mother, tenderly holding the front paws of a small Melitaean. Utterly oblivious of his mother's death, the child is absorbed in his game with the dog—a detail that is both charming and sad, but also indicative of how much children in antiquity, as today, enjoyed the company of their canine friends. In fact, if it was not for the mourning servant-maid, the scene could very well pass for a peaceful image of everyday domestic life in the *gynaikonitis* of an Athenian household.

Children are not the only ones who are portrayed playing with their pet dogs on funerary reliefs. The handsome youth and maiden of two grave stelai in Paris are shown engaged in the same kind of game we have seen on children's stelai, teasing their Melitaeans with the birds they hold.[61] The cleansing utensils (strigil and aryballos) hanging from the youth's wrist mark him as an athlete, but it is his interaction with the small canine that becomes the focus of the scene. The deceased of another stele, an unnamed youth, is depicted extending one hand towards his pet Melitaean that jumps playfully at him.[62] During the fourth century BC, boys, girls, maidens and youths are frequently portrayed playing with their pet dogs on the funerary reliefs marking their graves (**Figs. 15a-b**).[63] Such images emphasize their youthfulness and untimely death, at the same time revealing the important position their pet dogs held in their young lives. Noteworthy is the presence of dogs in family scenes. The grave stele of young Eukoline from the Kerameikos

[59] Margariti 2018a, 32, 35-36, 38, 41.
[60] Berlin, Staatliche Museum 761: CAT 1.894.
[61] Paris, Louvre Ma 807: CAT 1.278 (youth); Paris, Rodin Museum 32: CAT 1.428 (maiden). For the latter, see Margariti 2018b, 119-120 (and cat. no. 43).
[62] Paris, Louvre Ma 807: CAT 1.278.
[63] Margariti 2018b, 120 and note 181.

is a perfect example (**Figs. 16a-b**):[64] the young maiden is accompanied by members of her family; her mother who tenderly caresses the deceased girl's arm and cheek, her mourning father and grandmother in the background. Even though Eukoline is holding a bird in her raised right hand, she is not shown playing with the small Melitaean visible at her feet. Her pet dog has raised itself on its hind legs, placing its front paws on the maiden's legs, trying in vain to attract her attention. Eukoline is here surrounded by the loving members of her *oikos*, both human and canine, all of them grieving for her premature death.

The grave stele of Korallion, wife of Agathon, from the Athenian Kerameikos cemetery depicts the seated dead woman shaking hands with her husband in the presence of two family members (**Figs. 17a-b**).[65] At first, one hardly notices the small Melitaean shown beside the deceased's legs, turning its head to look at its mistress. The stele is already fairly crowded, since the seated figure of Korallion occupies nearly half of it. And yet, the sculptor did not omit the beloved pet dog of the deceased, finding a way to portray it in the very limited free space beside her feet. A grave stele in Athens depicts the deceased female in the company of her Melitaean (**Fig. 18**).[66] She is shown seated, looking at the small canine standing before her with a smile on her face. As we have already mentioned, these small dogs were normally associated with the wealthy elite who could afford to keep pets. The presence of Melitaeans on funerary reliefs is therefore indicative of the deceased persons' social status, but at the same time we cannot ignore the evident connection between human and canine, the companionship and affection they share with one another. Similarly, the hounds accompanying male figures on funerary reliefs function as symbols of the hunt and markers of high social status, since hunting is a favorite activity of the Athenian elite,[67] but they are also faithful companions of the deceased males. Thus, a youth named Aristeides is portrayed holding a bird and accompanied by his hound, which is shown

[64] Kerameikos Archaeological Museum P 694 / I 281: CAT 4.420.
[65] Kerameikos Archaeological Museum P 688: CAT 4.415.
[66] Athens, National Archaeological Museum 882: CAT 1.190.
[67] Rawlings 2011 (esp. 150-153); MacKinnon 2014, 205.

standing beside its young master, turning its head to look at the bird.[68] An unfortunately damaged grave stele preserves a standing young man holding a strigil that marks him as an athlete in one lowered hand and a bird in the other.[69] His hound stands next to him, fully focused on the bird. One is here reminded of the children teasing their pet Melitaeans with the birds they hold. A marble funerary lekythos bearing a family scene depicts a hound accompanying the young brother of the deceased maiden.[70] The boy extends his hand towards his dog, but it is not clear whether he is holding a bird or not. Regardless of this, the playful mood between the two is undeniable. The hound's presence in this scene is of course a sign of the family's social status, but the bond between the boy and his dog is equally obvious. On another marble funerary lekythos, two bearded men are shaking hands and a hound is portrayed raised on its hind legs behind the standing male figure (**Fig. 19**)[71]. The dog is about to jump at the man in the loving and playful way of canines greeting their humans. The mere presence of the hound is indicative of the man's social position, but the manner in which the sculptor has chosen to depict the dog reveals the relationship between human and canine.

Finally, the grave stele of Eutamia in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens (**Figs. 20a-b**)[72] portrays the deceased woman seated, accompanied by a servant-maid holding a bird and what looks like a bird-cage. On top of the stele, below the name inscription and over the sculpted scene, a female hound is carved standing in profile to the right. Remarkably, the deceased's name, Eutamia, means 'good housewife'; since, as it has already been mentioned, a good wife and mother is likened to a female dog in the ancient texts, the female hound's presence on this funerary relief is an obvious symbol of Eutamia's loyalty and dedication to her *oikos*, as a good housewife.

[68] Geneva, Ortiz Coll.: CAT 1.227.
[69] Chalkis, Archaeological Museum 4758: CAT 1.348.
[70] Malibu, G.P. Getty Museum 73.AA.132.1: CAT 3.876.
[71] Athens, National Archaeological Museum 1071: CAT 2.411a.
[72] Athens, National Archaeological Museum 911: CAT 1.692.

All the images we have seen so far depict dogs in a very positive light. They are shown hunting, guarding, being pets or status symbols, providing companionship and affection for humans. What about the negative aspects we find in the ancient texts? Do they also appear in Athenian art?

The ancient authors may be frequently referring to canines being gluttonous and resorting to food theft, but there are no actual depictions of such behaviour in art. Dogs are only occasionally portrayed with a bone in their mouths, chewing bones or eating pieces of meat, often in symposium scenes.[73] It is clear that these were offered to them by humans and there is no indication whatsoever that they may have been stolen by the dogs. To the extent of my knowledge, there is not a single depiction of a dog stealing food or attempting to do so in Athenian art. A black-figure olpe in Heidelberg showing two men butchering meat in the presence of two dogs, one of which is portrayed lying on the ground eating a piece of meat, has been interpreted by some scholars as depicting a dog that has just stolen some food.[74] However, there is no iconographical evidence suggesting that the dog has stolen the meat and is not just eating a piece that happened to fall on the ground by accident. Nor can we exclude the possibility that the men may have been tossing any undesirable pieces of meat such as fat or bone to the dogs, since they were useless to them.

This brings us to the canine love of raw meat, the fear of dogs suddenly turning wild and attacking humans, the corpse-eating canines and the references to the dog as *laithargos*, unpredictable.[75] There are no depictions of dogs eating corpses in Athenian art and I am not aware of any in ancient Greek art. This kind of horror was never described by ancient authors and it is not surprising that it was never shown in art, either. As a rule, wild or aggressive dogs do

[73] For example, Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 86332: *CVA*, Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 5, 34-35, fig. 11, Pls. (3132-3133) 45.1-2, 46.1-3 (BAPD 303004); Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional L65: *CVA*, Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional 1, IIIHE.8, PLS. (39-40) 21.3A-B, 22.1-2 (BAPD 305509); Zurich, University: BAPD 330144; Dunedin, Otago Museum E48.226: *CVA*, New Zealand, New Zealand Collections 1, 13, Pl. 17 (BAPD 302889).

[74] Heidelberg, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität 253: *CVA*, Heidelberg, Universität 1: 64, Pl. (473) 39.3 (BAPD 10598). See Mitchell 2009, 57-58.

[75] *Supra* pp. 52-53 and note 14.

not appear in non-mythological scenes. Unique is the case of a red-figure chous portraying a youth and an animal that looks like a large dog, having grabbed the youth's mantle with its teeth.[76] It has been suggested that the dog is perhaps attacking the youth or even that it is not a dog, but one of the *Keres*, the spirits or souls wandering around the city during the Anthesteria, the Athenian festival with which vases like this one were associated.[77] Of course, if the creature shown on this chous is one of the *Keres*, then we are not really talking about an actual dog. We have already seen several miniature choes depicting children happily playing with their pet dogs. Thus, another possible interpretation of this unusual scene is perhaps that of a dog tugging the mantle of his young master in a playful manner. As anyone who has experience with dogs knows, most canines enjoy playing tug, but they can quickly and easily get overexcited. Clearly, we can only speculate on what the artist intended to show when painting the vase, but even if we consider this image to be a depiction of an aggressive dog attacking a youth, it still is one scene among over 1,400 images of non-aggressive, friendly dogs accompanying humans in Athenian art.

Images of aggressive dogs in mythological scenes are typical for depictions of Aktaion on Athenian vases (**Fig. 21**). According to the well-known myth, the young Theban hunter was transformed into a stag by Artemis, as a punishment for the fact that he had seen her naked taking her bath or because he had boasted that he was more skilled in the hunt than the goddess.[78] Aktaion was killed by his very own hounds that instantly attacked the stag tearing it apart, no longer able to recognize their master. The iconography of the myth in Athenian vase-painting is fairly standardized: the hero is shown attacked and bitten by his hounds, always in the presence of Artemis.[79] Even though he is normally portrayed in human form, some vase-painters chose to

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[76] Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale Tarquiniese RC7461: Van Hoorn 1951, no. 949, fig. 27 (BAPD 15903).

[77] Van Hoorn 1951, 21-22 and 1953, 107; Beaumont 2015, 80. For the Keres, see Garthwaite 2010. On the Anthesteria, see note 50.

[78] Eur. *Bacch*. 337-340, 1291; Apollod. *Bibl*. 3.30-32.

[79] For examples, see Athens, National Archaeological Museum 882: *CVA*, Athens, National Museum 6, 113-114, Pl. (850) 67.1-5 (BAPD 305378); Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 10.185: Barringer 2001, fig. 133, fig. 74 (BAPD 206276); Paris, Louvre G 224: *CVA*, Paris, Louvre 6, III.IC.33-34, Pls. (421-423) 42.9, 43.3-5, 44.3.8.10 (BAPD 202576).

partly depict his transformation into a stag. On three red-figure vases, a calyx krater fragment and two bell kraters, the young man has sprouted a pair of antlers, as well as pointy ears (**Fig. 22**).[80] A red-figure neck-amphora in Hamburg portrays a different stage of the transformation: there are no antlers, but Aktaion is partly covered with a dappled deer skin which includes the head and legs of the animal.[81] The presence of Artemis serves as a reminder that it was the punishment of the goddess that led to Aktaion’s death and the vases showing the hunter’s transformation emphasize the fact that he would have never been attacked by his own hounds, had he not been transformed into a stag. In that respect, it is important to take a closer look at the red-figure bell krater by the Lykaon Painter (**Fig. 22**), as besides depicting Artemis transforming Aktaion into a deer, the painter has also provided another reason for the hounds’ attack against their master: a strange female figure shown in close proximity to Aktaion is portrayed with a small canine head on top of her human head (**Fig. 23**). The name inscription ‘LYSA’ above the canine head allows for the identification of this unusual figure as a personification of rabies. Clearly, the Lykaon Painter wished to provide an additional explanation for the behavior of the hounds, attributing their lethal attack to canine madness caused by disease.[82] The admiration for canine loyalty and love that is revealed in the ancient texts, obviously made the idea of dogs attacking and ripping their own master apart particularly unpleasant and difficult to accept, even in the world of Greek myths where virtually anything can happen. This is reflected in Athenian depictions of the myth, reminding the viewer that it was the punishment of the goddess or even rabies that led to Aktaion’s horrific death, since the notion of a canine willingly attacking its own master seems unthinkable in the post-Homeric times.

[80] Oxford, Ashmolean Museum V 289: *CVA*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1, 22, Pl. (117) 25.6 (BAPD 213566); Atlanta, Emory University, Michael C. Carlos Museum 2000.6.1: *LIMC* II (1984), s.v. Artemis, no. 1398, pl. 561 (BAPD 15540); Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 00.346: Barringer 2001, 136, fig. 76 (BAPD 213562 – **Fig. 22**).
[81] Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe 1966.34: *LIMC* I (1981), s.v. Aktaion, no. 27, pl. 350 (BAPD 352495). Cf. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, Acropolis Collection 2.760: Digital *LIMC* no. 29973 (BAPD 206295).
[82] A similar explanation is put forth by Pausanias (9.2.4.1-2).

An exceptional scene decorating a red-figure cup by the Triptolemos Painter depicts the training of a hound on the exterior.[83] A youth is teaching his hound to give paw, while another young male is watching them with interest. The hound is portrayed obediently performing the timeless trick, which is still part of modern canine training—a simple google search can prove its popularity. One would think all is fine with this well-trained dog, but the pair appears again in the cup's interior and this time we are presented with an entirely different image: the hound is actually shown biting the youth, while at the same time defecating! And even though a biting dog is no joke, the fact that it is defecating clearly indicates that this is a humorous situation. After all, this is a drinking cup that would have been used in the symposium and when the wine was drained from the cup, the image of the unruly hound would appear. In the jovial atmosphere of the symposium, this unique scene would have seemed more entertaining than threatening.

A black-figure pelike in Florence depicts the interior of an oil merchant's shop (**Fig. 24**).[84] An array of vases is visible on the ground, consisting of a large pelike flanked by four lekythoi. Two hounds are shown fighting near the vases, having broken the foot of one lekythos and knocked over a second one. Their master is shouting and threatening them with a stick, trying to stop the dogfight before any more damage occurs to his merchandise. Fighting is a natural canine behaviour that occurs fairly often for a number of reasons. These dogs cannot be truly described as aggressive. They present no threat to the merchant or any other human. As a matter of fact, it is the man who is brandishing a stick in a menacing manner. The scene is clearly humorous and there is nothing in it to indicate a fear for the wild and unpredictable nature of dogs.

According to the ancient texts, dogs were also considered shameless, impudent and sexually licentious. The only example of a sexually licentious canine in Athenian art I am aware of is a very unusual scene of a dog and a man in an erotic position incised on a black-glaze stand from

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[83] Former Hunt Collection 11: Pevnick 2014, 155-156, 162, figs. 1-3, pl.21C (BAPD 8843). The vase is unprovenanced and linked to the Geneva Seizure of 1995: *Archaeology* Online features, September 2998. https://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/geneva/ (last accessed on 29.03.2024).
[84] Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco 72732: Oakley 2020, 63, figs. 2.18A-B (BAPD 9458).

the Athenian Agora, discovered during the excavations of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.[85] This is a unique and extraordinary depiction, since not even mating canines are being shown in Athenian sculpture and vase-painting. As for the shameless behaviour and impudence of which dogs are accused by ancient authors, the only artistic depictions that come to mind are three vases depicting defecating canines. One of them we have already seen, the Triptolemos Painter cup with the biting defecating canine. The second one, a black-figure cup attributed to the Amasis Painter, portrays two naked bearded revelers lying on their backs, masturbating.[86] A defecating dog is shown beneath each handle. Clearly, it is not the canines that would be labeled as 'shameless' or 'sexually licentious' in this particular scene. The third vase, a black-figure droop cup in Athens, is decorated with a very lively symposium scene on each side.[87] Three dogs appear on this cup, but only one of them is depicted defecating under the handle. Once again, the image is humorous and certainly not unsuitable for the liberated atmosphere of the symposium. Finally, there are no depictions of female dogs associated with Clytemnestra, Helen or other shameless female figures in Athenian art.

In conclusion, the duality of ancient views concerning canines is only observed in the texts. Ancient authors praise the usefulness, value, intelligence, good nature, and above all the undying loyalty of dogs and the powerful love they feel for their masters. At the same time, they accuse canines of being gluttonous and prone to food theft, shameless, impudent, sexually licentious, unpredictable and even potentially dangerous. Female dogs are models of motherhood and fertility symbols, but also associated with some of the most notorious females of Greek mythology. However, the positive canine aspects prevail upon the negative ones in the ancient texts. Athenian sculpture and vase-painting of the Archaic and Classical periods only depict positive images of dogs and their relationship with humans. The very small number of scenes

[85] Athens, Agora Museum P 27698: Lang, *Agora* 21, nos. C 15, M 9, pp. 13, 94, pls. 4, 61.
[86] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 10.651: *CVA*, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 2, 43-44, Pls. (934-935) 100.5, 101.1-4 (BAPD 310515).
[87] Athens, National Archaeological Museum 359: *CVA*, Athènes, Musée National 3, 5051, Pls. (138-139) 40-41 (BAPD 43016).

showing aggressive or defecating dogs are either mythological or humorous. Canines are therefore portrayed as valuable collaborators in hunting and herding animals, tomb guards, symbols of high status and wealth, cherished pets, faithful and devoted companions for males and females of all ages. The examination of textual and iconographical evidence reveals that the Athenians of that time were well aware of the negative canine traits that might occasionally prove disruptive to the symbiosis between humans and dogs, but considered the advantages of keeping dogs to greatly outweigh any difficulties presented by the animal's natural instincts. The many stories praising canine loyalty narrated by ancient authors and the very large number of scenes portraying dogs faithfully accompanying humans in so many aspects of their everyday life indicate that the affectionate relationship dogs are capable of forging with humans played an important role in the way the ancient Athenians viewed and depicted them.

Appendix

Fig. 1 - Attic red-figure askos, ca. 430 BC. Athens, Agora Museum P5330. Photo and copyright: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Agora Excavations (http://www.agathe.gr).

Fig. 2: Detail of Attic red-figure volute krater, ca. 390-380 BC. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California, 87.AE.93 Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content Program.

Fig. 3: Attic black-figure volute krater (Francois vase), ca. 570-560 BC. Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco 4209. Photo: courtesy of the National Archaeological Museum of Florence (Regional Directorate of Tuscany Museums). Image reproduction is strictly prohibited.

Fig. 4a: Attic red-figure vase shaped like a cow's hoof, ca. 470-460 BC. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Fletcher Fund, 1938), inv. no. 38.11.2. Photo: www.metmuseum.org.

Fig. 4b: Detail of Attic red-figure vase shaped like a cow's hoof, ca. 470-460 BC. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Fletcher Fund, 1938), inv. no. 38.11.2. Photo: www.metmuseum.org.

Fig. 5: Funerary statue of a Molossian from the Kerameikos cemetery, second half of the 4th cent. BC. Kerameikos Archaeological Museum P670. Photo: Ephorate of the Antiquities of the City of Athens, Ministry of Culture.

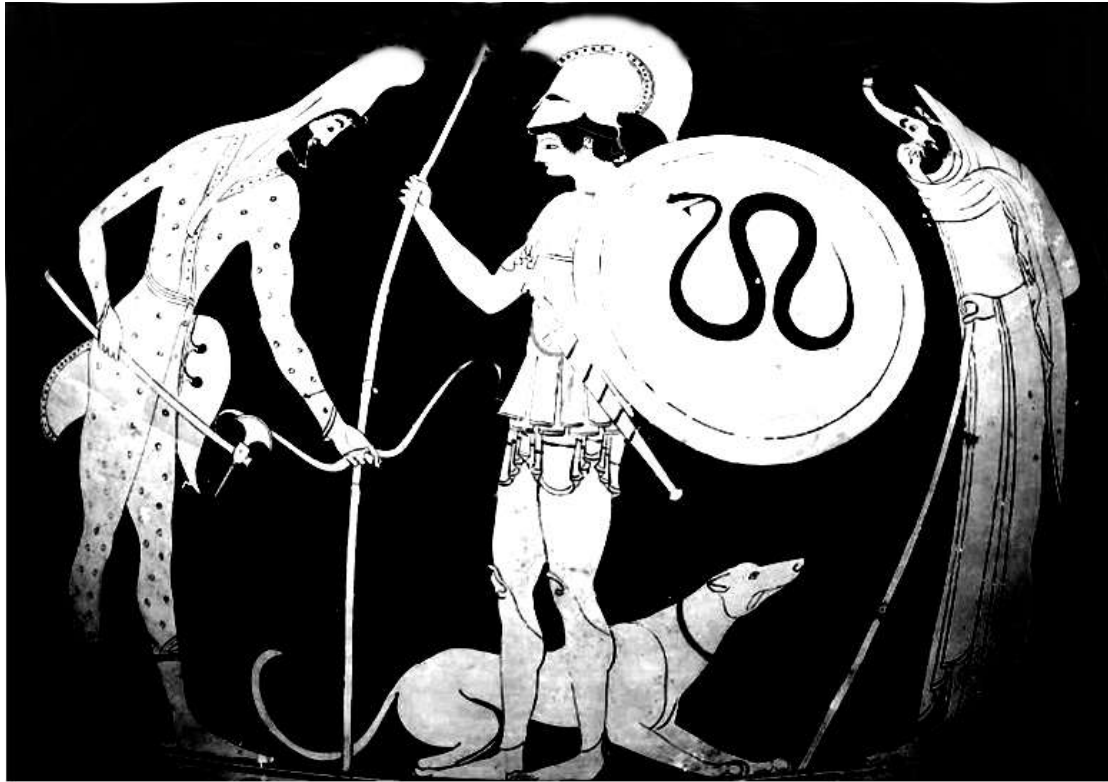

Fig. 6: Attic red-figure amphora, ca. 510-500 BC. London, British Museum E448. Sketch: Katia Margariti.

Fig. 7: Attic black-figure hydria, ca. 510 BC. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Fletcher Fund, 1956), inv. no. 56.171.29. Photo: www.metmuseum.org.

Fig. 8a: Banquet relief, late 5th cent. BC. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 1501. MINISTRY OF CULTURE - © NATIONAL ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM (photo: Kostas Xenikakis).

Fig. 8b: Detail of banquet relief, late 5th cent. BC. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 1501. MINISTRY OF CULTURE - © NATIONAL ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM (photo: Kostas Xenikakis).

Fig. 9: Melitaean. Detail from Attic grave stele, second half of the 4th cent. BC. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 3249. MINISTRY OF CULTURE - © NATIONAL ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM (photo: Katia Margariti).

Fig. 10: Attic red-figure hydria, ca. 480 BC. Berlin, Antikensammlung F2178. Sketch: Katia Margariti.

Fig. 11: Attic red-figure cup, 500-450 BC. Rome, Mus. Naz. Etrusco di Villa Giulia (BAPD 203960). Drawing after Gerhard, E. (1858), *Auserlesene Griechische Vasenbilder*: *hauptsächlich Etruskischen Fundorts*, Vol. 4, Berlin.

Fig. 12: Attic red-figure chous, end of 5th cent. BC. Athens, Agora Museum P 20090. Photo and copyright: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Agora Excavations (http://www.agathe.gr).

Fig. 13: Attic black-figure amphora, ca. 540-530 BC. Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano 344. Drawing after Furtwängler, A. and K. Reichhold (1932), *Griechische Vasenmalerei*, Munich.

Fig. 14: Attic grave stele of Pamphilos, 375-350 BC. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 1980. MINISTRY OF CULTURE - © NATIONAL ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM (photo: Dimitrios Gialouris).

Figs. 15a-b: Attic grave stele of a young girl, 'Melisto', 350-320 B.C. Cambridge (MA), Harvard University, Sackler Art Museum 1961.86. Photo: Harvard Art Museums / Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Alpheus Hyatt Purchasing and Gifts for Special Uses Funds in memory of Katherine Brewster Taylor, as a tribute to her many years at the Fogg Museum, Photo © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Detail of Attic grave stele of a young girl, 'Melisto' (above).

Figs. 16a-b: Attic grave stele of Eukoline, second half of the 4th cent BC. Kerameikos Archaeological Museum P 694 / I 281. Photo: Ephorate of the Antiquities of the City of Athens, Ministry of Culture.

Detail of Attic grave stele of Eukoline

Figs. 17a-b: Attic grave stele of Korallion, third quarter of the 4th cent. BC. Kerameikos Archaeological Museum P 688. Photo: Ephorate of the Antiquities of the City of Athens, Ministry of Culture.

Detail of Attic grave stele of Korallion

Fig. 18: Attic grave stele of a woman, 420-400 BC. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 882. MINISTRY OF CULTURE - © NATIONAL ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM (photo: Tasos Vrettos).

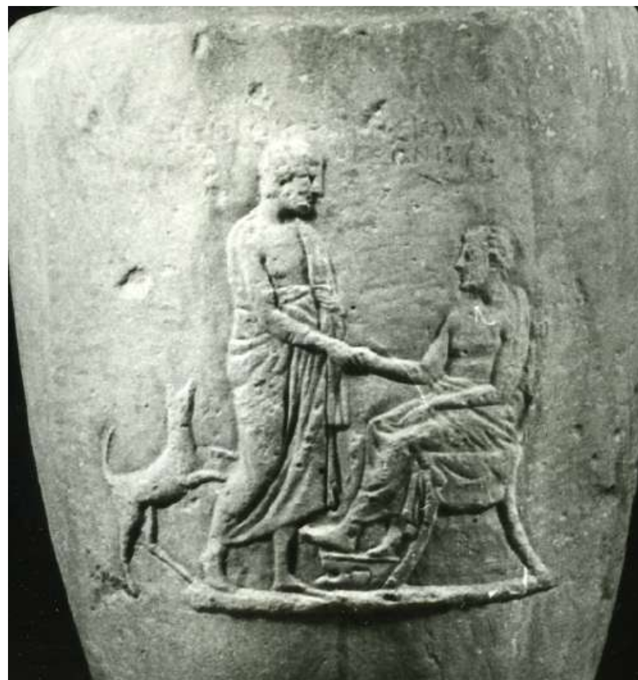

Fig. 19: Attic marble lekythos, second half of the 4th cent. BC. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 1071. MINISTRY OF CULTURE - © NATIONAL ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM.

Figs. 20a-b: Attic grave stele of Eutamia, 420-400 BC. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 911. Photo: National Archaeological Museum. MINISTRY OF CULTURE - © NATIONAL ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM (photo: Tasos Vrettos).

Detail of Attic grave stele of Eutamia

Fig. 21: Attic black-figure lekythos, 525-475 BC. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 883. MINISTRY OF CULTURE - © NATIONAL ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM (photo: Kostas Xenikakis).

Fig. 22: Attic red-figure bell krater, ca. 440 BC. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 00.346. Sketch: Katia Margariti.

Fig. 23: Detail of Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 00.346 (Fig. 21). Sketch: Katia Margariti.

Fig. 24: Attic black-figure pelike, ca. 520-500 BC. Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco 72732. Sketch: Katia Margariti.

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The Fast and the Furious: Rome's Global Horse Racing Industry

By Jordon Houston

Abstract

Chariot racing was Rome's oldest recorded form of public entertainment, with the earliest games supposedly taking place in celebration of the first Roman victory over the Latins during the reign of King Tarquinius Priscus. As Rome's empire spread during the Imperial period so did the hosting and popularity of chariot racing in its provinces. To support the hosting of these games a truly global infrastructure had to be created, both breeding and training horses to be raced locally and at the Circus Maximus in Rome. This paper will present and discuss the evidence concerning chariot racing's infrastructure outside of Rome with the intention of illustrating that the industry of training and breeding racehorses permeated all corners of Rome's empire. It will demonstrate that Rome's coloured factions relied heavily on breeders from the provinces to source the best racing animals. From Spain to North Africa and Asia Minor there is evidence to suggest that local breeders not only provided for regional circuses but also traded with coloured factions both in the provinces and those at Rome. By combining the ancient epigraphic, papyri, literary, and artistic evidence along with modern globalisation theories it is possible to begin building a picture of what was a truly global horse industry to facilitate one of Rome's most popular sports.

Horse racing remains one of the oldest recorded sports in human history. Chariot racing in the Roman world is no exception to this with it being one of the original and most popular sports in the city (Bell 2022, 29). As Rome's empire spread during the Imperial period, so did the hosting and popularity of Roman-style chariot racing in its provinces. To support the hosting of these games, a truly global infrastructure had to be created to facilitate the provision of racehorses for the Circus Maximus in Rome and at local venues across the empire's many

provinces. This article draws upon globalisation and its related theory, glocalisation, to approach this topic in a new way. These theories can help to better understand how Rome's insatiable need for fast racehorses not only established a global network for producing these animals but also created local trends in the provinces. Since the 2000s, globalisation theory has been applied frequently to better understand Rome's sprawling and diverse economic activities, regarding especially trade, mass production and consumption, religion, and the general mobility of people in the ancient world (Pitts and Versluys 2015; Geraghty 2007; van Alten 2017; Whitmarsh 2010; Witcher 2016; Woolf 2021). The idea of globalising Roman entertainment has been largely absent from scholarly discussion. Recent attempts have been made to interpret chariot racing through a globalised lens (e.g., Montoya González 2020 and Vamplew 2022),[1] yet these works are typically smaller in scope or are an exploratory attempt at applying globalisation to the sport. However, globalisation allows for a better understanding of the connections between Rome's empire-wide economic activity for chariot racing and provincial trends concerning the sport. By analysing the organisation of entertainment in the wider Roman empire it is possible to demonstrate that Rome's globalising forces created a homogenisation in the popularity of specific sports based on where Rome imported resources for their own games.

Globalisation and Globalising the Ancient World

At its most basic definition, globalisation is a theory that examines the emergence of global cultural systems. Most commonly, globalisation is associated with its economic effects, specifically the economic integration and developments that have culminated in the highly interconnected financial markets seen today. However, the effects of globalisation have also been studied extensively by sociologists and have much wider implications than the economic situation. Sociologists interpret globalisation as creating an interconnectedness and interdependence between geographic areas, artificially generating political units (Dobratz,

[1] Thuillier 2016 includes 'mondialisation' in his discussion on the commercialisation of the sport but does not approach the subject in any further depth.

Waldner and Buzzell 2012, 344). Therefore, globalisation should be interpreted as an effect that has impacts on the cultural, social, political, and demographic facets of society on top of its economic effects. Globalisation processes have led to the creation of glocalisation, which is defined as a process that results in the provision of locally specific goods and services and communicates locally specific information back to the global system (Scott 2014; Khondker 2005, 184; Robertson 1995, 28). Roudometof (2016, 399) likens this process to light passing through a prism where refraction breaks the light into the entire colour spectrum. Similarly, glocalisation can be perceived as the process in which cultural practices are fed into a wide array of localities and result in the creation of several distinct interpretations or uses of the original practice.

This leads to the question of how theories like globalisation and glocalisation should be applied to the ancient Mediterranean world. In "Globalisation, Consumption, and Objects in the Roman World: New Perspectives and Opportunities", Martin Pitts outlines five points of things to consider when applying globalisation to the Roman empire with five reasons why globalisation is more than "just 'good to think with'":

1. Globalisation fosters a shift away from methodological nationalism and 'container thinking' about the Roman Empire.

2. Globalisation de-centres Rome in favour of a more complex polycentric conceptualisation of the Roman world, and its flow of people, ideas, and objects.

3. Globalisation shifts the focus back to the bigger-picture phenomena, that crucially consist of networks of localities connected by the flow of objects, styles, commodities, people, and ideas.

4. Globalisation does not assume the existence of any *a priori* structures that may act to constrain interpretation from the outset; rather, it allows for the identification and agency of pan-regional networks that may have originated independently from the Roman state.

5. Globalisation puts objects at the very forefront of historical inquiry, as it is only through the movement of objects, styles, and materials that globalisation can be reliably and consistently

investigated throughout the connected localities that make up the Roman Empire (Pitts 2020, 158).

Therefore, globalisation provides a perspective of the ancient world that looks more at how localities interacted with Roman culture and how this process differed across the empire to create new identities (Gardner 2013, 7). However, this process needs to be treated with caution, as with the application of any modern theory to an ancient context. It is important to recognise that Roman economic and political systems were different from what we have today. Globalisation and glocalisation need to be adapted when applied to an ancient context. It is first important to strip away the aspects that make the theory 'modern' while maintaining its core ideas, which focus on how different cultures interact with each other and how these cultures adapt features from one another to best suit their needs.

Rome's Wide Reach for Racehorses

The global reach for horses and charioteers is one way of testing theories of globalisation, and it is best demonstrated by the evidence found in Rome. The city's commercialisation of chariot racing created an industry in which a wide reach for horses and charioteers was required to fulfil the insatiable desire for these games (Vamplew 2022; Thuillier 2016). While chariot racing can be dated back to Rome's early days, the concept of the primary organisational entity of the city, the coloured factions, does not appear to have come into existence until the financial stresses of the Second Punic War.[2] This led to the privatisation of the provision of racehorses for *ludi* in 214 BC (Livy, 24.18.10-11; Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, 9.5). Once established, the factions garnered significant popularity in the city with both the plebian and patrician classes, as evidenced by the early references to them. Pliny notes that a passionate supporter threw themself onto the funeral pyre of a Red charioteer named Felix in the 70s BC, while rivals at the time

[2] While evidence for the factions does not appear until the first century BC and they do not appear to have been fully integrated until the first century AD, Decker and Thuillier 2004, 162 suggest that it is likely that they existed long before the early evidence for them. For a detailed study on the origins of chariot racing in Rome and the development of the factional system see Thuillier 2012 and 2016.

claimed that the individual had been intoxicated by the burning of spices (*Natural History*, 7.186; Hyland 1990, 205 for the dating of this event). It has been suggested that the rival of the Reds was the Whites, just as the Blues hated the Greens more than any other faction (Cameron 1976, 56). The earliest attestation to the Greens is provided by Suetonius, who tells us that Caligula was an avid fan (Suetonius, *Caligula*, 55). Suetonius also reports that Vitellius was a long-time supporter of the Blues, and Martial singles out the Blues and Greens to represent chariot racing (Suetonius, *Vitellius*, 7; Martial, *Epigrams*, 14.131). This suggests that originally the Red and White factions originated sometime in the second and first centuries BC and that the Greens and Blues rose to prominence in the early Imperial period.

Thuillier (2012, 188-190; 2016, 20-21) suggests that these factional rivalries were initially based on a geographic criterion. Similar to modern football clubs in the United Kingdom and Europe or baseball teams in the United States, Thuillier asserts that early factions were connected to the four Republican districts of Rome, contributing to the spectator's emotional attachment to them. Thus, by the time Augustus reorganised Rome into fourteen districts, emotional attachment to these factions was thoroughly cemented into the entertainment culture of the city. It is not surprising, then, that later Imperial additions to the factional system (i.e., the Golds and the Purples) failed to capture the hearts of spectators. While there was an eagerness for chariot racing, and the inclusion of competitive factions heightened this, loyalty to specific factions was based, initially, on where spectators lived and this was likely passed through generations.

The combination of this well-entrenched organisational system for chariot racing and the increasing scale of games in Rome from the late Republican period onwards meant that the city quickly needed to pull from its wider empire to meet the ever-increasing logistical demands. This turned the factions into international entities that sourced their charioteers and horses from both imperial and private stud farms in Spain, Sicily, Thessaly, North Africa, and Turkey to obtain only the best racers (Bell 2014, 495 and 2022, 48). At its height, the Roman racing scene

accounted for 66 regular racing days per year (Willekes 2019, 458).[3] The factions would have needed to provide enough horses for 24 races (of 12 charioteers per race). Assuming that each horse only races once per day, this would account for a minimum of 576 (12 *bigae* in 24 races) and a maximum of 1,152 (12 *quadrigae* in 24 races) needed for a single day of races. Therefore, an immense number of horses were required just to feed the city of Rome's thirst for chariot racing. One inscription in Rome demonstrates how the city pulled resources from around their empire to fulfil this need for horses. The inscription lists the names of 74 horses (*CIL* VI, 10053, AD 110-120). Accompanying the names of these horses is their breed or country of origin: of the 74 horses, 46 are recorded as being from Africa, with others being from Gaul, Spain, Sparta, Cyrenaica, and Thessaly. Another horse list mentions that an unknown charioteer had won 584 races with African horses and 1,378 with Spanish horses (*CIL* VI, 10056, second half of the second century AD).

This use of a variety of different horse breeds is also seen in the careers of famous charioteers in Rome, many of whom were also imported from the provinces. The mid-second century AD charioteer Gaius Apuleius Diocles, born in Lusitania, is recorded as competing in 4,257 races over his 24-year career for the Reds, Greens, and Whites (an average of 170 races per year), of which he was victorious in 1,462 (*CIL* VI, 10048 = *ILS* 5287, AD 146-150; for an in-depth analysis of known charioteer careers see Teeter 1988 and Horsmann 1998). Diocles also comments on the horses that he drove, claiming that he was the best driver of African horses. He explains that he beat the previous champion of the African horse, Epaphroditus who had won 134 times with the African horse Balbus. Diocles secured 152 victories with his horse, Pompeianus. The explicit mention of being the best driver of African horses suggests that there was prestige to be won by successfully driving these horses, perhaps because they were more

[3] Meijer 2010, 52 states that there were 64 regular races, based on the Calendar of Philocalus (354). This would result in a total of horses needed for the races in Rome as 36,864 (as opposed to 38,016), and *quadriga*: 73,728 (as opposed to 76,032). Neither of these estimates take into consideration that it is possible that a horse might have been raced multiple times in one day, and that horses could race several times a year.

challenging to race or control. However, it is just as possible that Diocles mentioned this since he was particularly successful with, or preferred to compete with, African horses.

The need for well-trained horses was indeed global in nature. The projected number of races held in Rome alone per year and the prevalence of horses brought into the city, primarily from the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa, Greece, and Asia Minor, created such global conditions. This intense exploitation of provincial resources and local breeders' ability to produce high-quality and fast racehorses meant that certain provinces became associated as premium horse-producing regions. This demand for horses led to a complex network to provide them centrally but also created several opportunities for local entities to fulfil the need for horseraces in the provinces.

Chariot Racing in the Provinces

The relative scarcity of archaeological evidence for monumental or semi-monumental stone circuses in comparison to amphitheatres has led some to suggest that gladiatorial, beast, theatrical, and agonistic spectacles were more popular than chariot racing. The sheer financial undertaking and the amount of flat space required for the construction of stone circuses meant that they were often the last public building to be added to a city, if at all. Therefore, a monumental circus should be interpreted as evidence that chariot racing was taking place at a high enough frequency to merit the economic and geographic investment needed for the construction of these venues. However, a fully monumental circus was not necessarily required to host all races, as seen with 'semi-monumental' circuses. One such example of these semi-monumental circuses is referred to in an inscription from the North African town of Auzia (*CIL* VIII, 9065). Dating to AD 227, it was paid for by Decennius Claudius Iuvenalis Sardicus in commemoration of his son and two grandsons; the inscription refers to the construction of turning posts, eggs (lap counters), and a judges' *tribunal* in the circus. Humphrey (1986, 329) believes that the circus being referred to here was not a full monumental circus. This is based on the lack of any direct evidence for monumental seating in the region and the presence of an

inscription claiming that the costs of chariot racing in the city cost a surprisingly low amount, HS 540 (*CIL* VIII, 9052, mid-third century AD). The low cost of these races in comparison to figures given for other contemporary Roman spectacles, such as the figure of HS 50,000 per day over 4 days for the presentation of gladiatorial games and panthers at Carthage in AD 133 (*ILAf* 390), suggests that the races at Auzia must have been modest and cannot be representative of what chariot racing generally cost to host (Humphrey 1986, 329). Thus, it is unlikely that a full monumental circus would have been built to accommodate such events (Humphrey 1986, 329). The ‘circus’ at Auzia illustrates the danger of assuming popularity solely on the presence of surviving archaeological remains for venues. Just like gladiatorial and agonistic events, chariot racing did not necessarily require a monumental stone structure to host.

Unsurprisingly, the Iberian Peninsula is another region with a concentration of evidence for chariot racing. As one of the most in-demand regions for high-quality racehorses to be raced at the Circus Maximus the Iberian Peninsula appears to have enjoyed a lively racing scene (Nogales Basarrate 2017, 24). This is reflected by the number of monumental circuses that have been discovered in this region, including Merida, Tarragona, Toledo, Calahorra, Sagunto, Santiago do Cacem and Italica (Humphrey 1986, 337). However, just as with North Africa, the list of areas with known chariot racing activity is much longer. Mosaic depictions of circuses have been discovered at Barcelona (Blázquez Martínez 2001, 197-215), the villa Bell Loc del Pla (Girona) (Vivo Codina et al. 2017, 67-73), Italica (now lost, Mañas Romero 2015, 311-319), the villa at Cortijo de Paterna (Seville) (Blázquez Martínez 1982, 19), and the villa mosaic of Noheda (Cuenca) (Valero Tévar 2017, 75-82). This suggests that circuses, either of a fully monumental scale or of a reduced size like at Auzia, were present in far more regions than we currently have architectural remains for. The most common visual depiction of chariot racing in the Iberian Peninsula comes in the form of representations of charioteers separated from a circus context (14 examples) (Montoya González 2020, 35-36). Many of these depictions represent charioteers or horses that belonged to local organisational entities (i.e., horse breeders and factions). These

will be discussed in more depth in the coming sections.[4] The combination of this evidence for chariot racing in the Iberian Peninsula suggests an enthusiasm for the sport in this region which was unparalleled by any other Roman province.

Outside of North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, there is evidence of circuses and chariot racing activity, but it does not appear with the same frequency as it does in the previously discussed regions (Humphrey 1986, figs. 137, 149, 179, 201, 205, and 267). Comparing the evidence between regions reinforces the theory that Spain and North Africa were the main centres for Roman-style chariot racing. The Gallic provinces provide some securely attested monumental stone circuses, but for the most part, the evidence from this region comes in the form of artistic remains. Interestingly, the known circuses from these regions appear primarily in provincial capitals or regional centres (Lyon, Saintes, Vienne, Trier, and Arles). This suggests a similar situation to that of gladiators in Greece where these events were mainly hosted as part of Roman celebrations (Carter 1999 and 2010). This is reinforced by an inscription from Lyon recording the hosting of circus games by Sextus Ligurius Marinus that were in commemoration of his promotion to *pontifex* (*CIL* XIII, 1921, date uncertain). A series of pottery appliqués displaying chariot scenes, also from Lyon, further illustrates chariot racing activity in the city. These small discs embedded into vases depict victorious charioteers, generally riding in a *quadriga*, with a victory inscription underneath. The most common inscriptions on these appliqués read NICA PRAESINE, ORTE PRASINUS EST, PRASINE VINCAS, ORTE VENETUS EST, and CALOS VENETE (Humphrey 1986, 414). These vases were likely sold as souvenirs for the Green and Blue factions during a day of games, similar to those found throughout the empire depicting gladiators and beast hunts (Cassibry 2021; Bomgardner 1992).[5]

[4] For an exhaustive studies of the different types of chariot related scenes see Dunbabin 1982 and López Monteagudo 1994.

[5] For more on sports souvenirs in the Roman world see Popkin 2022, 119-164.

Mosaic evidence also suggests a certain degree of popularity of the races at the local level. One mosaic found at the villa of Sainte-des-Colombe-les-Vienne, close to Vienne's circus, is framed by four charioteers (Humphrey 1986, fig. 197). The charioteer in the bottom left corner is also accompanied by the number CLXXVI. Presumably, this number indicates the victories of this specific charioteer. Without an accompanying name for this charioteer, it is hard to know if this was meant to depict a well-known local charioteer. If chariot racing was not a regular event in Vienne and the number of professional charioteers was limited, perhaps an individual could be known for their victory record alone. This would suggest that 176 victories constituted an exceptional career here and that avid followers of chariot racing in the area would be able to recognise a rider based on this alone. Another mosaic from Trier, dating to c. AD 250, depicts a front-facing Red faction charioteer victorious in a *quadriga* (Hoffmann *et al*. 1999, pls. 100-101). Both the driver, *Polydus*, and what was surely his most famous horse, *Compressore*, are named. The commissioning of established coloured factions and famous racers and horses suggests that chariot racing was sufficiently popular and widespread in the Gallic provinces, but not to the degree that is seen in the Iberian and African regions.

Britain proves an even more challenging region to comment on as there is little evidence for the popularity of the sport in this region or any established widespread organisational infrastructure. A monumental stone-built circus has been discovered at Colchester, but otherwise, the evidence for racing is limited and later in date (Crummy 2008). Cylindrical mould-blown cups with circus scenes have also been found in Colchester, often accompanied by scenes of gladiatorial combats or athletic sports (Cool and Price 1995, 43, see also nos. 232-238). Similar cups appear to have been in widespread use around the end of the first century AD, but only in the western and north-western provinces (Cool and Price 1995, 44).[6] One fourth-century AD mosaic from Horkstow indicates an awareness of the factional system as it depicts

[6] Similar examples can be found at Chavanges (Harden et al. 1987, 169, no. 90), Colchester (Harden *et al*. 1987, 168, no. 89), Couvin (Schuermans 1893), Heidelberg-Neuenheim (Heukemes 1972, 17, abb. 13), Montagnole (Lenormant 1865), Trier (Goethert-Polaschek 1977, 43, no. 129, Tafn 12.136, 35), and Trouville-en-Caux (Sennequier 1985, 44-47, no. 12).

four racers in alternating red and white costumes (Humphrey 1986, fig. 202). Therefore, it is hard to comment on the extent of chariot racing’s presence in Roman Britain. Races were regular enough to merit the construction of a circus and various artistic depictions of the sport, but it does not appear to have been widespread. Dating evidence suggests that the circus was possibly constructed in the second century AD, but this is recognised as problematic and should be treated as the earliest possible date (Crummy 2008, 28). This, along with all of the artistic evidence for the sport dating to the fourth century AD, indicates that when chariot racing came to Britain it was limited in scope and popularity compared with its incidence in North Africa or Spain, for instance.

The eastern Roman empire provides a rich, but also problematic, area for the study of chariot racing. The earliest confirmed presence of a Roman factional system does not occur until the early fourth century AD with records of a faction manager in Alexandria, which will be discussed in detail below. This delay was likely caused by the cultural differences between East and West during the Roman period. While the organisation of Western horse racing looked to the events taking place in the Circus Maximus and Rome for their structure, the East looked to Olympia and the agonistic method of organisation where private individuals submitted their own horses and charioteers to compete and the victory was claimed by the owner rather than the athlete (Humphrey 1986, 438; Mann and Scharff 2022, 11). The East was nonetheless a significant region for Roman-style chariot racing. Horse lists show that cities in Greece and Asia Minor were famous breeding regions. Many of the monumental circuses here were built mainly in the later second and third centuries AD (Humphrey 1986, 438-441). Like Gaul, some of these venues had strong connections to Roman celebrations. The circus at Antioch, dating to the second century AD, was used annually for the games of the Syriarch in honour of the emperor (Humphrey 1986, 460). Tyre’s circus is thought to have been a gift from Septimius Severus in return for the city’s loyalty during the civil wars of the 190s AD and in commemoration of their *colonia* status (Cameron 1976, 209).

The East's strong connections to their Greek origins likely contributed to this lack of chariot racing. In a world where Roman political and cultural influence was becoming increasingly apparent, the East's desire to retain a quintessentially Greek practice illustrates a desire to appeal to the region's cultural origins. Since Greece and Asia Minor already had an established horseracing culture it appears that Roman chariot racing held little appeal for the local population. It would be inaccurate to say that Roman chariot racing did not exist in the East, but it does not appear to have been a popular form of entertainment until late antiquity. Even when evidence of factional activity in the East, and therefore evidence of regular hosting of Roman-style chariot racing, does appear, it comes late to the East with the earliest evidence appearing in AD 315 a period when all entertainment was organised via the factions (Humphrey 1986, 439; Webb 2008, 42; Cameron 1976, 198-199). This late adoption of the factions demonstrates a general lack of interest in chariot racing in Greece and Asia Minor, likely due to the already established agonistic culture mentioned above which included a horseracing element.

Organising Chariot Racing in the Provinces

While benefactors of chariot racing in Rome could visit the coloured factions and obtain everything needed for the races easily, the situation in the wider empire was more complicated. Factions were present in many of the major centres of Iberia and Northern Africa, however, they do not appear to have been a necessary part of Roman-style chariot racing. Rather the situation appears to have been more impromptu, using resources that were available to local elites, whether that entailed established factions, horse breeders, or privately financed organisations.

Evidence for faction activity in the Roman empire is primarily found in major cities where monumental stone-built circuses have been discovered. The mosaic and epigraphic evidence for factions in the provinces suggest that they functioned in much the same way the Roman ones did, providing a service in which wealthy individuals could hire all that was required for the races. One such example of this is the mosaic evidence discovered at the Maison des Chevaux discovered at Carthage (Dunbabin 1978, pls. J and 84, 85, 86). Dating to the beginning of the

fourth century AD, the mosaic depicts various scenes divided into a checkerboard pattern. Of the 198 panels that it would have originally displayed, only 61 survive today. Originally the top row depicted figures of charioteers on foot, alongside them are four *sparsores* (water-sprinklers) holding amphorae, one for each faction (Dunbabin 2016, 160). These figures are accompanied by a variety of different horses, mythological figures, and scenes of human activity such as hunting, fowling, athletics, a man lying sick in bed, and a couple playing dice together. The inclusion of the accompanying inscription 'good luck to the people [i.e. the fans] of the Blues' suggests that this building was either owned by a follower of the Blue faction or perhaps a clubhouse for fans (Dunbabin 2016, 161). This is just one of many examples of provincial evidence for factions. An inscription dating to the second century AD from Tarragona documents the factional affiliation of the charioteer Fuscus who belonged to the Blues (*CIL* II, 4315). While it does mention his popularity, it does not give explicit detail about his career like the inscriptions of great charioteers in Rome such as Diocles. The epigrams of the *Latin Anthology* preserve the names of several charioteers at Carthage, along with evidence that some of these men were foreign to the city, both of Egyptian and wider African origins (*Latin Anthology* 172, 173, 179, 288, and 322; Stevens 1988). This indicates that the provincial factions acted much like those at Rome, purchasing charioteers who showed promise, albeit on a more limited geographic scope.

North African evidence attests to the presence of factions at Carthage, Sousse, Lepcis Magna, and Cherchel (Humphrey 1986, 333; see also the curse tablet from Carthage *DT* 234.69-76) that calls on the charioteers of the Blue faction to "fall in every part of the hippodrome and especially at the turns"; Hollmann 2003, 68). However, these are all cities that had monumental circuses and can be said to have had a high enough frequency of races to warrant such a building due to city size and population. Were the factions only present in cities where races were frequently occurring and were therefore considered to have been profitable for the *factionarius*? It does not appear to have been considered economically feasible to establish coloured factions in smaller towns where chariot racing may have been hosted a few times each

year. These organisations had to consider not only the cost of horses but also of charioteers, their sustenance costs, the maintenance of chariots, stable hands to care for the animals, trainers, and other staff that the Roman factions are known to have provided for organisers (Dunbabin 2016, 141 and MacLean 2014 for more on personnel required; *CIL* VI, 10046 = *ILS* 5313, Augustan period, gives a list of the *familia quadrigaria* of the Red faction).[7] Factions possibly provided services to nearby towns, in the same way as *lanistae* hired out gladiators to compete in neighbouring cities, or like the sodalités of North Africa who trained and presented exotic beasts for *venationes*. However, there were other options which benefactors may have considered more practical for small towns that may have only had a semi-monumental circus or even just a designated area of flat ground for such occasional events.

Evidence suggests that small towns had privately funded ventures, much like the original ownership of the Roman factions. One example from the Byzantine period is the sixth-century AD papyri evidence from Oxyrhynchus demonstrates that both the Green and Blue factions were present in the city and were financed by a single wealthy family, the Apiones. While this example is admittedly from a period where the Roman empire no longer exists and an altered political reality from the rest of the material in this article, the organisational entities used to host chariot racing are a continuation of what was originally established in Rome hundreds of years prior. Therefore, what is described in these documents is potentially representative of what occurred in smaller provincial towns around the empire. The first is an account from c. AD 565-566, which records the gift of wine from the Apion family to the Blues (*P. Oxy.* 2480). There are several entries for wine here, including wine not only for the charioteers, but also for the horses, and the *Philitiani* of the faction.[8] Another receipt dating to AD 618 shows that for a month the Apiones were also responsible for paying the wages of the 'starters' of the Blues (*P. Oxy.* 152). Another receipt, dating to AD 552, records the payment of one *solidus* less than four carats to contribute to the costs of veterinary treatment of horses from the Green faction and an

[7] It should be noted that Caldelli 2016 has called the authenticity of this inscription into question.
[8] Humphrey 1986, 517-518 explains this is likely derived from *philition* 'common mess' and he interprets it to mean club members or faction personnel.

additional sum to cover expenses associated with this, perhaps for materials required for treatment (*P. Oxy.* 145). The Apiones also had a viewing box at the town’s hippodrome, an area for the exclusive use of the Apiones and their guests (*PSI* VIII.953.62). It is uncertain just how involved the Apiones were in the functioning of the town’s factions, but they clearly had an interest in horses and chariot racing. References to their estate show that it included stables and the personnel associated with the rearing and training of racehorses, such as the *hippotrophoi* (*P. Oxy.* 138, 140, 1862, and 1863). This suggests that the Apiones were the financiers of both factions in Oxyrhynchus. The inclusion of multiple factions was perhaps to create the competitive nature associated with chariot racing in major urban centres such as Rome, or particularly during this period, Constantinople, to which the family had connections. This may have been the case in other small towns across the empire, where private individuals financed and possibly provided for the factions to improve the town’s (and their own) social prestige. If this was the case, this could suggest that some local factions should be seen as an extension of household and patronage networks, rather than independent ‘entrepreneurs’.

Where factions were not present, local horse breeders may have provided horses for the races. This would account for the heavy concentration of circus-related mosaics and epigraphic evidence that comes from these regions. Additionally, as the horse lists and charioteer inscriptions at Rome show, these regions also provided horses for the Roman factions. The best evidence for breeder involvement with the races is the chariot racing mosaics where horses bear distinct marks on their hindquarters which are often interpreted as being stable marks. One example of this is the mosaic from Cherchel depicting the horse Muccosus. There are two marks on this horse, one indicating that the horse raced for the Green faction, *PRA*, and the second for its stable *Cl. Sabini,* Claudius Sabinus (Humphrey 1986, 310). However, these stable marks are also often seen without any factional affiliation. In Mérida, for example, a mosaic survives which figures two victorious charioteers in *quadrigae* (Humphrey 1986, 375-376). Each charioteer is identified by name, Marcianus and Paulus, suggesting their fame in the area. The left lead horse of Marcianus must have also been a famous horse during his career as its name accompanies it,

Inluminator, and the stable name, Getuli. At Torre de Palma, another circus mosaic has been found which names five individual horses, Hiberus, Leneus, Lenobatus, Pelops, and Inacus, all adorned with plumes and elaborate collars typical of circus horses; on two of these horses are brand marks. It has been suggested that four of these horses were of the local horse breed and that they belonged to a stud farm that this villa owned (Humphrey 1986, 376). The distribution of evidence for breeding and chariot racing demonstrates that breeding was a significant part of the culture in the provinces of Lusitania and Baetica in the southern regions of the Iberian Peninsula. Many of these races were taking place in smaller Iberian communities where it would have been difficult not only for factions to operate due to a low frequency of races and also almost certainly for a lack of funds required to host full-scale circus games. It would seem more likely that these organisers were securing provisions for the races from local stud farms that also benefitted from an opportunity to train horses that were possibly destined for the Roman factions.

Evidence for the presence of local breeders being involved in the organisation of chariot racing in some areas of North Africa is illustrated by the mosaics found at the house of Sorothus in Sousse. The room C mosaic depicts imagery that suggests the owner's involvement in not only breeding horses but also racing them (Laporte and Lavagne 2006, 1354-1361). The four medallions in this mosaic depict six named horses in total: Amor, Dominator, Adorandus, Crinitus, Ferox, and Pegasus (see Bernard 1906, pl. XIV for a depiction of these medallions).[9] Each horse is adorned suitably for the races with palm fronds on their heads. Adorandus and Crinitus also wear reins, while the others wear collars with pendants. Just as with the Iberian mosaics depicting local breeder's horses, Sorothus' horses have been branded accordingly. Two different branding styles are depicted here. Amor, Adorandus, Ferox, and Pegasus have been branded with their owner's name in the genitive form, SORO/THI. Dominator and Crinitus bear an iconographic brand thought to represent the mountains seen in the central part of the

[9] Laporte and Lavagne 2006, 1358 note that two further horses on the right medallions had existed at one point but have been lost to degradation.

mosaic depicting the stud farm, perhaps representing a distinctive geographic feature of the farm itself (Laporte and Lavagne 2006, 1360 and fig. 18 for a detailed image of this iconography). It is possible that Sorothus' horses were branded with both brands as they are only depicted here from either the left or right profile. Only those on the left side of the medallions bear the SORO/THI brand and only those on the right side bear the iconographic brand. Presumably, the two horses lost to damage on the Ferox and Pegasus medallions would have borne the iconographic brands as well. Sorothus' connection to the horse racing industry is further reinforced by the room E mosaic depicting victorious horses (Laporte and Lavagne 2006, 1361-1367, fig. 19). These horses are once again named: Campus, Dilectus, Patricius, and Ipparchus. Each horse is branded with the same SORO/THI and iconographic brands seen in room C. The horse's victorious nature is indicated by the presence of several iconographical depictions of winning. Date trees and palm leaves separate each pair of horses, depicting abundance and victory; additionally, flying cupids holding laurel garlands hover above each horse (Laporte and Lavagne 2006, 1362 and 1365). Two symbols, in the form of posts with crosspieces hanging ropes ending in ivy leaves, are present on the left and right sides of the mosaic suggest that Sorothus had a wider involvement with the North African entertainment industry (see Laporte and Lavagne 2006, fig. 19 for a detailed image of this symbol). These symbols are direct representations of the emblem of the *Tauriscii* sodalité who were responsible for the provision of exotic animals and hunters for the amphitheatre.[10] The mosaics discovered at the house of Sorothus demonstrate that a similar organisational system to the Iberian Peninsula's local breeders existed in North Africa. Just as with the mosaics found at Cherchel and Mérida, the naming of all horses dressed in racing attire suggests that they would have been known to the viewer. However, unlike the Cherchel mosaic, no factional indicators can be found on any of Sorothus' horses suggesting that he may have only raced those depicted in these mosaics locally.

[10] For more on the role of sodalités and their symbols see Beschaouch 1966, 1977, 1979, 1985, 2006 a and b. Laporte and Lavagne 2006 discuss Sorothus' potential connection with the exotic animal and maritime trades on 1367-1370 and 1377-1386.

The presence of horse breeders and their involvement in the provision of horses, and likely drivers too, raises the question of how integral these businessmen were in the functioning of the provincial factions. One example of this comes from papyri recording the shipment of barley for the Blue faction in Alexandria. Dating to AD 315, the first records of the transfer from the granary at Karanis to a river port where the barley was handed from a foreman of a donkey caravan to a shipmaster due for Alexandria and signed by two village officials of Karanis (*P. Cair. Isid.* 57). Here the barley is recorded as being delivered to the *hippotrophos* (horse breeder) Hephaestion. The second, dated five days later, is a receipt for money as payment for the delivery of the barley previously mentioned and is issued by the same two Karanis officials mentioned in the first (Humphrey 1986, 511-512). However, Hephaestion here is no longer referred to as *hippotrophos*, instead, he is referred to as the *factionarius* of the Blues in Alexandria (*P. Cair. Isid.* 58). This titular differentiation raises questions as to how involved horse breeders were in the administration of the provincial factions. As seen in the estate records of the Apiones at Oxyrhynchus, *hippotrophoi* were those responsible for the breeding and training of horses. Considering the concentration of horse breeders documented in both Iberia and Northern Africa, along with the high numbers in which horses from these regions appear in the records of those who raced in Rome, many of these stud farms must have become immensely wealthy. Major provincial centres where chariot racing was frequently hosted—such as Alexandria, Carthage, and Italica—were in a situation where it was economically feasible for businessmen to establish themselves as formal factions. This mirrors the development of the Roman factions which initially began as business ventures for *equites* to provide for the games in the Circus Maximus which eventually transitioned into a 'Player Manager' operation (Cameron 1976, 9-10).

Globalising Chariot Racing in the Roman Empire

As seen throughout this article, chariot racing permeated every corner of the Roman empire. This certainly occurred at differing rates and to different degrees of popularity. When looking at

the evidence for chariot racing and regional methods of organisation through the lens of globalisation it is evident that Rome's empire-wide pull for horses must have had some influence on the occurrence of the sport outside Italy. Horse racing, or even chariot racing for that matter, is by no means a distinctly Roman sport. The Greeks had propagated their forms of horse racing throughout Asia Minor and the south of Italy, both with and without chariots, hundreds of years before through the introduction of agonistic events (Mann and Scharff 2022, 8-9). Greek-style horse racing continued to be an important element of public life in southern Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor throughout the Roman period. Yet, the Greek sport distinctly did not attain popularity in the western reaches of the empire. This leaves the question of how globalisation can help us better understand chariot racing in the wider empire.

As demonstrated by the lengthy career lists of famous charioteers like Diocles, horses were sourced from all over the Roman empire, with popular breeds appearing to come from the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa, Greece, and Asia Minor. Greece and Asia Minor would have been producing high-quality racehorses for centuries before the region's assimilation into the Roman empire, so the connection between their horses and performance in racing is clear. Furthermore, the importation of racehorses from the Greek world into Rome appears to have largely been a one-way process, as seen with the slow adoption of the coloured factions in the East and the widespread hosting of chariot racing throughout. Even when coloured factions are found within the eastern parts of the empire, it is typically following the date when the factions came to encompass the organisation of all types of entertainment. The case study of the Greek East demonstrates that Roman globalising factors, such as the importation of racehorses, did not always result in the wholesale adoption of Roman chariot racing. Rather, the opposite is apparent, what can be seen is an explosion of agonistic culture including horseracing which emphasised Greek identity in an increasingly Roman world (Robert 1984, 35; van Nijf 1999, 177-180 and 2006, 227). Therefore, Rome's importation of racehorses from its empire and the practice of Roman-style chariot racing did not always necessarily always travel together.

However, the same cannot be said for the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa. Both of these regions embraced this Roman form of horse racing earlier and fully integrated factional entities and various versions of the circus into its logistics. It was the extensive Roman network for obtaining both horses and riders for their games that appears to have been the influencing factor for chariot racing's presence and popularity in the western provinces. Unlike the Greek world, the western regions of the empire did not have established forms of public entertainment that fit within this new Roman system. To solve this issue, they resorted to Roman attitudes of euergetism: gladiatorial combats, animal hunts, banquets, and public building projects. Euergetism was a method for wealthy individuals to give the populace a taste of the luxuries that came with being a part of the Roman empire (Forbis 1996, 29). This is particularly true when it concerned public entertainment. These events were free to the public and brought several economic opportunities to the region (e.g., those who provided for the games, markets, an increased number of people coming into the city, etc.). However, these events were immensely expensive undertakings and the concentration of wealth amongst the local elite within the provinces was not the same as that in Rome. Benefactors would have required events that not only fulfilled this desire for Roman luxury in the city but also ways to reduce the impact on their purses, especially if they intended to have an ongoing political career.

One effective way of cutting these costs would have been to host what was locally available. This is best illustrated by North Africa. The province had a much higher occurrence of animal hunting, especially with exotic animals, than the rest of the empire (for example, see the catalogue mosaics in Dunbabin 1978, 69-75). Gladiatorial combats must have been the most common form of public euergetism as slaves were affordable compared to horses and wild animals. They were also easier to obtain and train. Additionally, gladiators needed only a small open area to be hosted, whereas wild animals required containment and chariot racing needed a large section of flat ground to serve as a track. Rome had established horse breeding cultures in regions where desirable horse breeds could be obtained, leading to a greater accessibility of these resources to local benefactors. When thinking about the hosting of chariot racing outside of

Rome in this way, the globalising force that was Rome becomes a significant factor when considering the increased popularity of the sport in these provinces. This would also account for the lower visibility of chariot racing in other provinces that were not known as famous horse-producing regions, like Gaul and Britain.

Globalising forces are not the only factor at play here. There were also glocalisations of chariot racing in these regions. Factions that emulated those at Rome and fully monumental circuses were only economically feasible in regional centres where races would have been hosted several times a year. Local solutions to this organisational issue can be found in regions where there were no factions or circuses. As seen with the Apiones, a single patronage network could be responsible for the presence of factions in a city. It is possible that the appeal of factions in regional centres also harkened back to what made them so successful in Rome: by including two or more teams, patrons could embed these entities into different areas of the city to create an emotional connection with specific demographics. This would have guaranteed a certain degree of longevity for these provincial factions. Just as in Rome, spectators' loyalty would have been passed down through generations and likely created a secondary industry in which products, such as souvenirs, could be marketed directly to fans, further producing financial opportunities. In regions where horse breeders were present, they became the primary providers of racehorses, illustrated by the presence of stable marks on victory mosaics at Cherchel, Mérida, and Torre de Palma.[11] In this case, the races served not only as a euergetistical opportunity for benefactors but also as a training opportunity for the breeders. A significant part of training these horses would have been getting them acquainted with the racing environment. They not only had to race as part of a team, but these horses also had to be accustomed to the sounds of the circus. Columella recommended that racehorses should only be broken at age three (*De re rustica* 6.29) and Pliny further reinforces this late training of racehorses by claiming that the circus did not claim horses until the age of five (*Natural History,* 8.162). This delayed entry to the racetrack for horses in

[11] See Montoya González 2020 for more on the proliferation of chariot racing and horse related mosaics and paintings in the Iberian Peninsula as part of a globalisation 'refraction' process which resulted in several different 'glocalities'.

the Roman period is perhaps in recognition of the benefits of an experienced horse over a younger and faster, but inexperienced, horse. This emphasis on experience is even more beneficial when considering that horses are not racing on their own but in a team. Any mistake or trip on the track, if not responded to correctly, could be fatal for not only the horse, but also for the other horses in the team, the charioteer, and even others racing (Willekes 2016, 199). Experience was vital for not only success but also for the trainers to produce racehorses that could both compete in the high-stakes Roman circuit, and that would fetch a higher price.

Purchasing experienced and proven horses would have been an essential factor for the established factions, as seen in the historically high cost for horses, specifically those trained for the racecourse. A receipt from the Ptolemaic period documents that horses were priced at 800 *drachmae,* which is further emphasised by the included 10 *drachmae* price for mules (*P. Cair. Zen.* 59093). The sale of a famous racehorse called Seianus during the late Republican period secured a price of HS 100,000 (Gellius, 3.9.4). Additionally, Diocletian's price edicts of AD 301 even set the maximum price for racehorses at 100,000 *denarii* (30.1.1a; Crawford and Reynolds 1979, 34), whereas a cavalry horse for the military was set at a much cheaper 36,000 *denarii* (30.1.2). This demonstrates not only the immense cost of horses in general but also the prestige and higher value of horses destined for the circus. While training would have been carried out in factional stables, it would have been in their financial interests to have these horses on the track as soon as possible. Training on arrival would have been more focused on matching teams and drivers.

Therefore, local breeders were presented with a unique opportunity to train their horses in a low-stakes environment while also feeding the local racing circuit. This would account for the increased presence of stable markings on horses in mosaics in Iberia and North Africa. The inclusion of factional indicators on some of these horses, such as the *PRA* present on the hindquarters of Muccosus, suggests that some of these horses were later sold on to either local factions or those in Rome and others remained to be raced locally. Therefore, while globalising forces pushed Roman-style chariot racing into the provinces and increased its popularity in

regions without an established form of euergetistic racing, it was the internal glocalising forces that refracted the practice to be locally viable and led to the widespread embracing of the sport outside of regional centres.

Conclusion

The evidence for chariot racing has demonstrated that the sport had a truly global reach in the Roman empire. Not only did Rome require the use of both horses and charioteers from all across the Roman world, but also that the races took place in all regions as well. To conclude, let us return to Martin Pitts' five points to consider when applying globalisation to the ancient world to illustrate how it can inform our understanding of chariot racing outside of Rome:

1. Perceiving chariot racing through globalisation and its subsequent theory, glocalisation, shifts our thinking about the sport away from it merely being present in the provinces. Rather, it highlights how the reception of this sport by the various provincial localities was different and resulted in highly regionalised methods of representing or organising these games.

2. By de-centring Rome in our analysis it is possible to see that the movement of the idea of chariot racing was more complex than simple mirroring. In regions like Greece and Asia Minor, the pre-existing agonistic racing culture continued, and it was not until the late antique period that we see Roman methods of organisation (e.g., the factional system) appear at which time the organisation of all entertainment was done in this way. In the Iberian Peninsula and Northern Africa, where Rome sourced a substantial number of horses and charioteers, chariot racing became hugely popular and the factional system can be found throughout. Additionally, there is a greater representation of horse breeders in imagery representing the sport, reflecting the importance of the industry locally. Finally, when we look to regions that were not well-known for their horses or charioteers, such as Gaul and Britain, there is a lesser representation of the sport. While it certainly existed in these regions, it is clear that popularity lay in other forms of spectacle such as gladiatorial combats.

3. It is impossible to identify such trends in chariot racing without shifting the focus of inquiry to the bigger-picture phenomena. While several significant discoveries can be found by studying instances in isolation, they do not provide a wider context of chariot racing in the Roman empire which is vital for understanding how the sport was received in regions that did not have the long history associated with the sport.

4. For a large part of the Roman empire's history, Rome did not impose its own forms of chariot racing organisation onto the provinces. Therefore, organisational entities for chariot racing emerged independent of the Roman state, otherwise, the presence of factions would have occurred much earlier in the eastern Greek provinces. When factions do occur in the provinces, they appear to have begun life much like the factions in Rome, as commercial and logistical answers to a lack of reliable organisational entities. However, in regions where factions did not exist or there was not enough frequency to merit the creation of factions, horse breeders filled this organisational gap. In even more informal occasions this may have occurred closer to the Greek chariot racing system, in which horses and charioteers were individually owned rather than the need for factions, however, there is little to no information to confirm this.

5. It is only through the presence of numerous mosaics, paintings, inscriptions, ceramics, and circus-related architecture that chariot racing can be detected in the provinces. While literary sources do attest to the presence of breeding industries in the provinces to feed the Roman racing market, very little is said about how chariot racing took place outside of Rome. Therefore, it is the objects that tell us the story of chariot racing in the Roman empire and how different localities interacted with the sport.

The evidence points to a lively market for racehorses, in which the horses were the products of strategic and selective breeding and training programmes before reaching the track to maximise profit for the breeder. This appears to have led to the widescale popularity and organisation of chariot racing throughout certain provinces more than others. Therefore, by analysing the impacts of Rome's need for racehorses and their exploitation of regional resources,

it appears that it was not only the globalising powers of Rome at work but also the glocalisation processes that influenced the popularity of the sport in specific regions of the empire.

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Achelous and Hercules beyond Human and Non-Human: Blurred Hierarchies in Book 9 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

By Valentino Gargano

Abstract

This paper examines a passage in book 9 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which the river god Achelous recounts how he lost a fight to the civilising hero Heracles. It has been suggested in previous scholarship that the Metamorphoses challenge the basic self-definition of 'human' in the Roman world, based as it was on the antithesis between man and animal, as well as on the opposition between human and divine. This paper argues that the narrative of the wrestling match between Achelous and Hercules contributes significantly to blurring the distinction between 'human' and 'non-human' through a complex and multifaceted manipulation of the identities of both Achelous and Hercules. Traditionally an emblem of the triumph of human civilisation over animal wildness, Hercules here becomes assimilated to both a god, through the continuous foreshadowing of his apotheosis, and to a wild beast. His hypermasculinity and uncontrolled violence, so vastly praised in ancient literature before Ovid, cast a shadow in the poem over the human nature of this supposed representative of humanity. Achelous' animal-like character, on the other hand, is continuously endowed with heavily anthropomorphic features, while his divine nature is progressively and disquietingly emphasised. In playing with the conceptual axis distinguishing divine, human, and animal in classical literature, this passage deserves attention within the scholarly discussion of hierarchical play in the *Metamorphoses* and of the tendency of the poem, in Italo Calvino's words, of lingering on the "indistinti confini tra mondi diversi". This paper also explores the relevance of such tendency to the extra-literary, political world of Ovid's time, and raises questions on the political relevance of hierarchical play in poetry more broadly. It is now accepted in scholarship that Hercules constituted a powerful

symbol of the emperor’s propaganda: Ovid’s playful reflection on human and non-human acquires then potentially subversive connotations that require further investigation.

More than twenty years ago, Charles Segal memorably commented on a much-discussed topic in Ovidian studies, namely the poet’s play with hierarchies and structures within the *Metamorphoses*:[1] “[Ovid] challenges one of the pillars of the classical epic tradition, that is, the classical definition of human nature, which, from Homer through Plato and Aristotle, is founded on the antithesis between human and bestial. In place of this view of a stable human nature, Ovid presents a world where the boundaries between humans and animals are dangerously fluid”. Taking my cue from Segal, I examine the figure of Hercules in book 9 of Ovid’s poem and argue that the wrestling match between Hercules and Achelous is an important locus of intense reflection on identity, a locus whose superficial neatness gives way, on closer inspection, to an intricate web of blurred categories and contrapuntal ironies. I argue that Hercules and Achelous confound typical categorisations of Greek-Roman epic and myth. Specifically, the definition of human identity, which should be fundamental to the encounter between the civiliser Hercules and the monstrous Achelous, is complicated by the adherence of both characters to several realms and identities. I argue that Achelous’ multiple identities—god, monstrous beast, man-like figure, inanimate river—produce comic but destabilising effects, effects which are paralleled by the ironic presentation of the hero. The destabilising political undertones of Hercules’ representation in Propertius 4.9 have long been acknowledged;[2] it is time to reassess the treatment of the figure in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. God, human, animal, and even inanimate object: these categories of definition seem to fall apart, creating a world of ironies, a carnivalesque Bakhtinian world. Refraining from reviving now outdated definitions of Augustanism or anti-Augustanism, I claim that this typically Ovidian carnival should be seen as

[1] Segal 1998, 10. Cf. Calvino 1979, 7; Barchiesi 2005, cxvi; Li Causi 2022, 121.
[2] Spencer 2001.

possessing subtle yet tangible undertones that make Ovid's play with hierarchies something more than a formalistic matter of literary irony.[3]

The Divine Achelous

Book 9 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* begins with the river-god Achelous' account of his wrestling match with Hercules in the contest to win the hand of Deianira. Achelous is entertaining his guests, Theseus and his companions, in the palace where he lives, when he is asked about the origins of his broken horn. The god proceeds to tell how he fought with Hercules and how the hero eventually managed to beat him and break his horn, whose mutilated extremity then provides the occasion for a brief aetiological account of the origins of Cornucopia. From the very first lines of the book, the picture Ovid paints of this god is humorous and betrays theriomorphic traits, of which his pathetic, broken horn is the first hint. However, Ovid goes on to make Achelous' status as a god not only evident, but even the main reason that prompts him to challenge Hercules. The divine status of Achelous is explicitly established at 9.16: *turpe deum mortali cedere dixi* ('it is a shame for a god to give way to a mortal').[4] Achelous' claims of superiority are based on his divine status and his scepticism about Hercules' divine ancestry (23-26). It is this specific provocation that enrages Hercules and triggers him into fighting. Achelous' claims, undermined as they can be by the god's comic and boisterous self-reported behaviour, are valid:[5] while Hercules' genealogy might be divine, he still remains a mortal at the time of the fight.

But Ovid's ironic strategy cannot allow the confrontation to be so clear-cut, to be weighing god against mortal. An enjambement, almost an afterthought, intervenes to disturb the straightforward identification of roles in the wrestling match: *nondum erat ille deus* ('he was not yet a god', 17). This is only the beginning of a series of disturbances of distinctions between

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[3] Cf. Barchiesi 2005, clvii-clxi.

[4] All translations are mine.

[5] Secci 2009, 39 notices that Achelous applies a thoroughly Homeric principle, 'the unquestionable superiority of gods over men'.

mortal and divine, and of the corresponding hierarchy: Ovid presents the struggle between Hercules the man and Achelous the god to then casually proceed to allude to Hercules' apotheosis, indeed narrated at length in the same book. Synchronically and diachronically, the ironies of divine and semidivine identities intrude within the text. However, there is more to this than the simple disturbance of this hierarchy.

There are grounds to believe that Ovid reserved special emphasis on the definition of divinity in the encounter between Hercules and Achelous. Book 9 itself introduces the first apotheosis within the *Metamorphoses* and stages a divine council. Before book 9, however, book 8 also crucially hinged upon the true nature of the gods and the respect that is due to the celestials within a series of tales of punished hybris and rewarded piety.[6] In book 8, it is the same Achelous who tells Theseus about Perimele's transformation into an island (590-610), evidence of his own divine stature. After Achelous' rape of the woman, Perimele's father attempts to murder her by pushing her off a cliff, but the river-god, thanks to his special acquaintance with Neptune, secures Perimele's salvation and transformation into an island. The fact that Achelous is a god is also underscored by a sacrilegious comment made by the 'scorner of the gods' (*deorum / spretor*, 612-613) Pirithous, one of Theseus' companions,[7] putting into question the gods' powers of metamorphosis (614-615). The myths of Philemon and Baucis (611-724) and of Erysichthon and Mestra (738-878) follow as exemplary tales of the power of the gods and as cautionary stories of theodicy.[8] The power of transformation is, therefore, an important symbol of divine stature by the end of book 8, when Achelous in fact interrupts his tales of transformation by shifting the focus on his own powers: *Quid moror externis? Etiam mihi nempe novandi est / corporis, o*

[6] Otis 1970, 171.
[7] Otis 1970, 202. Notice also that Pirithous is defined here as *Ixione natus*, the son of Ixion, who tried to rape Hera: Hill 1992, 234.
[8] Otis 1970, 171. But cf. Green 2003.

iuvenis, numero finita potestas (‘Why do I linger on stories of others? I myself, too, have the power of transforming, young men, though my choice of forms is limited’, 879-880).[9]

The Human Achelous

Everything at the beginning of book 9, then, seems set up to present yet another tale of divine power.[10] Instead, Ovid anticipates in the aforementioned line that the god’s opponent can only marginally stand as an emblem of humanity, while also imbuing Achelous’ character in this book with typically Ovidian humour. Achelous’ parodic depiction, however, goes beyond simple humour, and in fact anthropomorphises him. Far from the frightening Achelous that terrified Sophocles’ Deianira (*Trach*. 6-19),[11] the Ovidian Achelous kindly entertains his guests with tales,[12] sadly recounts how he lost the wrestling match to Hercules,[13] and is visually maimed. The humanisation of the god is perspicuous in the fight itself; yet it is also in the narrative frame of his reported speech that the reader perceives that this all-too-human deity is ridiculously attempting to magnify the struggle as well as his performance in it,[14] often subtly undercutting his own narrative. At 31-32, for instance, he trenchantly admits that he entertained the possibility of withdrawing from the fight and that he had perhaps been too much of a bragger: *puduit modo magna locutum / cedere* (‘I had spoken words of pride and so was too ashamed to withdraw’). The most striking element, however, of the god’s anthropomorphic depiction is indeed his human aspect. The most immediate literary precedent of the fight was probably Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*, where the god took on the appearance of a bull for the entire duration of

[9] Boyd 2022, 8. Green 2003, 41 sees the connection between Pirithous’ comment, Lelex’s intervention and the divine nature of their host and argues that Pirithous’ scepticism dumbfounds the audience precisely because they fear Achelous’ reaction: cf. Boyd 2022, 8.
[10] Cf. Otis 1970, 203.
[11] Secci 2009, 34.
[12] Speech-making can often be taken as a sign of the character’s humanity in the *Metamorphoses*. Cf. Fantham 2004, 18.
[13] Ironically contrasted with his previous confidence in his physical abilities in book 8: Kenney 2011, 395.
[14] Secci 2009, 36. The process of Achelous’ humanisation began already in book 8, with his cave resembling villas owned by wealthy Romans: cf. Due 1974, 80; Kenney 2011, 359.

the struggle (cf. ὑψίκερω τετραόρου / φάσμα ταύρου, ‘the appearance of a four-legged, high-horned bull’, 508-509).[15]

As we will see later with Hercules, turning the spotlight on the body is an important humanising procedure that emphasises man’s susceptibility to suffering and pain. As Secci has it: ‘Hercules wins the struggle comprehensively and permanently maims his divine opponent, who is left in the very human condition of nursing his wounds and trying to see the positive side of the events. Such an ending thus gives more substance to the sad introduction at *Met*. 9.1-5ff: Achelous’ attempt to soften the blow would fit an inferior human opponent much better than the *dominus aquarum*’.[16] At the same time, it is the continuous and detailed description of Achelous’ all-too-human body that receives the attention of Ovid in recounting the first part of the fight, starting from the lively picture of the river-god taking off his ‘green clothes’ (*viridem… vestem*, 32).[17] Almost cinematically, we hear of his neck (*modo cervicem*, 37), twinkling legs (*modo crura micantia*, 37), breast (*mea pectora*, 51), arms (*bracchia*, 52), back (*tergoque*, 54), arms again, now described as covered in sweat (*sudore fluentia multo / bracchia*, 57-58), whole body (*corpore*, 58), neck again (*cervice*, 60), knees (*genu*, 61), and finally his mouth biting the dust (*harenas ore momordi*, 61). Ovid-Achelous resorts to an iterated, almost hammering use of polyptoton to visualise the (human) bodies of both Hercules and Achelous pressing against each other and mirroring each other: *cum pede pes iunctus, totoque ego pectore pronus / et digitos digitis et frontem fronte premebam* (‘[we were] joined toe to toe; leaning forwards with my whole chest, I pressed my fingers against his fingers and my brow against his brow’, 44-45).[18] Even when Achelous decides to change his shape into that of a snake, Ovid cannot refrain from underlining the ironic and stark contrast between his status as a god and his human form: *inferior virtute*

[15] Kenney 2011, 399. Sophocles’ Deianira does speak about the different shapes of Achelous, but he is never completely anthropomorphic: φοιτῶν ἐναργὴς ταῦρος, ἄλλοτ᾽ αἰόλος / δράκων ἑλικτός, ἄλλοτ᾽ ἀνδρείῳ κύτει / βούπρῳρος (‘a roaming bull, then a writhing, gleaming snake, then again a man with the face of a bull’, 11-13).
[16] Secci 2009, 46. Notice Achelous’ emphasis on his panting and his general difficulty to withstand Hercules: this diverges from Sophocles’ version (ἦν δὲ μετώπων ὀλόεντα / πλήγματα καὶ στόνος ἀμφοῖν, ‘there were horrible blows on the foreheads and groaning from both’, 521-522).
[17] Anderson 1978, 420.
[18] Cf. Verg. *Aen*. 10.361 *haeret pede pes densus viro vir*.

meas devertor ad artes / elaborque viro longum formatus in anguem ('defeated in virtue, I turn to my skills, and I slip away from that man taking the shape of a snake', 62-63). As has been pointed out, *viro* means *ei* and refers to Hercules, but is used in conjunction with *virtute* to obliquely comment on Achelous' loss of masculinity and humanity—which in its turn ironically clashes with his previous pompous self-presentation as a god.[19]

The Animal Achelous

With a touch of typically Ovidian humour, Achelous realises that he is *inferior virtute* (62), inferior in 'manliness' but also in 'humanity'. The acknowledgment of such inferiority paradoxically leads him to adopt even conceptually 'inferior' forms—first that of a snake, and then that of a bull. While his snake form was alluded to by Sophocles' Deianira, in the *Trachiniae* Achelous fights mainly as a terrifying and powerful bull, and it was probably as a bull that the Ovidian reader was expecting Achelous to fight. Instead, Ovid has Achelous beginning the fight in human shape, as we saw, and alludes to his following transformation as a bull in an interesting simile at lines 46-49, right after lingering on the striking spectacle of Hercules' and Achelous' all-too-human bodies mirroring each other:

> non aliter vidi fortes concurrere tauros,
> cum pretium pugnae toto nitidissima saltu
> expetitur coniunx; spectant armenta paventque
> nescia quem maneat tanti victoria regni.
>
> 'Just so have I seen strong bulls charge together, when the most beautiful heifer
> in all the glade is the prize for the fight; the herds watch in terror, not knowing
> who will win so great a kingdom'

It has not escaped notice that this strongly evokes the famous Virgilian simile in book 7 of the *Aeneid* (715-719) comparing Turnus and Aeneas to two enemy bulls charging into battle for the rule of the grove.[20] In that context, the grandeur and significance of the last duel,

[19] Anderson 1978 *ad loc*; Hill 1999, 137; Kenney 2011, 401.
[20] Kenney 2011, 399.

foundational to the epic as a whole, is magnified by the serious analogy that compares the two heroes to fierce bulls and focuses on the reaction of both herd and herdsmen. Differently from Virgil, however, the metaphor here is trivialising and contributes to Achelous' ridiculous characterisation in a complex way. The metaphor clearly foreshadows Achelous' upcoming transformation into a bull which will prove a failure.[21] In general, the simile humorously pokes fun at Achelous' animal nature and at his animal shape, which the audience must have been expecting since his appearance in the poem in book 8. The metaphor does not magnify, then, the two fierce opponents in the same way it did with Turnus and Aeneas; rather, it obliquely comments on the violence and animality of the fight (an oblique comment that we have to take, as we will see, as relevant both to Achelous and Hercules). And yet, while humorously assimilating the two contestants to animals, Ovid adds a further twist to the comparison: Virgil's frightened *iuvencae* (12.718) become Ovid's *coniunx*—a humorous and humanising term first applied to animals by Ovid.[22] Achelous and Hercules, both human in shape, become here humorously assimilated to two bulls in a metaphor that underscores their bestiality and yet slightly humanises the animals to which they are compared.

Achelous' transformation into a snake (64-65) gives Ovid the chance to compare this episode to Hercules' heroic exploits and establish a connection between his role as an *alexikakos*, a civiliser and slayer of monsters/wild animals, and his role now in the fight (67-76):

> 'cunarum labor est angues superare mearum'
> dixit, 'et ut vincas alios, Acheloe, dracones,
> pars quota Lernaeae serpens eris unus echidnae?[...]
> quid fore te credas, falsum qui versus in anguem
> arma aliena moves, quem forma precaria celat?'

> 'It was the labour of my cradle to triumph over snakes,'
> He said, 'even if you happened to be the strongest of all serpents, Achelous,
> would you not be just a small part of the Lernaean hydra, being one snake only?
> [...] And what do you think will happen to you, turned into a fake snake,

[21] Galinsky 1972b, 97; Kenney 2011, 399.
[22] Galinsky 1972b, 97; Bömer 1977, 289; Hill 1999, 137.

wielding arms that you do not own and hiding in precarious shape?’

While *precaria* denotes a “sense of instability” and suggests that “Achelous’ tenure of the snake form is no more secure than it would have been if he had won it by prayer from a capricious divinity”,[23] Hercules’ taunt compares Achelous to both the serpents that he strangled in his cradle and the hydra of Lerna, and thus presents the river-god as the latest addition to the list of monsters that he tamed.[24] Moreover, Ovid seizes on the opportunity to connect the stories of Achelous and Nessus, and compares the two in 98-106, thus presenting the two ‘monsters’ as equivalent. At the same time, Ovid’s account of the fight draws heavily not only on the *Aeneid* as a whole and on the last fight between Aeneas and Turnus, but also, and specifically, on the encounter between Hercules and Cacus from book 8 of the *Aeneid*. As Ovid’s Achelous metamorphoses into a snake only after Hercules’ fourth attempt and is compared to the hydra, so Virgil’s Hercules overpowers Cacus after his fourth try and is then praised for having slayed the hydra;[25] Hercules chokes Achelous “just as Hercules had choked Cacus as if Cacus was a snake”.[26] In evoking Hercules’ civilising powers against the forces of wildness and monstrosity, both in the direct metaphor and in the allusion to the Hercules-Cacus episode in book 8 of the *Aeneid*, Ovid invites us to see Achelous as another example of the forces of animality tamed and civilised by the hero. All this, of course, while also humorously humanising the ‘monster’ and framing the episode within the precedent (and following) discussion of divine nature.

The Fluid Achelous

Achelous’s character, just like the element it embodies, is constructed and painted as essentially fluid. This is not simply metaphorical, and Ovid takes great pleasure in building his

[23] Anderson 1978, 422-423; Hill 1999, 138.
[24] What is more, the myth of the hydra is usually taken to be emblematic of Heracles’ victory over the forces of water: cf. Salowey 2021. Lactantius and Servius did interpret the hydra as a symbol of the swamp around Lerna which Heracles drained and ‘conquered’. If Ovid was already aware of the symbology, here the reference to the hydra would be further significant and appropriate to the river-god.
[25] Galinsky 1972a, 158.
[26] Galinsky 1972b, 98.

characterisation around his literal fluidity. It is exactly river-gods and sea nymphs that constitute a favourite Ovidian element of destabilisation of identity and categorisations. As Feeney brilliantly argued, Ovid takes pleasure in emphasising "the tension between the anthropomorphic deity and its natural element when that element is water, so mutable and resistant to shape"; this is obvious especially in the poet's treatment of Achelous, who, for instance, speaks as if he wished to protect Theseus from the dangers of his waters and as if he had nothing to do with them.[27] "The more Achelous concentrates on the harmony between his personality and his element—Feeney observes—the more difficult it becomes for the reader to overlook the split".[28] Achelous' paradoxical identification as natural river and (anthropomorphic) god is emphasised; the contradiction is not accepted but exposed by Ovid.[29]

Moreover, if, as has been suggested, shapeshifters in the *Metamorphoses* inhabit a liminal space between divine and mortal (since the gods in the poem are able only on occasion to change shape), Achelous thus appears far from assimilable to a god.[30] And this at the end of a book fully devoted to the importance of religiousness and to the acknowledgment of divine nature, and at the beginning of another that starts with Achelous' refusal to give way to a mortal and reaches its climax with the first deification of the poem. I have proved, however, that this fluid, metamorphic figure is carefully and subtly shown in the epic to oscillate between not only human and immortal, but also between human and animal, divine and animal.[31] The general instability of his figure is to be finally perceived in the humorous split between his identity as a river and his anthropomorphic shape described by Feeney. As it has been suggested, finally, it is not only the shapeshifters' power that is different from that of the gods; it is really the fluidity of

[27] Boyd 2022, 8.
[28] Feeney 1991, 233-235. Cf. Anderson 1978, 421 on 9.57: "the river-god's limbs flow not with usual water, but with sweat caused by his vain efforts" (cf. also 9.39-41). Cf. also Solodow 1988, 94; Li Causi 2000, 51.
[29] Li Causi 2000, 44.
[30] Forbes Irving 1990, 171; Fantham 1993, 21. Hercules is said to have fought against another shapeshifter at 12.536-576. There Periclymenus, like Mestra in Achelous' narrative, is human and sympathetic, while Hercules is not: cf. Fletcher 2005, 313.
[31] Notice the hybrid iconography of Achelous as a man-headed bull in archaic Greece: Isler 1970, 123-191; Gais 1978, 356.

their entire being that differentiates them from the disguising gods of the *Metamorphoses*.[32] Achelous' mythical identification as a body of water, its fluidity, both literal and metaphorical, the oscillation of its figure between divine, human, and animal, seem particularly appealing to Ovid's reflection on identity[33]—one that should be appreciated for its humorous tones, but whose serious implications should not be overlooked.

Hercules: Human or not Human?

While it is impossible to give a comprehensive account of the development of Hercules' figure in Greek and Roman myth,[34] some elements of his characterisation are recurrent and widespread. Chief among them, Hercules' role as a primal contributor to the establishment of human civilisation is perspicuous: as Hawes says, "for all his violence, Heracles is nonetheless a civiliser".[35] That Hercules stands as the civilising forces of humanity against wildness is evident from the myths of the labours and the *parerga* dealing with the hero's encounter with monsters and savage animals,[36] but also with inanimate natural forces—among which bodies of water seem to play a privileged role in his myth.[37] As a tamer of both animals/monsters and the flowing forces of nature, Hercules' status as a hero thus became overlapping with his role as a civiliser, and, ultimately, with his metaphorical value as a symbol of humanity.[38]

In his larger-than-life yet human outlook, Hercules did not differ considerably from Theseus, Perseus, and Jason, also standing for the civilising forces of humanity. Nor are his divine genealogy and catabasis unique to him. His final victory over death also does not single him out as special. But Hercules is unique in being the only hero to be properly deified[39] and become

[32] Forbes Irving 1990, 171; Fantham 1993, 21.
[33] Feeney 1991, 235. Cf. Li Causi 2000, 42-43, 55.
[34] Loraux 1990, 22. Cf. Galinsky 1972a; Padilla 1998; Blanshard 2006.
[35] Papadopoulou 2005, 5-6; Hawes 2021, 402; Barker and Christensen 2021, 290; Anderson 2021, 383.
[36] Hawes 2021, 402.
[37] Ibid.; Anderson 2021, 382; Romero-González 2021, 270.
[38] Galinsky 1972a, 149; Li Causi 2021, 47. The same applies to Hercules' allegorical role established since Prodicus. Cf. Hawes 2021, 403.
[39] Barker and Christensen 2021, 292. Cf. Shapiro 1983, 9.

object of religious cult,[40] to the point that his "ambiguous status, hero *and* god, presented a dilemma of ritual protocol".[41] Papadopoulou argues in her quick summary of the history of Hercules' figure throughout the centuries that "an aspect of Heracles which is evident in every examination of him is his fundamental ambivalence", a type of multi-layered double-sidedness that nevertheless expresses itself mainly in his mortal-immortal nature.[42] While Hercules' religious role progressively declined in Hellenistic times, it was revived and magnified in Roman times,[43] when, however, critics such as Euhemerus, Diodorus, and Lucretius also questioned the divine nature of the hero.[44]

Ovid devotes space to Hercules' apotheosis, a choice that runs counter to that of Sophocles in *Trachiniae*.[45] In the past, scholars have entirely accepted the seriousness of Hercules' deification and his metamorphosis into a god, to the point that Heinze spoke of the 'sublimity of the divine' in the episode and Fränkel assimilated the religious elements in the narrative to features of the 'theology of early Christianity'.[46] This view, however, is complicated by the Heraclean ambiguity that Papadopoulou rightly detects in the figure of the hero at large and that Ovid explores in connection with his immortal yet mortal nature. The wrestling match with Achelous, in particular, is a focal point of tensions where both opponents claim divine nature for themselves. Achelous' divine nature, as we have seen, is very much at the centre of the narrative, and the thematic progress in book 8 invites us to see Achelous' tale as the continuation of a series of tales on the powers of the gods (*turpe deum mortali cedere*). But the immortal half of Hercules' being complicates the picture (*nondum erat ille deus*). The entire struggle is anticipated not only by Achelous' boastful claims of divinity, but also on Hercules' divine genealogy, which the hero himself employs to persuade Oeneus (*ille Iovem socerum dare*

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[40] Shapiro 1983, 9.
[41] Shapiro 1983, 10, 13-15 and Pindar's ἥρως θεὸς (*Nem.* 3.22). The difficulties mainly consisted in the difference between rituals reserved to god cults and those dedicated to hero cults. Cf. Paus. 2.10.1; Hdt. 2.44.
[42] Papadopoulou 2005, 4; Romero-González 2021, 274.
[43] Galinsky 1972a, 126.
[44] Galinsky 1972a, 130-131. Cicero euhemerises Hercules' apotheosis at *Nat. D.* 2.24.
[45] Nethercut 2016, 129; Romero-González 2021, 274.
[46] Heinze 1919, 316; Fränkel 1945, 81; Bömer 1977, 278.

se…/…referebat, 'he referred to giving Jupiter to her as father-in-law', 14-15). Achelous' rhetorical strategies, which aim at presenting the fight as one between mortal and immortal, thus focus on undercutting Hercules' claims to divinity in lines 21-26. It is not simply that he is a man and 'not yet a god'; as the story of the hero unravels, Ovid unambiguously refers to his double nature: the point in Jupiter's speech in the council is exactly that Hercules is endowed with the natures of both mortal and immortal (248-256). His two parts (*materna…parte*, 'in his maternal part', 251; *parte…meliore*, 'in his best part', 269) have been coinciding in his being from the beginning. As it has been recognised recently, Ovid underscores the difficulty with which Hercules is admitted to the Olympus,[47] and in so doing he emphasises his liminal nature between man and god. Ovid then wittily makes the struggle between Achelous and Hercules ambiguous,[48] and this ambiguity is complicated as well by Achelous' hybrid nature. Is a god fighting against a god? A god against a monster? A man against a god? A man against a monster?

While Hercules' apotheosis does occupy a privileged position in the book, it becomes hard to agree with Heinze and Fränkel when noticing the way Ovid deals with the divine apparatus at the moment of Hercules' apotheosis.[49] Far from conferring a spiritual aura, the *augusta…gravitate* ('august dignity', 270) that he assigns to the moment of the hero's deification, Ovid imbues the council of the gods with humanising humour. It has been noted that Ovid describes the council as a typical meeting of the Roman senate; "he applies to the deities the class distinctions found in Roman society; already in their first appearance (1.171-74), they are divided into *nobiles* and plebs".[50] The same happens here, and Jupiter speaks as if he were "the *princeps* thanking the Senate for a favour done on behalf of a member of his family".[51] In the middle of the first apotheosis of the poem, Ovid seizes on the opportunity to continue his typical

[47] Nethercut 2016, 139.
[48] The comparison between the two (with its ensuing tension) is articulated in these terms also when Achelous is gone from the narrative. The river-god's confrontation with Pirithous, *Ixione natus* (cf. *supra*), had centred on the demonstration of divine power; in the Nessus narrative, however, it is Hercules who becomes the spokesman of piety against a son of Ixion (123-124).
[49] Galinsky 1972b, 103.
[50] Galinsky 1975,170; Tissol 2002, 306.
[51] Kenney 2011, 422-423.

process of humanisation of the gods. Hercules, then, is about to leave the world of men behind to join an Olympus where gods speak exactly like men on earth.

The same humanising humour reduces Hercules' heroism. While Galinsky believes that humour does not impair Hercules' heroism in the narrative of his fight with Achelous,[52] humour belittles and humanises the hero, both in the Achelous narrative and beyond. It is not only his apotheosis,[53] but the general treatment of his figure that undercuts the seriousness of the divine hero. For example, talking about Hercules' ironic reference to the Lernaean hydra, Solodow observes: "Mythology so handled is brought and kept firmly within the realm of the familiar. [...] by giving life to the inanimate and rendering the divine human, Ovid makes mythology the everyday, flesh-and-blood world of his reader. [...] Ovid's version of mythology intimates that the past was not larger than life: it was like the present. There were no heroes: mankind was made up of men like ourselves. [...] The humour in the poem pares away the abstract and the exaggerated; it keeps things concrete, small, and human".[54]

In many ways, Hercules does remain a powerful symbol of humanity and mortality in book 9. This does not simply mean that Ovid belittles his divine status through irony; instead, he emerges as a symbol of mortality especially through his death. His agony is recounted in grim detail: the same body that had functioned as a mirror to Achelous' own human shape (cf. *supra*) is described as it is consumed and destroyed by the fire (166-175): Ovid's spotlight is turned onto his body (*membris*, 168), mangled limbs (*laceros artus*, 169), great bones (*grandia…ossa*, 169), blood (*ipse cruor*, 170), breast (*praecordia*, 172), his whole body again (*toto…corpore*, 173), sinews (*nervi*, 174), marrow (*medullis*, 174), and hands (*palmas*, 175). In Segal's insightful words, "to speak of the body in classical literature is to speak of mortality. The body is the constant reminder of our creatureliness, our kingship with other living, and dying beings, and so our distance from the undying gods".[55]

[52] Galinsky 1972a, 159.
[53] Kenney 2011, xxxii.
[54] Solodow 1988, 108-109. Cf. also Otis 1970, 200.
[55] Segal 1998, 13.

The Animal Hercules

Ovid, however, does not limit himself to lingering on the ambiguity of Hercules' being and he complicates the picture of the hero's identity through subtle allusions to his sub-human nature. Hercules' uncontrolled hypermasculinity became problematic already in classical Athens. The avenues for philosophical and literary meaning, however, were diverse: poets and philosophers made sense of Hercules' 'outsized physical prowess—the problematic core of his heroism'[56] in various ways, allegorising his strength as moral fortitude[57] or, like Euripides and Seneca, turning it into a source of tragic pathos.[58] To an extent, Hercules' hypermasculinity and corporality made him comic. It was paradoxically Hercules' own exceptionality as a man that made him a symbol of human transgression—an unflattering and problematising part of his symbolism that laid the foundations for his fortune in comedy, where he was represented as a glutton and a drunkard. Ovid humorously alludes to the comic tradition in what is supposed to be the most serious moment in book 9 and fundamental to the story of Hercules' apotheosis, i.e., the moment of his death. His proverbial gluttony echoes in the sarcastic metaphor that compares the dying hero lying on the pyre to a drunken banqueter (237-238): *haud alio vultu, quam si conviva iaceres / inter plena meri redimitus pocula sertis* ('just as if you reclined in a banquet with garlands on your head amid cups full of undiluted wine').[59] As Galinsky has it, "he of the big appetite, who spent all his life drinking and eating, should pass away accordingly".[60]

What is more, Hercules' comic transgressions paradoxically allowed his character to be specifically assimilated to animals and made him a favourite figure of satyr-play.[61] His mythical

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[56] Hawes 2021, 405.
[57] Ibid.; Galinsky 1972a, 190.
[58] In Seneca's *Hercules Furens* Hercules' hybristic depiction is compounded with an emphasis on his strength: *iter ruina quaeret et vacuo volet / regnare mundo, robore experto tumet / et posse caelum viribus vinci suis / didicit ferendo* (67-70). Cf. Galinsky 1972a, 169, 174 and *Constant.* 2.1-2.
[59] Galinsky 1972b, 102; Galinsky 1975, 103.
[60] Galinsky 1972a, 159. Gais 1978, 369 notices the similarity in the iconography of Hercules as banqueter and Achelous as banqueter, suggesting a relationship of assimilation between the two iconographies. If this were to be true, Ovid could be alluding to Achelous here.
[61] Papadopoulou 2005, 7.

strength, as well as his comic traits associated to his physicality, often made his character strangely similar to that of his bestial and monstrous antagonists.[62] The problematic violence of his figure made him, in some circumstances, an ambiguous character 'transgressing the borders between civilization and wilderness as well as between humanity and bestiality'.[63] His violence was particularly problematic in the narrative of his madness, especially in Euripides' *Herakles*, where the hero's murder of his children deprives his previous heroic exploits of meaning.[64] Acutely aware of this, Ovid disseminates small yet humorous elements of Hercules' bestiality throughout book 9.

Achelous' challenge and taunt to Hercules had been cut short, within the river-god's narrative, by the hero's brisk comment: *melior mihi dextera lingua / dummodo pugnando superem, tu vince loquendo* ('my right hand is better than my tongue. You can be better than me at speaking, as long as I am better than you at fighting', 29-30). While Hercules' impulsivity, as well as his physicality, do not constitute a problem here,[65] they become more emphasised in the Nessus episode.[66] There is something here about his blind resort to strength and lack of consideration that is not entirely flattering. For instance, boasting that he has already defeated a river (Achelous), he dives right into the river that blocks his way without pausing to reflect on the best way to cross it (or on the potential danger of leaving Deianira alone with Nessus): '*quandoquidem coepi, superentur flumina' dixit / nec dubitat nec qua sit clementissimus amnis / quaerit et obsequio deferri spernit aquarum* ('"since I have already begun", he said, "let us triumph over the rivers": he neither hesitated nor looked for the calmest spot of the river to cross, and he disdained to be carried by favourable waters', 115-117). In doing so, Galinksy notes, he is

[62] Anderson 2021, 386: 'the bestial or semi-bestial aspect, the similarity in some respects between Hercules and his arch-enemies the centaurs, and not least the strongly burlesque aspects of so many episodes, make for a continuing enigma'.
[63] Kirk 1977, 16; Loraux 1990, 24; Papadopoulou 2005, 7. Cf. Barker and Christensen 2021, 298 on Hercules' antisocial behaviour as a sign of his sub-human nature; Li Causi 2021, 64.
[64] Li Causi 2021, 61, 64.
[65] But cf. *congrediturque ferox* (31). *Ferox* is applied both to Nessus later (101) and twice to Cacus in Ov. *Fast*. I 550, 570.
[66] Galinsky 1972b, 98-99.

implicitly giving Nessus the chance to run away with Deianira on his back,[67] and is outsmarted by the savage, semi-bestial centaur. The story of the monstrous Achelous had foreshadowed Hercules' encounter with the feral Nessus in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, and had then introduced the fundamental issue of the opposition between man and animal;[68] in Ovid, instead, the two stories remain juxtaposed but the polarity becomes way more unstable than in the tragedy. These terrifying monsters are really humane hosts and logical beings;[69] Hercules, on the other hand, acts like a strongman and is somewhat pathetic.

What is more, Ovid takes the opportunity of narrating Hercules' death, with the ensuing apotheosis, to offer his personal take on the *topos* of the madness of the hero—as mentioned above, an ambiguous part of the Herculean myth that also provided space for problematising the hero's violence. It is then not surprising to find explicit metaphors assimilating Hercules to animals as Ovid tells of Hercules' manic agony; all this, of course, right before the supposedly serious and extraordinary apotheosis sanctioning the hero's transformation into an Olympian.

Just before he dies, Hercules is indeed compared to a bull in a second bull simile (204-206):

> dixit perque altam saucius Oeten
> haud aliter graditur, quam si venabula taurus
> corpore fixa gerat, factique refugerit auctor.
>
> 'He spoke and went around high Oeta, wounded, just as a bull carries around the spears that have transfixed it in its body, while who is responsible for the wound has fled'

Ovid's witty metaphor obliquely compares him both to Nessus, in the specific reference to the shaft that has pierced the body of the animal, and to the bull shape of Achelous. Far from being mere humour, Ovid is inspired by a heavily problematic comparison in Euripides'

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[67] Galinsky 1972a, 159.
[68] DuBois 1991, 96-97, especially 102-103: "the hybrid creatures Achelous and Nessos are excluded from the circuit of exchange of women. Their violence marks them as outside the circuit of culture". Cf. Easterling 1982, 5.
[69] Stoessl 1945, 80, according to whom Nessus "behaves like a Venetian gondolier". Cf. the humanising portrayal of the centaurs, especially Cyllarus and Hylonome, in book 12: DeBrohun 2004, 437ff.; Reed 2013, 401.

Herakles, where the hero’s frantic violence in the throes of Lyssa (madness) indeed allows Euripides to compare him to a bull (867-870):[70]

> ἣν ἰδού· καὶ δὴ τινάσσει κρᾶτα βαλβίδων ἄπο
> καὶ διαστρόφους ἑλίσσει σῖγα γοργωποὺς κόρας.
> ἀμπνοὰς δ’ οὐ σωφρονίζει, ταῦρος ὣς ἐς ἐμβολὴν,
> δεινὰ μυκᾶται δέ.
>
> See! Look at how he tosses his head already at the outset and rolls his flashing eyes from side to side saying nothing! And he cannot check his panting like a bull about to charge, and he bellows terribly.

As has been noted, this is part of a larger assimilation in the play of Hercules’ figure to those of his monstrous enemies, a process of animalisation particularly visible in Euripides’ description of Hercules’ madness and uncontrollable violence.[71] However strictly we read Ovid’s Euripidean intertext, it is undeniable that his simile, while imbued with humour, activates a deeper level of meaning. The metaphor indeed anticipates Hercules’ murder of his friend and servant Lichas, a completely meaningless death given Lichas’ utter innocence, of which the responsibility can only be ascribed to the hero’s violence and aversion to speech. Hercules is described as roaring, groaning, and uprooting trees (207-210), the last of which finds a striking parallel in Ovid’s portrayal of Cacus in *Fast*. 1.570. Hercules sees Lichas and ‘with the pain building up all his rage’ (212; notice the word *rabies* and its animalising touch)[72] asks whether he is the one to blame. Ovid describes the incident by indulging in the depiction of Lichas’ fear, again presenting Hercules as flawed by the same impulsivity and lack of consideration that he had also exhibited in normal, previous circumstances. Lichas tries to speak and explain (*timide verba excusantia dicit*, ‘shy, he tried to excuse himself’, 215), but Hercules does not let him finish (*dicentem*

[70] Notice that Ovid is comparing Hercules not simply to a bull, but to a wild bull: cf. Bömer 1977, 340, who also does not find a model for the simile here. To my knowledge, the case for a relationship of intertextuality has not been made before, but it is likely, given Ovid’s patent gesture towards the Euripidean Heracles in 203-204, and the atheistic scepticism of Hercules at 203 f. evoking Euripides’ Heracles at 1340-1346: cf. Galinsky 1972b, 101.
[71] Li Causi 2021, 66.
[72] Cf. *Met*. 1.234, 4.503, 11.369, 11.370, 14.66, 15.521.

genibusque manus adhibere parantem / corripit, 'he snatched him as he was still speaking and attempting to clasp his knees', 216) and violently hurls him into the sea, killing him (216-218).

It is clear that the bull simile thus foreshadows Hercules' savage behaviour; it also invites us to reconsider the meaning of the first bull simile used in the narrative of the wrestling match with Achelous. While it anticipated Achelous' bull shape, it is possible to see that a glimpse of its animalising function must have been transferred from the hybrid god to the hero. The violence of the fight would then become much less celebrated and more problematic in Ovid than Virgil.

The 'animalising' procedure activated by both bull similes is in fact in line with Ovid's trivialising use of metaphors derived from the animal world and applied to the gods. As Galinsky noted, Ovid does not simply humanise the gods to create humour; it is really their 'sub-human' behaviour, compounded by their animal transformations, that Ovid showcases so as to deprive them of their *maiestas*.[73] Metaphors and similes play a fundamental role in the poem in this process of animalisation of the gods: the lustful Mercury gazing at the girls in the Panathenaic procession is compared to a greedy kite in a way that debases the god.[74] Even when the gods' behaviour is not directly despicable, their assimilation to animals, be it metaphorical or metamorphic, disturbs their majesty and creates humorous and disquieting effects: this is the case for Jupiter, who abducts Europa after transforming himself into a playful bull that leaps around waiting to be patted and kissed.[75] The bull simile(s) can be framed perfectly within this picture of the animalising function of metaphors in the *Metamorphoses*. Less disquieting but still witty is the final metaphor applied to Hercules at the beginning of his apotheosis (266-270):

> utque novus serpens posita cum pelle senecta
> luxuriare solet squamaque nitere recenti,
> sic, ubi mortales Tirynthius exuit artus,
> parte sui meliore viget maiorque videri

[73] Galinsky 1975, 162.
[74] Galinsky 1975, 164-165.
[75] Ibid.

> coepit et augusta fieri gravitate verendus.
>
> 'as a snake uses to revel and shines bright in its new scales after stripping off its old age with its skin; so when Hercules stripped off his body, he gained strength in his better part, started looking bigger and becoming awful in his august dignity'

Far from being a simple reference to the poison of the hydra that is killing him, the simile also connects again the hero to his long-gone antagonist Achelous and the *forma precaria* much spurned by Hercules.[76] Just as Achelous' snake form was 'precarious' and—according to Hercules—not the real form of the god's being, Hercules' mutating skin seems to characterise his previous mortal form as also false. This, however, is contradicted by *parte sui meliore*, which presents a picture of Hercules' identity just as hybrid as Achelous'. As often in the *Metamorphoses*, the presence of verbs and nouns denoting skins, induments, and clothes (here *exuit* and *pelle*) does not simply point at the falseness of appearances and forms, but rather at their precariousness.[77] Forms, be they divine, human, or animal, appear in the poem to be unstable, like clothes and skins to be continually worn and taken off from an undefined substance that constitutes identity:[78] it is the uroboric quality of the image of the serpent, shedding its skin not once, but perpetually, that undercuts the stability of Hercules' new condition.[79] Hercules does not simply takes on a different status: bull, serpent, man, god—just like Achelous, he is perpetually shifting between them.[80] Just as Propertius' Hercules becomes assimilated to Cacus,[81] so does Ovid's Hercules shadow the hybrid, undefined, fluid Achelous.

[76] Cf. Hill 1999, 138 on *precaria*.
[77] Li Causi 2022, 126-128.
[78] Ibid. *Contra*, cf. Galinsky 1999, 105, arguing that the *Metamorphoses* mostly reinforce the idea of stability of the self.
[79] Hutchinson 2008, 226-227 parallels Hercules' narrative with Iphis', the last in the book, and notes that Iphis' story questions the firmness of the division between hierarchical categories (in that case, male and female).
[80] Cf. the recent reconsideration of the Caeneus episode by Northrop 2020, 35: Caeneus' hybridity is underscored by their confrontation with the equally biform centaurs. Notice that Caeneus is explicitly compared to Hercules at 12.536-541. Cf. also Spencer 2001.
[81] Spencer 2001, 270.

The Divine Emperor?

Hercules' depiction as human, superhuman and subhuman and the narrative of his fight with Achelous do not simply constitute a literary issue. While the complexity of both characters adds to the humour and wit of the poet, it is important to perceive how such disturbances of categorisations can permeate, subtly yet cleverly, the political dimension of the poem. The final line in the narrative of Hercules' apotheosis, with its tantalising *augusta … gravitate*, introduces the *vexata quaestio*: is Augustus alluded to here?[82]

In a series of articles, Galinsky argued that by the time Ovid wrote the *Metamorphoses* Hercules had become an Augustan symbol.[83] Although we do not have evidence to argue that Augustus himself wanted to promote such a connection, Hercules is often connected to Augustus, directly or indirectly, in the poetry of Horace and Vergil. However, Galinsky is most persuasive in his analysis of the relationship of intertextuality between the *Aeneid* and Ovid's Hercules in the *Metamorphoses*. Finding a series of connections in the *Aeneid* approximating Aeneas to the Greek hero,[84] Galinsky argues that Virgil's narrative of the fight between Hercules and Cacus anticipates the final battle between Aeneas and Turnus.

Ovid's Hercules is fundamental to Galinsky's argument: he seems to have read the connection between the two stories and to have been aware of the equation Hercules=Aeneas=Augustus. Indeed, the episode of Hercules' fight with Achelous resembles and echoes in many respects the encounter of Aeneas and Turnus (cf. the bull simile above), but also takes elements from the fight between Hercules and Cacus in the same book (cf. *supra*).[85] Ovid thus seems aware of the Augustan connotations of the figure of Hercules, reading the narrative of the fight between Hercules and Cacus as a fundamental political episode in the poem.[86] What is more, Hercules seems to have been not simply a flattering and apt parallel for

[82] Fränkel 1945, 212; Galinsky 1972b, 104.
[83] Galinsky 1972a, 1972b, 1975. Cf. Loar 2021, 507-520.
[84] Galinsky 1972b, 107.
[85] Galinsky 1972b, 94-98.
[86] Cf. Loar 2021, 512. Cf. Ov. *Fast*. 1.544-586 with Barchiesi 1997, 96-99.

Augustus because of its pacifying merits (*vindice terrae,* 241).[87] Rather, his apotheosis may have provided grounds for Augustus' superhuman qualities in life and his literal deification after his death, as Hor. *Carm*. 3.9-12 also suggests.[88]

On the other hand, Galinsky's argument has not been entirely accepted,[89] and it has been put into question that Ovid's take on the Hercules-Cacus story in *Fasti* might have (anti-)Augustan connotations: while recognising the allusion to Augustus in Virgil, Propertius, and possibly Livy, for instance, Holzberg takes the Ovidian retelling of the story as devoid of political polemic, and unusually serious for the poet's standards.[90] While it is wise to advise caution in always reading Hercules in Augustan literature as a symbol of the princeps, and even more so in the case of his apotheosis for chronological reasons,[91] the story of Hercules' *alexikakia* seems to have been particularly laden with political connotations. As Clauss observes about the Ovidian retelling of the Hercules-Cacus myth in *Fasti*, Ovid juxtaposes the prediction of the apotheoses of the members of the imperial family with the story of Hercules and the hero's apotheosis:[92] "what was implicit in the Virgilian, Livian, and Propertian accounts of the Hercules-Cacus narrative Ovid makes explicit: he identifies the unnamed ruler who is unequivocally associated with Hercules".[93]

While caution should be advised against too easily reading Ovid politically, Hercules *alexikakos* does seem to provide a special model for Augustus. I hope, however, to have shown that his characterisation in the *Metamorphoses* would be far from uncomplicated, should this be the case, and that Hercules' apotheosis would not simply pay homage to the emperor.[94] As in

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[87] Cf. Loar 2021. Cf. also Nethercut 2016, 137 and Cass. Dio 56.36.4-5, who considers Augustus better than Heracles.
[88] Loar 2021, 510; cf. Galinsky 1972b, 106; Harrison 2018, 340-341.
[89] Beek 2023, 196-197.
[90] Holzberg 2012, 460-61.
[91] But cf. Kenney 2011, 422.
[92] Clauss 2016, 77.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Cf. Barchiesi 1997, 99; Barchiesi 2005, clvii. Cf. also Tissol 2002 on humour in the political apotheoses of the poem.

Propertius' treatment of the episode of Hercules and Cacus in 4.9, Hercules' figure and its ambiguity is fundamentally destabilising.[95] In the *Metamorphoses*, the wrestling match between the Greek hero and Achelous, supposedly representative of the chaos and disorder that Hercules has subdued, is a focal point of ironies and tensions. Using a shapeshifter/water deity (both destabilising figure types in the *Metamorphoses*), Ovid's reflection on the instability of identity both problematises a clear-cut definition of the fight between Hercules and Achelous (human vs god? Beast vs god? God vs god? God vs beast?) and is projected from Achelous to Hercules. This 'Bakhtinian carnival', to say it with Segal,[96] should not simply be perceived as a brilliant example of literary wit: the examination of the Hercules-Achelous episode alerts us once more to the potential political significance of hierarchic play. Such an extra-literary, political significance, I maintain, should be perceived even if Hercules were not an *alter ego* of Augustus here. As Galinsky has it,[97] 'in the context of the Augustan religious revival his [Ovid's] emphasis on the comic [...] human qualities of the gods amounts to something more than an aesthetic exercise'. The same can be said about his divine hero, symbol of humanity, pacifier of monsters, himself mirroring the hybrid creature that confuses boundaries and hierarchies.

[95] Spencer 2001, 263-264 *et passim*.
[96] Segal 1998, 10.
[97] Galinsky 1975, 173.

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