

## P.OXY. 2078, VAT.GR. 2228, AND VERGIL'S CHARON

CHARON:        quisquis es, armatus qui nostra ad flumina tendis,  
                      fare age, quid venias, iam istinc et comprime gressum.  
                      umbrarum hic locus est, somni noctisque soporae:  
                      corpora viva nefas Stygia vectare carina.  
                      nec vero Alciden me sum laetatus euntem  
                      accepisse lacu, nec Thesea Pirithoumque,  
                      dis quamquam geniti atque invicti viribus essent.  
                      Tartareum ille manu custodem in vincla petivit  
                      ipsius a solio regis traxitque trementem;  
                      hi dominam Ditis thalamo deducere adorti. (Aen. 6.388–97)

Whoever you are who stride in arms towards my river, come, say why you approach. Check your pace; speak now, from where you are. This is the land of the Shades, of Sleep and of Drowsy Night. It is sin to carry any who still live on board the boat of Styx. I even regretted that I ever admitted Hercules to the lake when he came here, and Theseus too and Pirithous, though they were Sons of Gods and of unvanquished might. Hercules came to steal by force Hell's own watchdog . . . ; Theseus and Pirithous had undertaken to abduct Pluto's mistress from her own wedding-chamber.<sup>1</sup>

AEACUS:        ἔα, τί χρήμα; δέρχομαι σπουδῇ τινα  
                      δεῦρ' ἐγκονοῦντα καὶ μάλ' εὐτόλμῳ φρενί.  
                      εἰπεῖν δίκαιον, ὦ ξέν', ὅστις ὦν τόπους  
                      εἰς τοῦσδε χρίμπτη καὶ καθ' ἥντιν' αἰτίαν. (Vat.gr. 2228 f. 482<sup>r</sup>)

What is this? I see a figure hastening hither apace—bold is his spirit indeed! Stranger, you must tell me who you are that come near these regions, and what matter brings you.<sup>2</sup>

I shall argue the likelihood that Vergil took Aeacus' speech as his model for Charon's, as part of Aeneas' newly created journey through Vergil's expanded topography of Hades.

The four Greek verses just quoted, addressed by Aeacus to Heracles, and Heracles' reply in twelve, were first published separately by Rabe,<sup>3</sup> and then inserted by Page as verses 16–19 and 20–31 between surviving frs. 1 and 2 of *P.Oxy. 2078*,<sup>4</sup> to be ascribed in all likelihood to the lost *Pirithous* of Euripides, rather than to the slightly later Critias.<sup>5</sup>

*P.Oxy. 2078* provides the broader mythological context of Aeacus' speech. In the play's first fifteen extant verses belonging to fr. 1, which Page thinks survives from the Prologus, Pirithous reminisces on the punishment that was meted out to his father Ixion for having boasted of ravishing Cronus' daughter Hera. Pirithous doubtless

<sup>1</sup> Translation by W. F. Jackson Knight, *Virgil: The Aeneid* (Harmondsworth, 1956), 159.

<sup>2</sup> Text and translation by D. L. Page, *Select Papyri III* (Cambridge, MA, 1962), 120–5, at 122–3.

<sup>3</sup> H. Rabe, 'Aus Rhetoren-Handschriften', *RM* 63 (1908), 127–51, esp. 144–5. Rabe in all published eleven more verses than A. Nauck, fr. 591 (containing five verses of Heracles' reply) in *TrGF (Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta)*, 1889; repr. Hildesheim, 1964), 547.

<sup>4</sup> Page considered parts of frs. 1 and 2 and all of frs. 3–5 of *P.Oxy. 2078*, ed. A. S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 17 (London, 1927), 36–45 to be too incoherent for inclusion in his own edition (n. 2 above), from which he omits also frs. 592–600, ed. Nauck, *TrGF* 548–50.

<sup>5</sup> Ancient testimonies on authorship collected by Nauck, *TrGF* 546–50 and 770 are assessed in favour of Euripides by Page (n. 2), 120–3.

reflects upon the similarity between his father's deed and fate and his own, as he languishes in Hades for having attempted, with Theseus as his accomplice, to carry off from the underworld the goddess Persephone to be his bride. Then comes the challenge issued to Heracles by Aeacus in the speech fully quoted above. Heracles in answer explains that he has been despatched by Eurystheus to bring Cerberus alive from Hades to Mycenae's gates. Heracles must then have overcome Aeacus, for the extant verses 32–45 belonging to fr. 2 (in Page's renumbered edition) of *P.Oxy.* 2078 depict Theseus and Heracles conversing in the underworld. Verses 32–3 preserve the end of Theseus' speech, in which this hero remarks upon the shame attached to betraying a loyal friend held captive by the enemy (*δυσ[με]νῶς εἰλημμένον*)—an obvious allusion to Pirithous being held against his will in Hades.

In the usual version of their descent, both heroes were caught and punished in the world below either by being held magically on seats in the underworld<sup>6</sup> or by growing to a rock on which they sat,<sup>7</sup> and Theseus alone was rescued by Heracles.<sup>8</sup> But Theseus' declared aversion to betraying a friend is generally taken to signify that in this play Theseus had elected to stay with Pirithous. In the lost portion of his speech Theseus must have implored Heracles for deliverance of Pirithous in return for help in capturing Cerberus, a bargain which in verses 36ff. Heracles declines on the ground that Eurystheus would count his labour unfulfilled 'if he heard that you had joined me in performing it' (*εἴ μοι πύθοιτο ταῦτα συμπράξαντά σε*, 39).<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, and with another change to the usual ending—if the notice by schol. Tzet. *ap. Anecd. Oxon.* 3.359.22 is correct (*κατ' Εὐριπίδην σφίζονται καὶ δύο*)<sup>10</sup>—Heracles obliges Theseus by successfully rescuing both heroes.

In his speech at *Aen.* 6.388–97, also quoted above, Charon, albeit with changed sympathies as we shall see, refers to the same catabatic figures as feature in Euripides' *Pirithous*. Charon's citation of Theseus, Pirithous, and Heracles constitutes actually the second catalogue of such figures in *Aeneid* 6. Earlier, at 119–23, Aeneas recalls for the Sibyl those whose success in returning from Hades Aeneas wishes to emulate. Aeneas first names in this list Orpheus, a culture-hero, whom Vergil consistently casts in a favourable light; as choir-leader, even after death, he teaches the power of the lyre in Elysium (*Aen.* 6.645–7). Last named by Aeneas is Heracles who, being in myth both a blusterer and an Eleusinian initiate,<sup>11</sup> suits both lists. Between them Pollux fulfils an honourable role, descending and ascending so as to share his immortality with his

<sup>6</sup> The first known instance is depicted in a scene on one of the Peloponnesian shield-bands datable to c. 600 B.C., for which see e.g. K. Schefold, *Myth and Legend in Early Greek Art* (London, 1966), 69, fig. 24; followed by Polygnotus in his famous mid-fifth-century wall-painting in the Cnidian Lesche at Delphi described by Paus. 10.29.9.

<sup>7</sup> First recorded by the fifth-century epic poet Panyassis *ap.* Paus. 10.29.9.

<sup>8</sup> Most of the variants can most easily be found in J. G. Frazer on Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.12 and *Epit.* 1.21 and in H. Herter, *RE Suppl.* 13 (1973), 'Theseus', 1176–7, 1203–5. Theseus' rescue alone is mentioned in Eur.'s play *Her.* 619 and 1169–70.

<sup>9</sup> W. E. H. Cockle's reading in 'P.Oxy. xvii. 2078: Euripides (?) or Critias (?)', *Pirithous*, *CR* 20 (1970), 136–7, which is palaeographically closer to his own transcription corrected from Hunt (n. 4), 40 (verse 33).

<sup>10</sup> Called by Page (n. 2), 120 'a great innovation.' So Diod. 4.26.1 and Hyg. *Fab.* 79.

<sup>11</sup> On the Eleusinianization of Heracles in the sixth century, see H. Lloyd-Jones, 'Heracles at Eleusis: P.Oxy. 2622 and P.S.I. 1391', *Maia* n.s. 19 (1967), 206–29 with refs. An Eleusinian alternative underlies Amphitryon's enquiry in Eur. *Her. Fur.* 610–13 as to whether Heracles obtained Cerberus by a fight or as a gift from Persephone; for representations of an initiated Heracles in new-style Cerberus scenes, see Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Three related Cerberi', *Antike Kunst* 17 (1974), 30–5, and for scenes of this kind introduced on Athenian vases c. 530 B.C., see J. Boardman, 'Herakles, Peisistratos and Eleusis', *JHS* 95 (1975), 1–12 with plates I–IV.

dead brother Castor.<sup>12</sup> And Theseus, whom Aeneas has just seen as liberator entering and leaving (though he is not mentioned by name) the Cretan labyrinth on the engraved gates of Apollo's Cumaean temple, practically prefigures, with appropriate overtones, Aeneas' impending entry into the kingdom of the dead (cf. *Aen.* 6.27 with 128–9). The Trojan stresses the divine birth of these descending heroes, but not their motives in making the descent. Not until Charon links Theseus with Pirithous and thinks of Heracles at *Aen.* 6.392–7 are their motives mentioned, and the sudden thought of them rouses Charon to anger.

Theseus' remark in the *Pirithous* on the shame attached to betraying a friend not only wins praise from Heracles for having thus brought credit upon both himself and Athens, but also elicits from him the designation 'champion of the oppressed' (τοῖσι δυστυχούσι γὰρ / ἀεί ποτ' εἴ σὺ σύμμαχος, 35–6), an appellation that could be applied in turn to Heracles himself for his subsequent rescue of both Theseus and Pirithous. Euripides thus presents Heracles' and Theseus' descents from a pro-Athenian viewpoint. But Vergil's Charon has no such sympathies. Instead he is outraged by Heracles' hallmark of brute force, and blames both Theseus and Pirithous equally for their sacrilegious descent to steal for the latter Persephone from her very marriage-chamber. Charon, in short, refrains from mentioning Heracles' rescue of them for two specific reasons: because the question of loyalty to friends is not the issue for Charon, and because, as Aeneas is to learn from the Sibyl at 601 and 617, neither of these heroes was rescued from the world of death by Heracles: Theseus and Pirithous both reaped for their perfidy eternal damnation in Tartarus.<sup>13</sup> It is quite evident from these conflicting passages (thought by Hyginus in *Aul. Gell. N.A.* 10.16 to be in need of revision), emanating from respectively Aeneas (by whom Theseus and Heracles are cited as successful prototypes, having returned from the dead) and the Sibyl (according to whom neither Pirithous nor Theseus made it back), that Vergil has chosen from among more than one version of Theseus' and Pirithous' descent, and he is not overly concerned with consistency but rather blends his reading of different versions to suit his poetry. Simply put, Vergil's prime motive for choosing among variants is 'What will make the best poetry?' and as the poetic purpose changes in the course of Book 6, the character of Theseus becomes progressively less attractive within it.

Since no actual *Αἰνείου κατάβασις* existed before Vergil—though Naevius may have composed a *nekyomanteion* depicting an *evocatio* by Aeneas of his father on the shore of Avernus,<sup>14</sup> and Fabius Pictor's *Somnium Aeneae*, to which Cicero refers in the *De Divinatione* at 1.21.43, has been cited as a dream-version of the descent and a probable source for Book 6<sup>15</sup>—a journey by Aeneas through the netherworld is Vergil's creation and the product of extensive innovation. The result is that Aeneas traverses infernal topography on a far grander scale than Odysseus or even Heracles or Orpheus ever did, and the reader is beguiled into following Aeneas through the world

<sup>12</sup> See J. G. Frazer on Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.11.2 with refs.

<sup>13</sup> So Diod. 4.63.5. Also Pausanias 10.29.9 who says that Polygnotus' mural (n. 6 above) depicted Theseus and Pirithous both still seated in Hades at the time of Odysseus' visit, perhaps inferred from the doubtfully authentic verse, Hom. *Od.* 11.631.

<sup>14</sup> That is, if Varro *ap.* Lactantius, *Div. Instit.* 1.6.9 correctly reports Naevius as mentioning the Cimmerian Sibyl in the *Bellum Punicum* (whose first two books cover the annals of Aeneas), from which P. Corssen, 'Die Sibylle im sechsten Buch der Aeneis', *Sokrates* 1 (1913), 12 infers the *evocatio* mentioned in the text. It is unlikely that such a *nekyomanteion* would have entailed an elaborate topography of Hades.

<sup>15</sup> See J. Perret, *Virgile: Connaissance des lettres* (Paris, 1965), 115–16.

of the dead with a sense of recognition, even though his journey through the nether-world is new. Vergil achieved this impression by combining in new ways old motifs from earlier descents, particularly Heracles'; that selected for study here is just one more instance of Vergil's artistic cleverness in modelling the Descent of Aeneas upon the Descent of Heracles.

This is not the place to rehearse all the arguments as to whether Norden was right to postulate an early lost epic '*Ηρακλέους κατάβασις*, whose influence he claimed explains certain remarkable similarities in Bacchylides, Aristophanes, Vergil, and Apollodorus.<sup>16</sup> The controversy centres on whether Vergil derived his knowledge of the Heracleian descent-tradition through this conjectured lost epic itself,<sup>17</sup> or a lost handbook of it, as Norden in one place supposed,<sup>18</sup> or just through separate passages reflecting an articulate and well-developed tradition about Heracles' descent. In any event, to Norden's list of authors reporting similar details concerning Heracles' descent pertinent to the *Aeneid*, Lloyd-Jones subsequently added a fragment of Pindar, preserved in *P.Oxy.* 2622 and commented upon by PsI. 1391,<sup>19</sup> which tells of how Heracles, after his initiation at Eleusis by Eumolpus, obeyed Eurystheus' mission to fetch Cerberus and saw Meleager and countless ghosts in Hades, much as in Bacchylides' fifth *Epinician* 56ff. and in Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* 5.2.12. To the first published reconstruction of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus by Edgar Lobel in 1967, Lloyd-Jones added the probability that Pindar compared the souls of the dead to both leaves and waves, a double-simile which Vergil adapted to leaves and birds at *Aen.* 6.309–12. And to this list of passages connecting the descents of Aeneas and Heracles I suggest we should now add the speech from Euripides' *Pirithous*, in which Aeacus challenges Heracles upon his approach to the underworld regions, denoted by 'these regions' (τόπους / εἰς τοῦσδε) in 18–19.

In Heracles' and Aeneas' descents, Aeacus and Charon each is the respective 'guardian' of the infernal regions, who accosts the descending hero as he hastens (σπουδῇ / δεῦρ' ἐγκονοῦντα, 16–17; *qui nostra ad flumina tendis*, 6.388) towards him. Neither Aeacus nor Charon recognizes the approaching figure (δέρκομαι . . . τινα, 16; . . . ὧ ξέν', ὅστις ὦν, 18; *quisquis es*, 6.388), but each demands to know his mission (εἰπεῖν δίκαιον . . . / . . . καὶ καθ' ἥντιν' αἰτίαν, 18–19; *fare age, quid venias*, 6.389). Aeacus first requests the identity of the approaching figure (εἰπεῖν δίκαιον . . . ὅστις ὦν τόπους / εἰς τοῦσδε χρίμπτηι, 18–19), which Charon does not waste time asking. Charon's opening words *quisquis es* scorn the notion that he can be influenced by status; his next, *armatus*, suggests that any living person who has come 'armed' is up to no good. Motive alone is Charon's focus (*fare age, quid venias*, 6.389), and getting the approaching figure to stop in his tracks (*fare age . . . iam istinc et comprime gressum*, loc. cit.)—so angered has Charon been made (*nec vero Alciden me sum*

<sup>16</sup> E. Norden, *P. Vergilius Maro: Aeneis Buch VI* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1926), 5, n. 2 lists the places where he discusses similarities pertinent to Vergil. For want of credibility I have omitted Norden's similar claim regarding the bird-simile in Soph. *O.T.* 175ff. on grounds argued in my 'Two Virgilian similes and the '*Ηρακλέους κατάβασις*', *Phoenix* 24 (1970), 248–9.

<sup>17</sup> To support the possibility that it survived to Vergil's day, H. Lloyd-Jones (in a letter to me dated 16 March 1971) suggests analogy with the *Aethiopis*, which E. Fraenkel thinks Vergil may have read directly; 'Vergil und die Aithiopis', *Philologus* 87 (1932), 242–8 = *Kleine Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie* 2 (Roma, 1964), 173–9, and writes: 'consider how many early epics are cited by Pausanias; did he know them all from summaries or citations?'

<sup>18</sup> Norden (n. 16), 239 on Verg. *Aen.* 6.395–6.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in n. 11 above; on the location of the similes within the Pindaric underworld, see further my article cited in n. 16 above.

*laetatus euntem / accepisse lacu*, 6.392–3;<sup>20</sup> *ex ira*, 6.407) by this new presence of living flesh, with its all too vivid reminder of the violence and treachery displayed by Heracles, Theseus, and Pirithous. In reply, whereas Heracles announces to Aeacus his identity first, as the latter requested, the Sibyl, who answers for Aeneas, shows her sensitivity to Charon's angry nuances by the priorities of her response: (i) this new hero's motives are not treacherous or violent—so calm your anger (*absiste moveri*, 6.399)—even if he is armed (he carries a *ferrum* and other *tela*, 6. 290, 399–400); and (ii) he is Aeneas, coming illustrious on a legitimate mission with impeccable credentials. The Sibyl reveals his identity unasked, but simultaneously his qualities, immediately followed by the show of the Golden Bough, the symbol of his legitimacy.

It appears, then, that Vergil has transferred the function of Euripides' Aeacus to Charon and created out of Aeacus' speech an innovative psychological dynamic for Charon.<sup>21</sup> The poet has also transformed the simple challenge to Heracles as he approaches the underworld regions where Aeacus is met into the ultimate test of Aeneas' fitness to go beyond the Styx deeper into the underworld.<sup>22</sup>

*Memorial University of Newfoundland*

RAYMOND J. CLARK  
rjclark@morgan.ucs.mun.ca

<sup>20</sup> As the cause of anger Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, '*Reading' Greek Death to the End of the Classical Period* (Oxford, 1995), 308–9 accepts Servius' explanation that Charon was punished by being put in fetters for a whole year for having ferried Heracles across the water in a *catabasis* by Orpheus drawn upon by Vergil—according to Norden (n. 16), 237, Charon must have complained to Orpheus himself about Heracles—and she further believes that this story of Charon's punishment also lies behind Charon's anger mentioned in Achaïos, *TrGF* 1.20F11, which accordingly provides a *terminus post quem* for the (possibly sixth century B.C.) Orphic descent.

<sup>21</sup> Together with whatever influence Vergil merged from the source mentioned in the previous note.

<sup>22</sup> For support of my research I am very grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.