Hercules, Cacus, and an Ennian contest of auguries in *Aeneid* 8

This paper addresses a number of significant and, to my knowledge, previously unacknowledged parallels between two iconic passages from Latin literature that describe two foundational moments in Rome's early religious history: the contest of auguries in book 1 of Ennius' *Annales* (72-91), and Hercules' battle with Cacus and his foundation of the Ara Maxima in book 8 of Vergil's *Aeneid* (200-261) (Stacey 1896: 22-36; Goldschmidt 2013: 78-100). Based on these parallels, I propose that Vergil's myth of Hercules and Cacus is meant to be read as a multiform of Ennius' myth of Romulus and Remus. Vergil therefore frames the conflict between Hercules and Cacus as a battle over the shape and contours of Rome and its sacred topography, one that culminates in Hercules' sacralization of the city and the inauguration of Roman religious practice.

Central to the paper's argument is the prominence of the Aventine in both episodes. After all, by the time Vergil was writing, the Palatine traditionally had played a much larger role in both myths: Cacus had always been on the Palatine before Vergil moved him to the Aventine, and the Romulus-Remus myth had evolved in such a way that Romulus had come to occupy the Palatine, not the Aventine (Mignone 2016; Wiseman 1995). The move to the Aventine, in other words, is significant for both myths. With this in mind, the paper's argument focuses on four key similarities between the Ennian and Vergilian passages: (1) both authors locate the conflict on the Aventine, a hill that is defined by its altitude (*in alto / ...Aventino*, Enn. *Ann.* 75; *altissima visu*, Verg. *Aen.* 8.234; Mignone 2016). (2) Both authors play with the etymology of the Aventine that connects it to birds (Varro *LL* 5.43; Fisher 2014: 62-4; O'Hara 2017: 204-5). (3) Both authors include directions related to the location of the birds, using language with clear augural connotations (esp. *laeva*: *laeva volavit avis*, Enn. *Ann.* 87; *laevum...ad amnem*, Verg.

Aen. 8.236; Linderski 2007: 19; Mignone 2016: 396-9). (4) Both authors emphasize the opposition between light and dark as representative of, and critical to, the protagonists' triumphs over their opponents, again using language with augural connotations (esp. *infera* vs. *praepes*).

Having identified these similarities between the two passages, the paper highlights one further point that shows Hercules' close (augural) connection to the Aventine: specifically, Hercules is credited with begetting a son named Aventinus in *Aeneid* 7. According to Vergil, Hercules impregnates Aventinus' mother, the priestess Rhea, in the thickets (*silva*) of the Aventine, and it has been suggested that the pairing of *silva* and *Rhea* in 7.659 likely alludes to Rhea Silvia, mother of Romulus and Remus (O'Hara 2017: 193). Not only that, but in the account of Aventinus' birth, both he and Hercules are described with the adjective *pulcher* (*Hercule pulchro / pulcher Aventinus*, 7.656-657; cf. *proles pulcherrima*, 7.761), much as Romulus is in Ennius (*Romulus pulcer*, 75; cf. *pulcerrima praepes*, 86; *pulcrisque locis*, 89). The application of this particular descriptor to Hercules is a bit odd, though an explanation may come via augural thinking: as others have noted in their analysis of Ennius, the term *pulcer* does not simply mean "beautiful," but also connotes augural propitiousness (Mignone 2016: 396; Linderski 2007: 5-6).

The paper concludes by addressing directly the question of what Vergil gains by invoking the augural contest between Romulus and Remus when describing Hercules' defeat of Cacus. If we accept Wiseman's argument about the status of Romulus and Remus at the end of the first century BCE, there seem to have been at least a couple decades, beginning in the 20s, when the name "Remus" was not weighted down with all the negative connotations of fraternal conflict and fratricide. Telling the story of Rome's foundation thus became slightly more fraught,

necessitating the identification of a substitute that could tell a familiar story but without some of its unsavory elements.

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