

Tarchon's Speech and Etruscan Ethnic Stereotypes in Vergil's *Aeneid*

I survey in this paper the construction of Etruscan ethnic identity in Vergil's *Aeneid* through the lens of Tarchon's speech to his fellow Etruscans. In the penultimate book of Vergil's *Aeneid* (11.732-739), Tarchon levels a bitter tirade at his countrymen, upbraiding their lifestyle in an attempt to exhort them to battle. Tarchon shows a keen awareness of the many traditional, negative stereotypes of the Etruscan people: cowardice, laziness, luxury, effeminacy, sexual promiscuity, gluttony, and religiosity or superstition. Tarchon's words seem to reinforce negative stereotypes, but in their immediate context they are ironic, because Tarchon himself is Etruscan, and, furthermore, Tarchon's own subsequent *aristeia* is quite valorous (11.741-758).

Scholars have noted that the speech is sarcastic in tone (Williams 1973, 427; Grandsden 1991, 132), but they do not discuss Tarchon's speech within the context of the *Aeneid* as a whole, and it is worthwhile to examine it as part of Vergil's larger treatment of Etruscan ethnic identity. Vergil generally avoids negative stereotypes of Etruscans up until this point, and their introduction at the end is surprising, especially since Etruscans have featured prominently since *Aeneid* 7. Indeed, by the time Tarchon gives his speech, Vergil has prepared readers to understand his sarcasm, because other Etruscan characters have already contradicted Tarchon's statements by exhibiting their piety (10.154-156), nobility (e.g., the Etruscan Catalogue, 10.163-214) and outstanding bravery (e.g., Lausus and Mezentius, 10.780-907). The placement of Tarchon's speech in *Aeneid* 11 thus underscores a greater theme of Vergil's work, which is a challenge to traditional, negative Etruscan literary stereotypes. I argue that Tarchon's speech is itself indicative of Vergil's treatment of Etruscans throughout the *Aeneid*, and that by inviting readers to question their negative ethnic stereotypes of Etruscans, the author subverts them and creates a new space for a positive Etruscan literary identity. This positive treatment of Etruscans

supports the work of previous scholars, who have argued that the text of the *Aeneid* fosters a sense of belonging and inclusivity in the reader (Toll 1997; Ando 2002; Syed 2005, Reed 2007; Fletcher 2014).

Bibliography

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