

## THE GREEK ORIGINS OF THE CACUS MYTH

The myth of Hercules and Cacus is related by several Augustan writers: Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.185–275, Livy 1.7.3, Ovid, *Fasti* 1.543–86 and 5.643–52, Propertius 4.9.1–20, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 1.39. These accounts fall naturally into two classes, in which Cacus is represented respectively as a clever rascal and as a superhuman ogre. The former version is found in Livy and Dionysius, and the latter occurs first in Vergil, and then in Ovid and Propertius. Numerous shared details go to show that Livy and Dionysius drew on a common source, and verbal similarities that have been demonstrated between Vergil and Livy evidently establish Vergil's dependence on this same source.<sup>1</sup> It would therefore appear that the ogre-Cacus is Vergil's invention. Certainly there is no evidence for a pre-Vergilian Cacus characterized as an ogre.

As Livy and Dionysius tell the story, when Hercules was passing through Rome driving the cattle he had won from Geryon, a local thief named Cacus, who dwelt in a cave on the Aventine, stole several of them. As a stratagem for avoiding detection, he adopted the ruse of dragging the stolen cattle backwards into his cave, so that their hoofprints would point in the wrong direction. He was none the less undone when the lowing of the cattle pent up in his cave was answered by that of the cattle still in Hercules' possession. Hercules was thus able to follow the sound, and broke into the cave and destroyed Cacus. Although some local rustics were alarmed at the death of one of their number, Hercules' action won the approval of King Evander, and a friendship was struck up between the two. According to both Livy and Dionysius, Cacus was able to steal the cattle because Hercules, exhausted by his travels, had sunk into a slumber. Livy adds that he more or less ate and drank himself into a stupor, and it is likelier that this detail was suppressed by Dionysius than invented by Livy. Thus this detail probably belonged to the source evidently employed by both writers.

We are told that the Cacus myth is a Hellenized reworking of an Italian myth about a local deity Cacus, intended to provide an aetiology for the cult of Hercules at the Ara Maxima (cf. Livy 5.13.6).<sup>2</sup> It is often assumed that the common source used by Livy, Dionysius, and Vergil was Ennius' *Annales*,<sup>3</sup> but no evidence confirms this view, and it does a disservice to Ennian studies to foist unattested episodes upon the *Annales*. There is no evidence for the myth of Hercules and Cacus before the Augustan period,<sup>4</sup> and Wissowa may have been

<sup>1</sup> Cf. S. G. Stacey, 'Die Entwicklung des livianischen Stiles', *Archiv für lateinische Lexikographie und Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1898, repr. Hildesheim, 1967) 10.39; R. Paratore, *Virgiliana* (ed. Bardon and Verdière, 1971), pp.280 ff.

<sup>2</sup> For recent studies of the Cacus myth cf. the references cited by Franz Bömer in his commentary on the *Fasti* (Heidelberg, 1958), 2.61 f. and R. M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy, Books 1–5* (Oxford, 1965), pp.55–7. Some older studies retain their interest: Roscher's *Lexicon* I. 2270–

89; Ludwig Preller, *Römische Mythologie* (Berlin, 1881–3), 2.280 f.; Georg Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*<sup>2</sup> (Munich, 1912), pp.282 f., and *RE* s.v. 'Cacus'; Sir James Frazer, *The Fasti of Ovid* (London, 1929), 1.206–11.

<sup>3</sup> So Stacey, quoted with uncritical approval by many subsequent authorities.

<sup>4</sup> To be sure, Ps.-Aurelius Victor, *Origo Gentis Romae* 7 (IV c) tells the story in a form not unlike that of Livy and Dionysius, citing the *Libri Pontificales* as his authority. There is an important discussion of the

right to identify it as a recent invention. The source standing behind our extant authors could equally well be some late republican annalist, such as Valerius Antias, Licinius Macer, or Aelius Tubero.

The detail of the cattle driven backwards reminds us of the Greek story of Hermes' theft of the cattle of Apollo, narrated in the *Fourth Homeric Hymn* and dramatized by Sophocles in *Ichneutae*. But there is another Greek myth that resembles the Cacus legend so closely that one is tempted to regard it as the prototype of the Roman tale in its known form. Unfortunately the details are not recounted, but Probus writing on Vergil, *Georgics* 3.267 f., alludes to an otherwise unknown myth in which Sisyphus stole the horses of Diomedes<sup>1</sup> from Heracles as he was driving them back to Eurystheus as his eighth labour. Especially because Cacus seems to have been originally portrayed as a cunning rogue much like Sisyphus, the Cacus story looks like a Roman redaction of this myth.

How did the story come to Rome? There is no evidence, and we do not know Probus' source for the myth of Sisyphus and Heracles. But a conjectural account of the transmission of the myth may be suggested.

There is no attested literary treatment of this Greek myth, but as this is the only known myth that brings together Heracles and Sisyphus, and as fr. 673 N.<sup>2</sup> ('And I hail thee too, O noblest son of Alcmene') establishes that Heracles was a character in Euripides' satyr play *Sisyphus*, it is commonly understood that Sisyphus' theft of Diomedes' horses was the subject of this play.<sup>2</sup> Porphyry commenting on Horace, *A. P.* 221, gives the titles of three satyr plays by Pomponius, a playwright approximately contemporary with Sulla best known for his 'literary Atellana', *Ariadne*, *Atalanta*, and *Sisyphus*. It is of course likely that these were translations or reasonably close adaptations of Greek prototypes, probably by Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides.<sup>3</sup> If we were to suppose that his *Sisyphus* was based upon Euripides' *Sisyphus* (not to be confounded with Critias'

sources of the *Origo* by A. Momigliano, 'Some Observations on the *Origo Gentis Romae*', *JRS* 48 (1958), 56–73, in which the theories that this work is a forgery, and that Dionysius is the prime source for most of the antiquarian lore provided, are refuted. On p. 72 Momigliano rejects the suggestion that the *Libri Pontificales* of L. Caesar (cos. 64 B.C.) is a source, on the grounds that a pre-Augustan source is 'intrinsically improbable'. He does not refer to the suggestion of Schanz-Hosius, *GRL* 4.1.69 f., that the source in question was some antiquarian commentary on the *Libri*, by no means necessarily pre-Augustan, such as Veranius' *Pontificales Quaestiones*, mentioned by Macrobius 3.5.6.

<sup>1</sup> Not the horses of Lycurgus, as erroneously stated by Gilbert Murray (see below).

<sup>2</sup> The best discussion of *Sisyphus*, the satyr play produced with the Trojan trilogy of 415 B.C., is Gilbert Murray, 'The Trojan Trilogy of Euripides', *Mélanges Glotz* (Paris, 1932) 2.646; cf. also Peter Guggisberg, *Das Satyrspiel* (Zurich, 1947), with references. I am afraid I cannot accept the theory of

Nikos Chormouziades, *Satyrika* (Athens, 1974) that the subject of *Sisyphus* was a descent to Hades by Heracles and Sisyphus: (1) what is the evidence for the existence of any such myth? (2) assuming *P. Oxy.* 2455 fr. 7 is a fragment of a Hypothesis to *Sisyphus*—which is scarcely self-evident—I do not see how it attests this subject. It shows Hermes played a part in the play summarized therein, but surely he could appear in a variety of roles besides *psychagogos*. Nor can I accept the theory of P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Historia* 22 (1973), 339, that the myth of Sisyphus and Heracles was the subject, not of *Sisyphus*, but of *Autolycus*, another Euripidean satyr play. The author ignores John Tzetzes' explicit testimony about the subject of *Autolycus* (or, more precisely, *Second Autolycus*) at *Chil.* 8.459.

<sup>3</sup> *Atalanta* might have been based on the probably Sophoclean *Oeneus* play (if such it was) of *P. Oxy.* 1083 fr. 1, and *Ariadne* may have been based on Euripides' *Theseus* which, as I will argue in an article forthcoming in *Hermes*, was a satyr play, not a tragedy.

*Sisyphus*, sometimes confused with Euripides' own play in later antiquity), both the means and the approximate date of the transmission of this story to Rome would be understood. From Pomponius' play the story was then transferred to Cacus, and then passed into the annalistic tradition.

This conjectural account of the origin of the Cacus myth finds a good measure of confirmation in the nature of the story. It is striking that many of the generic stereotypes of satyr drama<sup>1</sup> appear in this myth: the defeat of ogres and criminals; the prominence of trickery and the use of a trickster as a central character; the appearance of Heracles, both in the role of suppressor of criminality and Gargantuan roisterer. The specific device of dragging animals backward is used in two satyr plays, Sophocles' *Ichneutae* and Euripides' (*Second*) *Autolycus*,<sup>2</sup> and it is not impossible that Euripides introduced this same clever ruse in his *Sisyphus*. Then, too, in his satyric *Syleus* Heracles appeared both as a roistering banqueteer and as the indignant hero who goes berserk, tears apart the bad man's house, and kills him.<sup>3</sup> In reading the story of Cacus, the student of Greek satyric drama finds himself on remarkably familiar ground. *Post hoc propter hoc* is of course faulty reasoning, but because the Cacus myth, especially in its earliest known form, bears these satyric earmarks, I believe the theory proposed here is superior to a wholly hypothetical derivation from Ennius' *Annales*.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Guggisberg, op. cit., pp.60–74 with references; Jacqueline Duchemin, *Le Cyclope d'Euripide* (Paris, 1945), pp.xv–xvii; D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto, 1967), pp.332–6; A. P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived* (Oxford, 1971), index s.v. 'satyric motifs'; D. F. Sutton, 'Satyric Qualities in Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Tauris* and *Helen*', *RSC* 20 (1972), 313–22; 'Satyr Plays and the Odyssey', *Arethusa* 7 (1974), 161–85; 'The Greek Satyr Play', *The Cambridge History of*

*Ancient Literature* i (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> I have argued that the rejection of Athenaeus' evidence that Euripides wrote two *Autolycus* plays, probably both satyric, may well be wrong, 'The Evidence for a Ninth Euripidean Satyr Play', *Eos* 62 (1974), 49–53.

<sup>3</sup> For *Syleus*'s contents cf. Wiktor Steffen, *Satyrographorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Poznan, 1952), pp.224–7 and B. A. van Groningen, 'De *Syleo* Euripideo', *Mnem.* N.S. 58 (1930), 293–9.