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Vera Iouis proles(?)

Anchoring Domitian's Divinity

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Abstract

This article argues that Virgil's designation of Hercules as *uera Iouis proles* ('true offspring of Jupiter') in the Sali's hymn to the hero (*Aeneid* 8.301) played a significant role in Flavian epic poets' stance on the emperor's divinity. A close intertextual analysis of Valerius Flaccus', Statius', and Silius' reuses of Virgil's formula shows how its original use as an anchor for the emperor's claim to divine parentage evolved throughout the Flavian dynasty into a progressively more disenchanting and potentially subversive approach to the subject. In a new political context where two brothers, Titus and Domitian, could both aspire to divinization, the broader implications of Virgil's formula, with its veiled allusion to Iphicles, Hercules' mortal and cowardly half-brother, called attention to the possible existence of a false offspring of Jupiter and urged Flavian epic poets to explore critically the validity of some mythic models as anchoring devices for the emperor's divinity.

Keywords

Flavian epic poetry – Domitian's divinity – Hercules – Iphicles – Jupiter – divine parentage

In his capacity as the epic hero par excellence, Hercules serves as the primary model for a number of other epic heroes. Aeneas is implicitly compared to Hercules at the very beginning of Virgil's *Aeneid*, where a reference to the many labours he was driven to face by Juno's 'remembering' wrath (1.4 *saeuae memorem Iunonis ob iram*; 9-11 *regina deum ... | ... tot adire labores | impulerit*) as the subject of Virgil's memorializing song (8 *Musa, mihi causas memora*) cannot but conjure up the ancient standard interpretation of Hercules' name as 'the one who gained glory by the aid of Hera.' By immediately presenting Aeneas' labours as harking back to Hercules', Virgil invites the reader to map his new epic saga onto an easily recognizable model, thus anchoring his hero in a shared notion of the epic hero.² Handed down from Aeneas to the Julii, Hercules' model influences Virgil's presentation of Augustus' claim to divinity. The son of a god and a mortal woman, Hercules ultimately succeeded in achieving full divinity thanks to his heroic exploits worldwide: the same fate awaits Augustus. In Anchises' words, Augustus' dual parentage resolves itself into a fully divine patrilineal stock (6.792 *Augustus Caesar, diui genus*); significantly, his overwhelming divinity exceeds the very limits of Hercules' model (801 *nec uero Alcides tantum telluris obiuit*), thus paradoxically diminishing its worthiness as an anchor for the emperor's divinization.³

¹ See, e.g., D.S. 4.10.1 (cf. 1.24.4) δι' Ἡραὶν ἔσχε κλέος.

² Galinsky 1972, 132; Newman and Newman 2005, 334-337.

³ On Virgil's identification of Aeneas/Augustus with Hercules in the *Aeneid*, see Galinsky 1972, 131-149.

This article examines some aspects of the reception of such a model in what has been deemed “in important respects, ‘Herculean epic,’” that is, imperial, specifically Flavian, Latin epic.⁴ Despite drawing heavily on Virgil’s discourse about the emperor’s divinity as an analogue to Hercules’, Valerius Flaccus, Statius, and Silius do not seem to accept it uncritically; in fact, they appear to navigate it along routes that Virgil had largely left untouched. By foregrounding such downplayed elements, they contribute to a problematization of the emperor’s claim to divinity while simultaneously calling into question the very existence of an uncontroversial mythic anchor for this claim.

1 The Salii’s hymn to Hercules (Verg. A. 8.288-302)

Let us start by analyzing a nodal episode in Virgil’s discourse on Hercules’ divinity. After Evander has recounted Hercules’ slaying of Cacus to Aeneas (8.190-267), the feasting continues in the evening with a double chorus of Salii commemorating Hercules’ famous victories over a series of monsters and cities, to which Cacus is added as a Roman appendix:

tum Salii ad cantus incensa altaria circum	285
populeis adsunt euincti tempora ramis,	
hic iuuenum chorus, ille senum, qui carmine laudes	
Herculeas et facta ferunt: ut prima nouercae	
monstra manu geminosque premens eliserit angues,	
ut bello egregias idem disiecerit urbes,	290
Troiamque Oechaliamque, ut duros mille labores	
rege sub Eurystheo fatis Iunonis iniquae	
pertulerit. ‘tu nubigenas, inuicte, bimembris	
Hylaeumque Pholumque manu, tu Cresia mactas	
prodigia et uastum Nemeae sub rupe leonem.	295
te Stygii tremuere lacus, te ianitor Orci	
ossa super recubans antro semesa cruento;	
nec te ullae facies, non terruit ipse Typhoeus	
arduus arma tenens; non te rationis egentem	
Lernaeus turba capitum circumstetit anguis.	300
salue, uera Iouis proles, decus addite diuis,	
et nos et tua dexter adi pede sacra secundo.’	
talia carminibus celebrant; super omnia Caci	
speluncam adiciunt spirantemque ignibus ipsum.	
consonat omne nemus strepitu collesque resultant.	305

Verg. A. 8.285-305

Then the Salii come to sing round the kindled altars, their brows bound with poplar boughs—one band of youths, the other of old men—and these in song extol the glories and deeds of Hercules: how first he strangled in his grip the twin serpents, the monsters of his stepmother; how likewise in war he dashed down peerless cities, Troy and Oechalia; how under King Eurystheus he bore a thousand grievous toils by the doom of cruel Juno. “You, unconquered one, you with your hand are slayer of the cloud-born creatures of double shape, Hylaeus and Pholus, the monsters of Crete, and the

⁴ Hardie 1993, 66-67.

huge lion beneath Nemea's rock. Before you the Stygian lakes trembled; before you, the warder of Hell as he lay on half-gnawn bones in his bloody cave; no shape daunted you, no, not Typhoeus himself, towering aloft in arms; your wits did not fail you when Lerna's snake encompassed you with its swarm of heads. Hail, true seed of Jove, to the gods an added glory! Graciously with favouring foot visit us and your rites!" Such are their hymns of praise; and they crown all with the tale of Cacus' cavern, and the fire-breathing monster himself. All the woodland rings with the clamour, and the hills resound.⁵

As has been noted,⁶ "[t]he hymnic tribute," without the Cacus appendix, "is ... bookended by two serpentine conquests." The catalogue opens with a reference to how Hercules throttled with his bare hands the pair of snakes, literally 'the twin snakes' (289 *geminos ... angues*), sent by his stepmother Juno into his cradle, and ends with a reference to 'the Lernaean snake' (300 *Lernaeus ... anguis*) surrounding the hero with its mass of heads.

The first exploit to be mentioned was also the first to be accomplished by the hero, just a baby at that time: the twin snakes are *prima ... monstra* (288-289) in both senses of the adjective.⁷ Nevertheless, the last item in the catalogue, the Hydra of Lerna, was by no means the last one in the hero's career. Except for partial lists in poetic texts,⁸ all extant literary sources listing Hercules' labours agree that killing the Hydra was only the second one.⁹ Virgil must have deliberately moved it to the last spot to create a correspondence between the beginning of the list and its end. Both at the line-end, the two forms of the noun *anguis* (289 and 300) encapsulate the list and shape it into a textual ouroboros, which visually succeeds in doing what the Hydra failed to do, that is, 'standing around' the hero (300 *circumstetit*).¹⁰

The delayed *geminatio* of the noun *anguis*, reappearing in the same metrical position eleven lines later,¹¹ seems to suggest that the *gemiini angues* throttled by baby Hercules were just two of the Hydra's heads. Despite being killed, they were ultimately reborn, increasing exponentially in number until they became the Hydra's *turba capitum*.¹² The adjective *geminus* was later specifically used to describe this peculiar

⁵ Text from Conte 2019; translation from Fairclough 2000.

⁶ Fratantuono and Smith 2018, 409.

⁷ Some take *prima* as an adverb (Eden 1975, 99 "not only the first of all the *monstra* Juno was going to inflict on him, but also = *primum*, 'at the very beginning of his life;'" Fratantuono and Smith 2018, 398 "an adverbial accusative"); Serv. *ad loc.* does not contemplate this interpretation (*bene 'prima'; nam et alia omnia Iunonis insidiis pertulit*). Fordyce 1985, 236 defines the adjective as "adverbial in sense."

⁸ See, e.g., E. *HF* 419-422 (cf. 1274-1275), where the Hydra is mentioned among several other exploits of the hero (not all featured in the canonical twelve), still not in the last place; cf. Lucr. 5.26-27 and Mart. 9.101.4-10 (neither time in the last place).

⁹ See, e.g., Apollod. 2.5.2 [77] δεύτερον δὲ ἄθλον ἐπέταξεν αὐτῷ τὴν Λερναίαν ὕδραν κτείνειαι; Pediasim. 5 δεύτερον δὴ τὴν Λερναίαν ὕδραν κτείνειν ἀγῶνα προσέταξεν; Tz. *H.* 240 Λέρνης ἐννεακέφαλον ὕδραν δευτέρως κτείνει; D.S. 4.11.5 δεύτερον δ' ἔλαβεν ἄθλον ἀποκτείνει τὴν Λερναίαν ὕδραν; *Tabula Albana*, *FGrHist* 40.1c.3 δεύτερον ὕδραν Λερναίαν ἔκτεινε; *AP* 16.92.2 δεύτερον ἐν Λέρνῃ πολυάχενον ὄλεσεν ὕδρην; Q.S. 6.212-219; Hyg. *Fab.* 30.3; Auson. 14.17.2; Anth. 627.2 *extincta est anguis, quae pullulat, Hydra secundo*.

¹⁰ Although not explicitly attested (see Maltby 1991 *s.uu.*) and apparently wrong (see Ernout and Meillet 2001 *s.uu.*), an etymological connection between *anguis* and *ango* ('to throttle, choke, strangle') might have been posited, as if the snake was genetically programmed to strangle its victims. Virgil might obliquely play with this notion by presenting Hercules as strangling the twin snakes: *eliserit angues* (289) harks back to Cacus' death by strangulation, where the verb *ango* occurs (260-261 *angit inhaerens / elisos oculos*); Serv. A. 8.288 (*uiderunt Herculem angentem manibus angues*) seems to point to such a connection, while at the same time possibly reproducing a standard narrative of the episode (cf. Apollod. 2.4.8 [62] Ἡρακλῆς διαναστάς ἀγῶνων ἐκατέραις ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτοῦς διέφθειρε). A juxtaposition of *anguis* and *anxius* in Stat. *Ach.* 1.214 and V. Fl. 1.400-401.

¹¹ Is it coincidental that the section encompassed by the two forms of the noun *anguis* (289-300) consists of twelve lines? Poems listing Hercules' twelve labours, one per line, are attested: see, e.g., Auson. 14.17 and Anth. 627.

¹² Cf. *Eleg. Maec.* 1.81-83 *premeret cum iam impiger infans / hydros ingentes uix capiente manu, / cumue renascentem meteret uelociter Hydram*, where the *hydri* killed by baby Hercules seem to be reborn in the following line as heads of the *Hydra*.

regeneration feature of the Hydra, regrowing two heads for every head chopped off.¹³ An epigram by Martial, no doubt reworking the Salii's hymn to Hercules (Mart. 14.177 *Hercules Corinthius: Elidit geminos infans nec respicit anguis. / iam poterat teneras hydra timere manus* ~ Verg. A. 8.288-289 *ut prima nouercae / monstra manu geminosque premens eliserit angues*), implies this use by suggesting that in killing the *gemini angues* baby Hercules was acting out in miniature the Hydra labour.

The brief recollection of Hercules' victory over the Hydra elicits a sudden burst of approval from the Salii, who salute the hero as *uera Iouis proles* (301). This expression is no mere ornament, and its position right after the Hydra labour is quite telling. If there is a 'true offspring of Jupiter,' there must be a false one. Hercules' mother, Alcmene, was famously subjected to heteropaternal superfecundation, i.e. the fertilization of two or more ova from the same cycle by sperm from separate acts of sexual intercourse, which can lead to twin babies from two different biological fathers. Alcmene, who lay with Jupiter disguised as her husband Amphitryon and later with the real Amphitryon, gave birth to twin sons, Hercules by Jupiter and Iphicles by Amphitryon.¹⁴ Albeit twins, the two sons were as different as possible. As the pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield* puts it, 'the one was worse, the other man much better, terrible and strong, Heracles' force' (51-52 τὸν μὲν χειρότερον, τὸν δ' αὖ μέγ' ἀμείνονα φῶτα / δεινόν τε κρατερόν τε, βίην Ἡρακλήειν).¹⁵

This genetic difference revealed itself precisely when Juno launched the two snakes against baby Hercules. As soon as Iphicles saw them, he shrieked in fright, while Hercules attacked them with his bare hands.¹⁶ According to Pherecydes,¹⁷ it was Amphitryon himself who sent the snakes as a test to learn which of the two babies was his son, and when he saw that Iphicles fled, whereas Hercules strangled them both, he understood that his son was Iphicles. This, of course, is not the version followed by Virgil, who explicitly refers to the two snakes as sent by Juno (288-289 *prima nouercae / monstra*). Even so, the Salii's hymn to the hero emphasizes Hercules' imperviousness to fear (298 *nec te ullae facies, non terruit ipse Typhoeus*), occasionally resulting in his ability to instil fear himself, specifically during his trip to the Underworld to capture Cerberus (296 *te Stygii tremuere lacus, te ianitor Orci*).¹⁸ Even with no reference to Iphicles' cowardly reaction, baby Hercules' ruthless killing of Juno's twin snakes per se was sometimes seen as proof of Hercules' descent from Jupiter.¹⁹ In some accounts of the episode, it even prompted Tiresias' prophecy about the hero's future ascent to heaven;²⁰ this detail of the story is in line with the fact that the baby, who had formerly been called Alcaeus, gained his more famous name in the immediate aftermath of this first exploit, which won him 'glory by the aid of Hera.'²¹

Given this tradition, Virgil takes great pains to end his list of Hercules' exploits with the killing of a monster that could count as an upgraded version of 'the first monsters,' the twin snakes that not only

¹³ See Ov. *Met.* 9.70-72 *nec ullum / de comitum numero caput est impune recisum, / quin gemino ceruix herede ualentior esset* and 192-193 *nec profuit hydrae / crescere per damnum geminasque resumere uires*; Sil. 2.159 *sectis geminam serpentibus hydram*. To my knowledge, no Greek source offers a similar use of δίδυμος for the Hydra.

¹⁴ Hes. *Sc.* 48-56; Pherecyd. *FGrHist* 3 F 13b-c; *schol. in Lyc.* 33; *TrGF* II, adesp. F 400 Kannicht-Snell; Pl. *Am.* 1135-1138.

¹⁵ Translation from Most 2007.

¹⁶ Theoc. 24.23-29 (cf. 54-63); Serv. *A.* 8.288. In Martial's reworking of the Salii's hymn, Hercules' 'tender hands' (*teneras ... manus*), of which the Hydra should be afraid, may come directly from Theoc. 24.54-56 ἦτοι ἄρ' ὡς εἶδονθ' ὑποτίθειον Ἡρακλήα / θῆρε δὲ ὄω χείρεσσιν ἀπριζ ἀπαλαίσιν ἔχοντα, / ἐκπλήγηδην ἰάχησαν ('When they [: Amphitryon and Alcmene] saw the baby Heracles gripping the pair of creatures in his tender hands, they cried out in astonishment,' translation from Hopkinson 2015).

¹⁷ *FGrHist* 3 F 69a-b.

¹⁸ In Martial's reworking of the hymn, the Hydra, too, is afraid of Hercules (14.177.2 *iam poterat teneras hydra timere manus*).

¹⁹ Pl. *Am.* 1122-1124 [speaking with Amphitryon, Bromia the handmaid reports Jupiter's words to Alcmene] *is se dixit cum Alcumena clam consuetum cubitibus, / eumque filium suum esse qui illos angues uicerit; / alterum tuum esse dixit puerum*; Ov. *Ep.* 9.21-22 *tene ferunt geminos pressisse tenaciter angues, / cum tener in cunis iam Ioue dignus eras?*; *Ars* 1.187-188 *paruus erat, manibusque duos Tyrrinthius angues / pressit, et in cunis iam Ioue dignus erat*; cf. Q.S. 6.200-207.

²⁰ Pi. *N.* 1.33-72; Theoc. 24.64-85.

²¹ D.S. 4.10.1.

served as a litmus test of Hercules' divinity but won him his very name, thus functioning as Hercules' identity card. By doing so, Virgil phrases his hymnic biography of Hercules as a prolonged demonstration of the hero's divinity embodied in his name. Significantly, in the final apostrophe to the hero (301-302), where one would most naturally expect to find his name, one finds instead two periphrases, the first one (*uera Iouis proles*) hinting at his divine origin from Jupiter, the other one at his ultimate reunion with his divine circle (*decus addite diuis*), the two extremes of a life dedicated to proving one's superiority to one's not-so-identical twin. By replacing Hercules' name, the two periphrases urge that he be known no longer as 'the glory gained by the aid of Hera' but as 'the glory (*decus*) gained thanks to his being the true offspring of Jupiter (*uera Iouis proles*).²²

The Sali's hymn is a nodal point in Virgil's efforts to map Aeneas' career onto Hercules' saga and thus provide a narrative anchor for Aeneas' and his descendants' divinization. A clear echo connects Hercules' labours as described in the hymn (8.291-293 *ut duros mille labores / rege sub Eurystheo fatis Iunonis iniquae / pertulerit*) to Aeneas' labours as referred to in the *Aeneid*'s proem, itself the beginning of a 'hymn' to Aeneas (1.4 *saeuae memorem Iunonis ob iram*;²³ 9-11 *quidue dolens regina deum tot uoluere casus / insignem pietate uirum, tot adire labores / impulerit*).²⁴ The implication is that Aeneas, too, himself the son of a mortal and a deity, will ultimately gain access to heaven through his heroic exploits, which will attest to his right to be divinized in the first place on account of his origin from Jupiter.

This use of Hercules' model on Virgil's part might be read against the backdrop of Augustus' mud-slinging campaign against Mark Antony, where the figure of Hercules allegedly played some role. Given Antony's efforts to present himself as a new Hercules, some elements of Virgil's treatment of the hero have been read as part of Augustus' efforts to reappropriate him from Antony and secure himself Hercules' model as an anchor for his rise to power and ultimately to heaven.²⁵ In this political context, Virgil's emphasis on Hercules' (and Aeneas') true descent from Jupiter might point to Augustus' claim to Caesar's political inheritance in his capacity as Caesar's true heir and as opposed to Antony's attempt to lay claim to that inheritance under false pretences. Augustus was the rightful pretender to Caesar's Herculean pedigree, the only true *diui genus*. Antony was merely posing as Hercules and eventually revealed his true Iphiclean nature when he took to flight with his army in terror, as Aeneas himself can see on his brand new shield (8.705-706 *omnis eo terrore Aegyptus et Indi, / omnis Arabs, omnes uertebant terga Sabaei*). There is no place for an Iphicles on a shield that can partly be traced back to Hercules' shield as described in the pseudo-Hesiodic poem of the same name.²⁶ After all, the last time that Hercules and Iphicles were put together on a shield, in Theoc. 24, where Alcmene lays the two babies to rest in a shield of Amphitryon's the night the two snakes come along (4-5), Iphicles could not wait to get out of it (23-26).

2 The celebrations of Pollux's victory over Amycus (V. Fl. 4.324-343)

Virgil's discourse on true and false divine parentage is in the background of the Flavian epic poets' stance on the emperor's divinity. The Virgilian formula *uera Iouis proles* enjoys a great revival in the epic poetry of this period, exerting both direct and indirect influence on all three major epic poets. Valerius Flaccus

²² Is *uera Iouis proles* phonetically hinting at Ἡρακλῆς?

²³ 1.3-4 are reworked into Venus' speech to Cupid at 1.667-669 *frater ut Aeneas pelago tuus omnia circum / litora iactetur odiis Iunonis acerbae, / nota tibi*. The phrase *fatiss Iunonis iniquae* (8.292) recalls *odiis Iunonis acerbae* (Fratantuono and Smith 2018, 401).

²⁴ Galinsky 1972, 143.

²⁵ See, e.g., Galinsky 1972, 141; for an alternative approach, see Loar 2017. For visual evidence of Antony's connections to Hercules, see Zanker 1988, 57-65; for a partial rebuttal, see Hekster 2004.

²⁶ Faber 2000.

embeds the formula twice in the same line when he reports the Argonauts' celebration of Amycus' defeat at the gloved hands of Pollux:

'salve, uera Iouis, uera o Iouis' undique 'proles'
ingeminant ...

V. Fl. 4.327-328

"Hail, true offspring, ay, true offspring indeed of Jove!" they cry again and again on every side.²⁷

Textual and intertextual discourse become closely intertwined here. By picking up the Virgilian formula, Valerius is literally doubling it; that is, he is creating a second occurrence, a twin, of that formula in Latin literature. Moreover, he doubles the formula in his text, writing the two words *uera Iouis* twice. Finally, by using the verb *ingeminare* to describe this repetition, he doubles the formula once again: a reporting verb like *ingeminare* cannot but double the reported speech, as though the Argonauts had uttered the whole speech, including the double occurrence of the two words *uera Iouis*, twice. Through this redundant reduplication, Valerius multiplies, potentially *ad infinitum*, the two words *uera Iouis*, which take on importance every time. Being 'truly of Jupiter' must have been of particular interest in this specific episode, featuring the two *Gemini* par excellence.

The twins Castor and Pollux famously derived from a heteropaternal superfecundation as well. Their mother, Leda, gave birth to Pollux by Jupiter and to Castor by Tyndareus.²⁸ In Valerius' poem, Pollux's killing of Amycus amounts to concrete evidence of Pollux's divine descent from Jupiter and simultaneously of Castor's mortal nature, just like baby Hercules' victory over the twin snakes proved him to be the son of Jupiter and Iphicles to be the son of Amphitryon. The prospect of fighting Amycus elicits two opposite reactions from the twin brothers. Amycus is still issuing his challenge when 'Pollux has already taken his stand with bared breast' (225 *nudo steterat iam pectore Pollux*), just like baby Hercules 'stood up' to face the twin snakes.²⁹ As for Castor, fear grips him, and the idea of his twin dying chills his blood (226 *tum pauor et gelidus defixit Castora sanguis*), a reaction worthy of the mortal Iphicles, whom Theocritus describes as literally 'dry with terror and bilious' (24.61 ξηρόν ὑπαι δειους ἀκράχολον Ἴφικλῆα) when Alcmene catches him to her bosom to calm him. The focus on a bodily fluid causing paradoxical solidification in both descriptions is particularly striking.³⁰ The reason for these two opposite reactions on the twins' part is most probably genetic. It is hardly coincidental that the reader is surreptitiously reminded of the twins' different fathers in the subsequent lines. Castor is afraid because it is not as if his brother is boxing at the games presided over by 'his parent from Elis' (227 *Elei ... parentis*), nor will this contest be one of the bouts in Laconia, where the winner washes himself 'by his paternal streams' (229 *patrios ... ad amnes*): the first father is Jupiter, Pollux's father, the second one is Castor's father, Tyndareus.³¹

The demonstration of Pollux's genetic divinity, alongside that of Castor's mortality, continues throughout the episode. When Amycus surveys his foe before the match begins, he is likened to Typhoeus in a simile catching the monster at the moment when he is assuming that he has already won the battle against

²⁷ Text from Murgatroyd 2009; translation from Mozley 1934.

²⁸ *Cypr.* fr. 8 Bernabé; *Pi. N.* 10.80-83 (cf. *Hes. fr.* 24 M.-W.); *Apollod.* 3.10.7 [126]; *schol. in Od.* 11.299, 300; *Eust. in Od.* p. 1686.22; *schol. in Lyc.* 88; *Hyg. Fab.* 77.

²⁹ *Apollod.* 2.4.8 [62] διαναστάς; cf. *Theoc.* 24.57 ἐπάλλετο δ' ὑψόθι, 'leaped high' (after killing the snakes).

³⁰ The first part of the adjective ἀκράχολος is shortened from ἀκράτ-, as in ἀκράτος, 'unmixed, undiluted,' and therefore conveys the notion of dense, almost solid bile.

³¹ Another indirect allusion to Tyndareus may be contained in *Oebalius* (228), an adjective derived from king Oebalus, father of Tyndareus according to *Hes. fr.* 199.8 M.-W.; *Apollod.* 3.10.4 [123]; *Paus.* 3.1.4; *schol. in Il.* 2.581-586; *schol. in E. Or.* 457; *schol. in Lyc.* 547, 1123; *Hyg. Fab.* 78.1; *Dict.* 1.9. See Murgatroyd 2009, 130.

the gods, seeing that their vanguard is composed of a womanish Bacchus and a virginal Minerva with Gorgonian snakes on her aegis (236-238). These three lines hark back to three lines from the Sali's hymn to Hercules (A. 8.298-300), as is evident from a close comparison between the two texts:

V. Fl. 4.236-238

non aliter iam regna poli, iam capta **Typhoeus**
 astra ferens Bacchum ante acies primamque deorum
 Pallada et oppositos doluit sibi uirginis **angues**.³²

Verg. A. 8.298-300

nec te ullae facies, **non** terruit ipse **Typhoeus**
 arduus arma tenens; non te rationis egentem
 Lernaeus turba capitum circumstetit **anguis**.

Valerius' Typhoeus demands all three lines for himself, incorporating Virgil's Hydra into his cosmic hybris; after all, she was his daughter by Echidna.³³ On the other hand, the Hydra's mass of serpentine heads becomes the Gorgon's mass of serpentine hair, now in the firm control of Pallas/Pollux (the paronomasia eases their superimposition). In this intertextual victory over the Hydra, there is a foretaste of what will soon amount to Pollux's Herculean labour, that is, his victory over Amycus, a latter-day Typhoeus, father of the Hydra.

One may compare Virgil's Aventinus, Hercules' son fighting in Turnus' army. He wields a shield showing the Hydra, his father's foe and distinguishing mark, depicted in such a fashion that it resembles the Gorgon's head encircled with snakes, a much more popular subject on shields (7.657-658 *clipeoque insigne paternum / centum angues cinctamque gerit serpentibus Hydram*). Conversely, Valerius' Pollux, Hercules' intertextual 'son' transfigured into Pallas under Amycus' emasculating gaze, wears the Gorgon's head as a piece of armour derived from a Virgilian line describing the Hydra. The comparison between these two Herculean figures is quite telling. Aventinus bears Hercules' *insigne*, his identifying mark, the monster that counted as an upgraded version of the twin snakes that served as a litmus test of his divinity and won him his very name; this way, Aventinus presumably declares his intention to follow in his father's footsteps, thus laying claim to his divinity. In contrast, Amycus' imagination operating in Valerius' simile restages the Hydra labour in gender-reversed terms. From Amycus' distorted viewpoint, he is upgraded to father of the Hydra, while Pollux is downgraded to a transgender analogue to Hercules. Precisely on account of such unfavourable conditions, however, one may anticipate that a fight between a Typhoeus figure and a transgender Hercules will be a much more reliable litmus test of the latter's divinity than Typhoeus' daughter was of the divinity of an entirely masculine Hercules.³⁴

The fight is not without difficulty for Pollux. When in the line after the Typhoeus simile Amycus 'tries to cow him with rabid clamour' (239 *rabido ... murmure terret*), one may suspect that Pollux is smitten with fear, thus proving himself the opposite of Hercules, whom, as the Sali sang, *non terruit ipse Typhoeus* (8.298). This suspicion gains support when Amycus undresses, and the Argonauts' spirits fail at the sight of his giant body. Pollux himself, here interestingly designated by his earthly patronym (247 *Tyndarides*), is amazed, and his comrades uncomradely miss Hercules, as if silently doubting Pollux's adequacy in stepping into his sandals (247-248 *redit Alcidae iam sera cupido / et uacuos maesto lustrarunt lumine montes*). Their longing for Hercules also serves as a metaliterary comment on the previous Typhoeus simile, where Bacchus and Pallas replace Virgil's Hercules. The simile is triggered precisely by Pollux's non-Herculean aspect. When Amycus finds him *nec mole tremendum* (232), one is reminded of Hercules' tremendous frightfulness by contrast (cf. A. 8.296 *tremuere*).

³² 'Not otherwise did Typhoeus, boasting that already the kingdom of the sky and already the stars were won, feel aggrieved that Bacchus in the van and Pallas, foremost of the gods, and a maiden's snakes confronted him.'

³³ Hes. *Th.* 306-315.

³⁴ For the paradigm of transcending the achievements of one's ancestors in the *Argonautica*, a motif shaping Valerius' discourse on the Flavians' innovations against the Julio-Claudian background, see Bernstein 2008, 31-32.

In line with this premise, the bout starts with Pollux on the defensive, occasionally even indulging in potentially Iphiclean fear (265 *uigil ille metu*; 269-270 *trepidi ... magistri | cura*). As the bout proceeds, however, he is progressively more confident, and his Herculean nature finally shows when he lands an unexpected blow to Amycus' face. He is even terrified by his own great daring (295 *territus ipse etiam atque ingentis conscius ausi*)³⁵ as if his attack against a quasi-Giant was verging on frightful Giantism.³⁶ On the other hand, Amycus confirms his monstrous pedigree when Pollux finds him *rationis egentem* (303), which Virgil's Hercules fighting the Hydra was not (8.299 *non te rationis egentem*). After Amycus' demise, Pollux is shown as finally 'unterrified,' staunching his wounds with the back of his glove (331-332 *nec sanguine Pollux | territus auerso siccabat uulnera caestu*). By becoming impervious to fear and accomplishing his Herculean labour, Pollux has rightfully gained Hercules' title *uera Iouis proles*, bestowed upon him by the Argonauts.

The whole scene might also be read against the background of Hercules' fight with Antaeus in Luc. 4 (the book number invites comparison with V. Fl. 4). On account of this overlap, it may be relevant to my analysis that, the moment Antaeus regenerates his powers by touching the earth,³⁷ Hercules does seem to 'fear' him, more than he once 'feared' the regeneration feature of the Hydra (4.633-635 *constitit Alcides stupefactus robore tanto, | nec sic Inachiis, quamuis rudis esset, in undis | desectam timuit reparatis anguibus hydram*). This moment of weakness somehow undermines Hercules' divinity, to the amusement of his 'cruel stepmother,' who was never more sanguine about a counterfactual rewrite of Aeneas' Herculean career as related in Virgil's *Aeneid* (Luc. 4.637-638 *numquam saeuae sperare nouercae | plus licuit ~ Verg. A. 1.4 saeuae memorem Iunonis ob iram* and 8.288 *nouercae*). However, one could not smell out Pollux's fear at the sight of Amycus' body. His amazement is the same as he will show while looking at Amycus' corpse after his victory against him (246 *miratur et ipse ~ 322-324 qua mole iacentis | ipse etiam expleri uictor nequit oraque longo | comminus obtutu mirans tenet*). This intertextual comparison between the two heroes may show that Pollux has already surpassed Hercules. In line with this impression, it may be no coincidence that Luc. 4.638 (of Juno seeing Hercules tired during the match with Antaeus) *uidet exhaustos sudoribus artus* is transferred by Valerius to Pollux seeing Amycus tired at 276-277 *ille dies aegros Amyci sudoribus artus | primus et arenti cunctantem uidit hiatu*,³⁸ as if Pollux was fighting against his own model, Hercules, the hero he is trying to replace on the Argo.

As for Castor, the verdict on his mortality is final. He had been gripped by *pauor* at the prospect of the match (226), and now that Amycus, *ingens hominum pauor*, lies outstretched on the ground (320), the reader learns that in feeling that emotion Castor has revealed himself to be a *homo*, that is, just a man, and therefore not a god.³⁹ Perfectly aware of that, Castor cannot but join the chorus of praise for his divine brother. He entwines Pollux's head and gloves with laurel, and looking at the ship, he prays that she takes back home that wreath (and its wearer) quickly:

illius excelsum ramis caput armaque Castor
 implicat et uiridi conectit tempora lauro,
 respiciensque ratem 'patriis' ait 'has precor oris, 335
 diua, refer frondes cumque hac freta curre corona.'

V. Fl. 4.333-336

³⁵ Compare Verg. *A.* 8.298 *non terruit ipse* with V. Fl. 4.295 *territus ipse*.

³⁶ See Murgatroyd 2009, 161 on *ingentis*.

³⁷ Compare, in particular, Luc. 4.631 *intumueret tori, totosque induruit artus* with the first focus on Amycus' body at V. Fl. 4.244-245 *ingentes umeros spatiosaque pectoris ossa | protulit horrendosque toris informibus artus*.

³⁸ Murgatroyd 2009, 154.

³⁹ Cf. Lucr. 1.1 *hominum diuomque uoluptas*.

Castor entwines his lofty head and his weapons with leaves, and wreathes his temples with laurel, and glancing at the ship, “Bring back, I pray, O goddess,” he cries, “this foliage to our native shores, and with this garland speed over the sea.”

These lines are packed with subtext. Indeed, the proem of the entire poem re-emerges in Castor’s prayer, as is evident from a close comparison between the two passages:

1.1-4	4.335-336
Prima deum magnis canimus freta peruia natis fatidicam que ratem , Scythici quae Phasidis oras ausa sequi medios que inter iuga concita cursus rumpere flammifero tandem consedit Olympo. ⁴⁰	respiciens que ratem ‘patriis’ ait ‘ has precor oris , diua, refer frondes cum que hac freta curre corona.’

This comparison reveals the actual destination of Pollux’s wreath and Pollux himself. Although Castor may be thinking of their fatherland’s shores in Laconia (4.335 *patriis ... oris*), Pollux’s real father, as he himself has convincingly demonstrated, was not the Laconian Tyndareus but celestial Jupiter. Therefore, the Argo, herself, as Castor calls her, a goddess (4.336 *diua*), who, as the proem declares, will finally come to rest in fiery Olympus (1.4 *flammifero tandem consedit Olympo*), will eventually take Pollux back to the sky⁴¹ where he, as the true offspring of Jupiter, comes from and belongs.

This intratextual nexus has important literary consequences. In the proem, the Argo’s expedition is superimposed onto Aeneas’ journey, specifically through the reuse of the word *ora* at line end (1.2 *Scythici quae Phasidis oras* ~ A. 1.1 *Troiae qui primus ab oris*). Therefore, by praying that the Argo, once in the East, takes Pollux back ‘to his paternal shores,’ Castor is casting him in the role of Aeneas, who, coming ‘from the shores of Troy,’ first settled on the Italian shores,⁴² his original fatherland, and eventually was lifted to the stars of the sky by his mother, as Jupiter prophesies to Venus (A. 1.259-260 *sublimemque feret ad sidera caeli / magnanimum Aenean*). On the other hand, Castor renounces any right to the role of Aeneas and prefers to praise Aeneian figures like his twin brother from the sidelines: after all, by wreathing ‘the head and the weapons’ (333 *caput armaque*) of his brother with laurel, Castor is declaring his Virgilian intention to sing ‘the weapons and the man’ (A. 1.1 *Arma uirumque*).⁴³

My analysis of this episode may shed light on the political valence of the Dioscuri in Valerius’ poem. On account of their φιλαδέλφια (Pollux famously offered Castor half his immortality to alternate with him between Olympus and Hades),⁴⁴ the Dioscuri were a traditional mythic paradigm for concord between imperial heirs in the Julio-Claudian period,⁴⁵ and it has been repeatedly suggested, with varying degrees of conviction, that this association could be extended to Titus and Domitian. In her doctoral dissertation, Darcy Krasne compellingly argues that Valerius’ poem may reflect two possible futures for Flavian Rome, harmony or civil strife, the Dioscuri being pivotal figures in this double vision.⁴⁶ If their association with fraternal *pietas* between imperial heirs applies to Titus and Domitian as well, then the poem’s first half

⁴⁰ ‘My song is of the straits first navigated by the mighty sons of gods, of the prophetic ship that dared to seek the shores of Scythian Phasis, that burst unswerving through the clashing rocks, to sink at length to rest in the starry firmament.’

⁴¹ For *ora* of a division of the universe, see *OLD s.u.* 4.

⁴² See, e.g., A. 5.703 *Italasne capesseret oras*.

⁴³ The echo may extend to *Castor* (~ *cano*).

⁴⁴ See, e.g., *schol. in Od.* 11.302, 303; *Pi. N.* 10.55-90; *schol. in Pi. N.* 10.112a; *schol. in Lyc.* 511bis; Apollod. 3.11.2 [137]; Verg. A. 6.121-122; Ov. *Fast.* 5.699-720; Hyg. *Fab.* 80, *Astr.* 2.22; Luc. *DDeor.* 25(26).

⁴⁵ Poulsen 1991.

⁴⁶ Krasne 2011, particularly 156-161; cf. Stocks 2018, 267-268.

demonstrates that the cooperation between Titus and Domitian is good, while its second half proves that their separation is bad. As Krasne notices, Vespasian differentiated clearly between his heirs, with Titus as the first-rank heir and Domitian as the second-rank heir. Therefore, by showing the potential conflict triggered by the separation of the Dioscuri in the poem's second half, Valerius, in Krasne's words, "could be commenting on the dangers that are inherent in this ranking system."⁴⁷

My interpretation of the Dioscuri's behaviour during the boxing match may enrich this fascinating proposal. Through his Herculean labour, Pollux proves himself worthy to replace Hercules' absence, thus succeeding him on the Argo as 'the true offspring of Jupiter;' Castor cannot but recognize his own inferiority and bestow upon his brother the crown and the title of Hercules II. Valerius exploits the fairly distinctive potential of the Virgilian formula *uera Iouis proles* to the full. Used by Virgil to let Hercules stand out against a relatively obscure twin brother, the formula helps Valerius distinguish between the very *exemplum* of indistinguishability, concord, and sharing. He thus devises a mythic anchor for Vespasian's stratification into first- and second-rank heirs. Pollux, the immortal one, the true offspring of Jupiter, is Vespasian's heir apparent, the one who is worthy to replace him in his capacity as the latter-day Hercules; Castor, the mortal one, the son who can claim Jupiter's fatherhood only by extension, comes off second best and has to align himself with Vespasian's will by extolling his brother as the rightful pretender to his Herculean throne.⁴⁸ This might be the ultimate goal of Valerius' reworking of Virgil's and his own proem in Castor's words. Pollux/Titus is the designated Aeneas, the successor on earth eventually destined to join his divine father in heaven; Castor/Domitian has to acknowledge his brother's prominence publicly by singing about his brother's exploits, precisely what Domitian himself does in the proem of the *Argonautica* (1.12-14).⁴⁹

3 The birth of Achilles (Stat. *Ach.* 1.1-3)

There may be another famous epic proem behind Castor's words in Valerius' scene; at least, Statius seems to think so. Let us read the first lines of his *Achilleid*:

Magnanimum Aeaciden formidatamque Tonanti
progeniem et patrio uetitam succedere caelo,
diua, refer. ...

Stat. *Ach.* 1.1-3

Goddess, tell of great-hearted Aeacides and offspring feared of the Thunderer and forbidden to succeed to his father's heaven.⁵⁰

The invocation *diua, refer* is derived directly from Castor's words at V. Fl. 4.336,⁵¹ with Statius' *patrio ... caelo* replacing Valerius' *patriis ... oris* in the immediately preceding line. In Statius' proem, Valerius' expression

⁴⁷ Krasne 2011, 159 n. 747.

⁴⁸ For the identification of the ruler with Hercules, a trope adopted from Hellenistic poetry onwards, see, e.g., Galinsky 1972, 116-117; for Valerius' Hercules as Vespasian, see Krasne 2011, 160 n. 748.

⁴⁹ Is Valerius suggesting that Domitian limit himself to his career as a poet of his brother's 'weapons'? One may recall Statius' description of Domitian's 'twin laurels,' one poetic and one military, flourishing in mutual rivalry (*Ach.* 1.15-16 *cui geminae florent uatumque ducumque / certatim laurus*; cf. Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.91-92). Instead of setting his sights on becoming a *dux*, perhaps Domitian should have stopped at 'singer of *duces*' (cf. Verg. fr. 2.2 Blänsdorf *cecini pascua, rura, duces*). Incidentally, Domitian's designation as *proles tua* in the proemial address to Vespasian (12) invites comparison with *uera Iouis proles*.

⁵⁰ Text and translation from Shackleton Bailey 2003.

⁵¹ Nuzzo 2012, 39 is, to my knowledge, the first to notice this echo, although he seems to dismiss it as irrelevant.

reads like a translation of Homer's ἄειδε, θεά (*Il.* 1.1), and it may very well have been devised as such by Valerius himself, given his engagement with proems in that passage. Statius seems to have detected its proemial tone and rearranged Castor's words in a properly proemial context. By changing *oris* into *caelo*, Statius' imitation confirms that Valerius' Pollux was making his way to the sky. Moreover, Statius' opening words, *Magnanimus Aeaciden*, hark back to Virgil's description of Venus carrying *magnanimus Aeneas* to the stars of the sky (*A.* 1.259-260), an intertext that proves Pollux's role as Aeneas' doublet on account of their common final induction into the gods' council.⁵²

Through this meticulous reworking, Statius casts himself as a mortal Castor praising a divine Pollux, who in this new poem stands in not for Titus but for Domitian, the poem's dedicatee. Like Valerius' Pollux, whose temples are wreathed with verdant laurel (4.334 *uiridi conectit tempora lauro*), Statius' Domitian wears two flourishing laurels (1.15-16 *cui geminae florent ... | ... laurus*);⁵³ on the other hand, Statius characterizes himself as 'anxious' (1.17 *trepidum*) and 'not yet confident enough' (1.18 *necdum fidente*) to sing of the emperor himself, a mental state akin to Castor's terror in front of Amycus. Everything would lead the reader to believe that Domitian has managed to replace Titus as Valerius' Pollux, except that, unlike Pollux, the subject of Statius' poem is ironically not bound to make it to the sky.

The first couplet of the poem states that Jupiter refused to be Achilles' father, thus denying him the opportunity to become his heavenly successor. In other words, Achilles is not a 'true offspring of Jupiter;' actually, he is not even the twin of a true offspring of Jupiter. Achilles is his own twin brother. His identity splits in two: the mortal Achilles, who he indeed was, and the divine Achilles, who he might have been but could not be. This split identity reflects itself in the awkward use of the adjective *patrio*: the sky was never 'paternal' for Achilles because he never was a son of Jupiter, and although, admittedly, he descended from Jupiter via Peleus' father, Aeacus, son of the god, *succedere* (1.2) explicitly points to royal succession through direct paternity/filiation.

The topics Achilles chooses for his song in 1.188-194 foreground precisely his exclusion from divine paternity. He begins with an account of the exploits which gained Hercules and Pollux the title *uera Iouis proles*, that is, Hercules' labours imposed on him by his stepmother⁵⁴ and Pollux's victory over Amycus;⁵⁵ he then continues with Theseus' combat against the Minotaur, another exploit of the son of a god (Neptune), and ends with 'his mother's conjugal bed' (194 *maternos ... toros*). All he can compare to a threefold display of masculine muscles (*tori*) is a wholly different kind of *tori*, symbolizing his divine mother's lack of strength to resist her subjugation to a mortal husband. His jealousy of the three heroes' patrilineal divinity might even show up in what looks like an attempt to undermine the divine paternity of at least two of them by using their mortal patronyms (190 *Amphitryoniades*; 192 *Aegides*).⁵⁶

Given the discourse on divine parentage implicit in the content of his song, it might be not coincidental that, just before starting to sing, Achilles is compared to 'Castor entering the shallows of Eurotas with panting steed and furbishing the weary ray of his star' (180-181 *Eurotae qualis uada Castor anhelo | intrat equo*

⁵² Nuzzo 2012, 38 refers also to Luc. 4.611 *magnanimus Alciden* (the rest of the line, *Libycas exciuit in oras*, has a somewhat proemial diction: cf. V. Fl. 1.2 *Scythici quae Phasidis oras*). In Lucan's passage, Hercules is about to wrestle with Antaeus, a scene which, as shown above, might serve as a model for Pollux's bout with Amycus.

⁵³ Statius' primary model for these lines (Verg. A. 8.680-681 *geminas cui tempora flammis | laeta uomunt*) has *tempora* in the same metrical position as in Valerius' line. Moreover, if Domitian wears 'twin laurels,' Castor seems to crown his brother twice: *illius excelsum ramis caput ... Castor | implicat et uiridi conectit tempora lauro* (4.333-334). This most likely is nothing more than a verbal hendiadys (cf. 335-336 *has ... | ... frondes cumque hac ... corona*), which is very much in line with Pollux's ability to 'attract doubling' (Krasne 2011, 116).

⁵⁴ Stat. *Ach.* 1.189 *quot... superarit iussa nouercae* ~ Verg. A. 8.288-289 *ut prima nouercae | monstra ... eliserit*.

⁵⁵ Stat. *Ach.* 1.190-191 *crudum quo Bebryca caestu | obrurit Pollux* ~ V. Fl. 4.160 *et tua cur Amycus caestu nondum obruit ora?*

⁵⁶ For a discussion of Achilles' song against the background of different models of succession to power advanced in Flavian literature, see Bernstein 2008, 118-119.

fessumque sui iubar excitat astri). The mortal Dioscurus, the ‘son-of-Zeus’ who was no true ‘son-of-Zeus,’ is caught sight of while he washes himself and his steed in what Valerius’ Castor presumably alluded to when speaking of ‘paternal streams’ (cf. V. Fl. 4.229 *patrios ... ad amnes*), that is, the Spartan river that he could consider paternal on account of his mortal father, the Spartan king Tyndareus. Although in his song Achilles refers to Pollux’s victory over Amycus as a model of ‘mighty seeds of glory’ (188-189 *immania laudum / semina*) to which he aspires too, Statius has already exposed Achilles’ naivety by comparing him to Pollux’s mortal twin, the one who cannot claim divine paternity.

This implicit subversion of Achilles’ aspirations might have repercussions on the *Achilleid* as a whole. Statius presents his poem as a ‘prelude’ to his future poem on Domitian (1.19 *magnusque tibi praeludit Achilles*). Whatever meaning one wishes to attribute to the term,⁵⁷ alluding to Achilles’ failed deification is hardly a good start for a prelude to Domitian. Building on this assumption, David Konstan has intriguingly suggested that these verses allude to the fact that Vespasian chose as his successor Titus rather than Domitian, thereby effectively preventing Domitian’s deification.⁵⁸ This implicitly subversive character of the poem may be confirmed by the deep intertext between Statius’ lines and Valerius’ depiction of Castor’s deference towards his divine twin. This Pollux—Statius seems to imply—is not divine at all. The whole poem would thus amount to a failed attempt at anchoring the emperor’s divinity in myth. Achilles’ ultimate failure as a true ‘son-of-Zeus’ might serve as the symbol of Domitian’s inadequacy in laying claim to his brother’s status as *uera Iouis proles*, i.e. rightful pretender to Vespasian’s title.

4 Scipio’s rescue of his father (Sil. 4.454-479)

The third and last occurrence of the Virgilian formula *uera Iouis proles* is featured in book 4 of Silius’ *Punica*, when a young Scipio sees his father Publius pierced by a javelin in battle:

Hic puer ut patrio defixum corpore telum conspexit, maduere genae, subitoque trementem	455
corripuit pallor, gemitumque ad sidera rupit. bis conatus erat praecurrere fata parentis, conuersa in semet dextra; bis transtulit iras in Poenos Mauors. fertur per tela, per hostes	
intrepidus puer et Graduum passibus aequat.	460
continuo cessere globi, latusque repente apparet campo limes. metit agmina tectus caelesti clipeo et sternit super arma iacentum corporaque auctorem teli multasque paternos	
ante oculos animas, optata piacula, mactat.	465
tunc, rapta prope duris ex ossibus hasta, innixum ceruice ferens humeroque parentem, emicat. attonitae tanta ad spectacula turmae tela tenent, ceditque loco Libys asper, et omnis	
late cedit Hiber; pietasque insignis et aetas	470
belligeris fecit miranda silentia campis. tum celso e curru Mauors: “Carthaginis arces	

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Barchiesi 1996, 49 and 55-57.

⁵⁸ Konstan 2016.

exscindes," inquit, "Tyriosque ad foedera coges.
 nulla tamen longo tanta exorietur in aevo
 lux tibi, care puer: macte, o macte indole sacra, 475
 uera Iouis proles! et adhuc maiora supersunt;
 sed nequeunt meliora dari." tum nubila Mauors
 aetheraque, emenso terras iam sole, capessit;
 et fessas acies castris clausere tenebrae.

Sil. 4.454-479

When the boy saw the weapon lodged in his father's body, tears wetted his cheeks, he trembled and turned pale in a moment, and his loud cry went up to heaven. Twice he sought to lay violent hands on himself and die before his father; but twice Mars turned his fury against the Carthaginians instead. Boldly the boy rushed on through missiles and through enemies, keeping pace with Mars himself. At once the ranks gave way, and a wide passage was seen suddenly upon the plain. Protected by the god's shield, he mowed down the host; over the armour and bodies of the slain he laid low the thrower of the dart, and many a life—the atoning sacrifice he longed for—does he immolate before his father's eyes. Then in haste he drew the spear from the tough bone, and sped away, bearing his father supported on his neck and shoulders. Amazed at such a sight, the soldiers lowered their weapons; every fierce Libyan and every Spaniard everywhere gave ground: his youth and his noble defence of his father brought about a wondrous silence on the field of battle. Then Mars spoke from his lofty car: "Thou shalt sack the citadel of Carthage, and force her people to make peace. But the glory of this day surpasses all that a long life will offer thee, dear boy. Blessings on thy glorious promise, true child of Jupiter! Greater things are yet to come, but a better gift Heaven cannot give." The sun had now completed his journey over the earth, and Mars betook himself to the clouds and the sky; and darkness confined the weary armies to their camps.⁵⁹

Although initially shaken (455 *tremetem*) by the vision of his father's wounding, Scipio soon grows fearless (460 *intrepidus*), and his following act of Aeneian *pietas* wins the approval of Mars himself. The god compliments the youth on his innate disposition, worthy of his divine descent from Jupiter: *macte, o macte indole sacra, | uera Iouis proles* (475-476).⁶⁰ Mars' words combine the Sali's hymn to Hercules (*A. 8.301 salue, uera Iouis proles*) with Apollo's compliments to Ascanius (9.641 *macte noua uirtute, puer*). However, Silius must be aware of Valerius' reuse of the Virgilian formula as well. If, as shown above, Valerius doubles part of it (4.327 *uera Iouis, uera o Iouis ... proles*), Silius couples two Virgilian passages together and transfers Valerius' reduplication from one passage to the other by doubling Apollo's *macte* in Valerian fashion (*macte, o macte*). In so doing, he paradoxically links Scipio's status as the true offspring of Jupiter with his deferential disposition towards his earthly father.

Issued by Mars without having been asked for, Scipio's divine birth certificate retrospectively conditions the entire episode. Notably, the emphasis placed on *macte* through its reduplication echoes the very last word preceding the rescue proper, *mactat* (465).⁶¹ Scipio 'immolates before his father's eyes many a soul, longed-for expiatory offerings' (464-465 *multas ... paternos | ante oculos animas, optata piacula*,

⁵⁹ Text and translation from Duff 1927.

⁶⁰ Klaassen 2010, 124 rightly contrasts Mars hailing Scipio as *uera Iouis proles* (4.476) with Hamilcar's ghost hailing Hannibal as his *uera propago* (13.749): on the passage, see van der Keur 2015, 400-401 ('Hamilcar does his son little service by stressing his parentage').

⁶¹ The two words were considered to be related to each other (Maltby 1991 *s.uu.* *macto* and *mactus*), as they indubitably are (Ernout and Meillet 2001 *s.u.* *mactus*, *macte*).

mactat).⁶² The diction is somewhat religious, casting Publius as a god whose offence demands atonement and raising doubts about which father, his heavenly one, Jupiter, or his earthly one, Publius, is watching Scipio perform the sacrifice.⁶³ On a more uncanny note, the distant echo between *mactat* and *macte* connects the revelation of Scipio's status as the true offspring of Jupiter with his readiness to sacrifice victims on the altar of his father, be he Publius or Jupiter. After all, as Virgil's and Valerius' uses of the formula make clear, every 'true offspring of Jupiter' has a mortal equivalent, a twin brother bound to die.

Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus did not have a twin but a younger brother, Lucius.⁶⁴ However, as Claire Stocks has pointed out, the notion of twin-dom in brotherhood, even when two brothers are not twins, is central to understanding brotherly relationships in the *Punica*.⁶⁵ Silius makes only one fleeting reference to Lucius. During the funeral games held by Scipio, Lucius summons the names of the dead and hurls his spear, receiving a gift from his brother for his piety (16.575-582). Interestingly enough, this passage, too, harks back to the Salii's hymn to Hercules. Lucius delights 'in adding glory to the games by this act' (579 *hoc decus addere ludis*), a formulation ultimately derived from Hercules' designation as *uera Iouis proles*, *decus addite diuis* (A. 8.301). Far from increasing the number of the gods, however, Lucius, as the mortal brother of divine Scipio, can only aim to remember the dead.

Apart from this cameo, 'the reader could even be forgiven,' as Stocks remarks, 'for thinking that young Africanus was in fact an only child.'⁶⁶ This was Silius' exact intention, as is apparent when Scipio meets his mother, Pomponia, for the first time in the Underworld (13.613-649).⁶⁷ Since she died giving birth to him, this is her first and only occasion to reveal to her son the truth about his father. One day at noon, she was sleeping alone when suddenly she was clasped in an embrace, and though her torpid eyes were full of sleep, she saw Jupiter. The god had changed himself into a serpent, but she was not deceived by his disguise (637-644). However, when she was delivered of the divine burden she carried, Mercury conducted her to Elysium, where she now enjoys the company of Alcmene and Leda (629-633).

At first glance, her account sounds reliable; on closer inspection, one wonders when she gave birth to Lucius, considering that she supposedly died giving birth to his elder brother Publius.⁶⁸ To reconcile Pomponia's account with the historical existence of Lucius, one must suppose that Lucius, not Publius, was the elder brother. This conclusion, however, goes against almost all historical evidence,⁶⁹ including Silius' account, which implies that Pomponia had been barren before being impregnated by Jupiter.⁷⁰ Alternatively, Lucius might have been the product of a second marriage, which again contrasts both with historical evidence⁷¹ and with Silius' characterization of Lucius as *germanus ducis* (16.576), a term usually explained as

⁶² The echo between *animas*, *optata piacula*, *mactat* and *macte*, *o macte indole sacra* / *uera Iouis proles* (about ten lines later) may have been influenced by the structure of Virgil's hymn to Hercules, where *tu Cresia mactas* / *prodigia* (8.294-295; note *mactas* at line end, like Silius' *mactat*) is followed by *salve*, *uera Iouis proles* about seven lines later.

⁶³ On this sacrifice and in general on Scipio's double paternity, see Bernstein 2008, 150-156.

⁶⁴ On Lucius "[f]rère cadet de l'Africain," see Etcheto 2012, 167-169.

⁶⁵ Stocks 2018, 260.

⁶⁶ Stocks 2018, 254.

⁶⁷ On the figure of Pomponia, see Reitz 1982, 90-92; Marks 2005, 137-139; Augoustakis 2008, 67-69, partially revised in Augoustakis 2010, 215-219; Klaassen 2010, 123-125; Tipping 2010, 203-204; on the Ovidian colour of the episode, see Barchiesi 2001, 340.

⁶⁸ van der Keur 2015, 340.

⁶⁹ Plb. 10.4 is the only source stating that Lucius was Publius' elder brother, but it contains several inaccuracies: see Walbank 1967, 199-200.

⁷⁰ 13.615 *fecunda Iouis ... furto*; Gell. 6.1.1-5 states that Pomponia had given birth to no children before Publius' conception by Jupiter (*matrem eius diu sterilem existimatam tradunt, P. quoque Scipionem, cum quo nupta erat, liberos desperauisse*).

⁷¹ Despite its inaccuracies, Plb. 10.4 attests to Lucius and Publius having the same mother.

de eadem genetrice manans.⁷² Either way, Silius' narrative contradicts itself, leaving the reader with doubts about its accuracy, most notably Pomponia's reliability.⁷³

In other words, Lucius' birth has left no trace in Silius' poetic record. He has been almost completely erased to make space for his divine brother, the true offspring of Jupiter. Pomponia's assimilation to Alcmene and Leda makes her the exception that proves the rule. Both Alcmene and Leda gave birth to twin sons, one divine, by Jupiter, and one mortal, by their mortal husbands, and both their divine sons, Hercules and Pollux, were designated as *uera Iouis proles* to distinguish them from their mortal brothers. In an effort to present herself as the latter-day Alcmene/Leda and her son as the latter-day Hercules/Pollux,⁷⁴ she even urges him not to be afraid of any war (634-635 *ne bella puaescas / ulla*) so that he may avoid assimilation to Iphicles/Castor. Similarly, in Jupiter's prophecy on Domitian's reign, the emperor is not terrified at the prospect of his labours and actually terrifies his enemies, thus fulfilling all the criteria for his assimilation to Hercules as described by the Salii in their hymn to the hero.⁷⁵

In his reuse of the Virgilian formula, Silius takes it to extremes, thus unveiling its dark potential. To be the true offspring of Jupiter, one has to sacrifice the other aspirants to the title, to the point of rewriting history as if they were never born. Through the implicit disclosure of this dark potential, Silius may shed an even darker light on Domitian's political will to supplant his brother Titus as the legitimate heir to Romulus' throne, the rightful latter-day Scipio.⁷⁶ His aspiration to be the true offspring of Jupiter—Silius may suggest—is nothing more than a made-up dream, whose fabrication effectively implies the ruthless sacrifice of Titus' memory on Jupiter's altar. With brutal honesty, Silius' narrative offers perhaps the clearest example of the implications involved in his predecessors' discourse on divine paternity. The archetype of all divinized heroes, Hercules had to demonstrate that he was the only rightful pretender to the κλέος embedded in both his and his brother's name. In order for Hercules to function as a secure anchor for the ruler's divinity, Iphicles had to be erased.

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⁷² Maltby 1991 s.u.; Ernout and Meillet 2001 s.u. genō 9°. Cf. ἀδελφός, literally 'from the same womb' (Beekes 2010 s.u. ἀδελφός; cf. Hsch. s.u. ἀδελφοί· οἱ ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς δελφός γεγονότες. Δελφὸς γὰρ ἡ μήτρα λέγεται).

⁷³ The only other source on Pomponia's death in childbirth is Plin. *Nat.* 7.47, whereas Plb. 10.4 attests to her being still alive when Publius was elected aedile.

⁷⁴ When Scipio meets Virtus, she presents Hercules and the Dioscuri, among others, as examples of heroes who were admitted to heaven because their actions were consonant with their divine birth (15.77-83).

⁷⁵ Sil. 3.609 *nec te terruerint Tarpei culminis ignes* ~ Verg. *A.* 8.298 *nec te ullae facies, non terruit ipse Typhoeus*; Sil. 3.608 *iam puer auricomo praeformidate Batauo* ~ Verg. *A.* 8.296 *te Stygii tremuere lacus, te ianitor Orci* (the main model for Sil. 3.601 *nec Stygis ille lacus*).

⁷⁶ On Scipio as Domitian's double within the poem and on the tensions that the typological parallels between the two entail, see Tipping 2010, 200-203. For an analysis of Domitian's descent from Hercules and Jupiter against the background of the long scholarly debate on Silius' support for Domitian, see Burgeon 2008.

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