

Sate Sanguine Divum: A Brief Note on the Sibyl's Hesiodic Rebuke of Aeneas

Lee Fratantuono*

Ohio Wesleyan University

As Virgil's Aeneas ends his speech of appeal for pity to the Sibyl Deiphobe, he remarks that he is, after all, of the race of Jove the highest: 6.123 ... *et mi genus ab Iove summo*.¹ The reference is principally to the maternal descent of Aeneas from Jupiter through Venus (and secondarily the more distant Jovian lineage from Anchises); the point of the closing detail is that Aeneas deserves no less a boon than Theseus and Hercules before him.²

In Homer, Aphrodite is the daughter of Zeus and Dione; after the goddess saves her son Aeneas from certain death, she is soon thereafter wounded by Diomedes – and she runs to her mother Dione for solace (*Iliad* 5.370 ff.).³ Not surprisingly, in his address to the Sibyl Aeneas emphasizes his divine lineage from Jupiter, a descent that was closest on his mother's side of the family; despite the fact that a major emphasis of the Trojan hero's speech is on his father Anchises and how he wishes to visit the shade of his mortal sire,⁴ the closing verses of the address end with a strong declaration of his inheritance from Jove. While Jupiter figured in the lineages of both the Homeric Aphrodite and Aeneas' Trojan ancestor Dardanus, for Aeneas the great contrast was between his goddess mother and her mortal consort Anchises.

* Dirección para correspondencia: Ohio Wesleyan University. Delaware, Ohio, U.S.A. E-mail: lmfratan@owu.edu

¹ All quotes from Virgil's *Aeneid* are taken from R. Mynors, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera Omnia*, Oxford, 1969 (corrected reprint, 1972).

² With 6.122-123 cf. the rather different 6.601 *quid memorem Lapithas, Ixiona Pirithoumque*, as the Sibyl addresses Aeneas about the sinners in Tartarus.

³ On the passage see especially G. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary, Volume II, Books 5-8*, Cambridge, 1990, ad loc. Kirk notes how "the mother-daughter relationship is heavily stressed," and that the name Dione is a "feminized" form of a name of Zeus.

⁴ Cf. 6.106 ff.

The commentators on this passage have not noted that the Sibyl responds with a salutation that constitutes something of a subtle rebuke to Aeneas: to Deiphobe, he is *sate sanguine divum* (6.125), the one descended, indeed sprung or sown from the blood of the immortals.⁵ The reference here is not principally to the Homeric Aphrodite (the daughter of Zeus and Dione), let alone to Anchises as a distant descendant of Jupiter – but rather to the Hesiodic story of the birth of the goddess from the sea foam after the sexual violence of the castration of Ouranos,⁶ “an episode which has a certain dream-like quality in the absence of any fixed viewpoint or any definite time-scale.”⁷ The Sibyl proceeds at once to call Aeneas *Tros Anchisiade* (6.126), “Trojan son of Anchises” – an appellation that stands in striking contrast to both *genus ab Iove summo* and *sate sanguine divum*.

Aeneas had emphasized his heritage from the supreme sky god Jupiter. The Sibyl's response in subtle rebuke is that he is in fact the descendant of Aphrodite and *Anchises* (who was all too mortal, his divine ancestor Zeus notwithstanding), and that Aphrodite is the daughter not of Zeus, but rather of the bloody castration by which the grandfather of Zeus was succeeded by his son Cronos.⁸ The Sibyl's use of *sate sanguine divum* does not directly call into question Aeneas' assertion of Jovian lineage, but serves rather to recall to the learned audience the rather more sanguinary and violent account of Aphrodite's nativity – the Hesiodic story rather than the Homeric. Further, Deiphobe underscores and emphasizes the Trojan ethnicity of the hero that he inherited from Anchises, in the use of a patronymic that emphasizes the mortal father of the hero. While Aeneas had Jovian blood in his descent from Aphrodite as daughter of Zeus and Dione, *and* from his ancestor Dardanus, the son

⁵ For the influence of Ennius' *sanguen dis oriundum* (*Annales* fr. 108), see N. Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 6*, Berlin-Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013, ad loc. For the subtle reading of the passage, see M. Delaunoy, *Virgile: Le chant VI de l'Énéide*, Namur: Maison D'Éditions ... Wesmael-Charlier, 1958, 56-57. Ichor, not blood, flows in the veins of the immortals; this point may also be of relevance in analyzing the problem.

⁶ *Theogony* 154 ff.

⁷ M. West, *Hesiod: Theogony*, Oxford, 1966, ad loc. The blood of Ouranos is cited by Hesiod as having produced the Erinyes, the Giants, and the mysterious Melian nymphs (*Theogony* 183-187); bloody drops fall on the earth in the aftermath of the castration, while the severed members are hurled into the sea whence the lovely goddess emerges. See further J. Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, Cambridge, 2003, 18-19.

⁸ On the goddess' birth from the severed parts of the primeval sky god, cf. A. Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite: Introduction, Text, and Commentary*, Oxford, 2008, ad 17.

of Zeus and Electra,⁹ the deliberately wrought contrast between *et mi genus ab Iove summo* and *sate sanguine divum* is between the Homeric and the Hesiodic accounts of the genesis of the goddess Aphrodite.

Aeneas' language to the Sibyl is echoed by his spokesman Ilioneus in the presence of King Latinus in Latium, where the Trojan once again evokes descent from Jove: 7.219-221 *ab Iove principium generis, Iove Dardana pubes / gaudet avo, rex ipse Iovis de gente suprema: / Troius Aeneas tua nos ad limina misit*.¹⁰ Significantly, Ilioneus highlights Dardanus and the genealogy from Zeus and Electra, rather than a descent with reference to Homer's Zeus and Dione as parents of Aphrodite.

Both passages, however, stem ultimately from Aeneas' words to his (disguised) mother Venus at 1.380 *Italiam quaero patriam, et genus ab Iove summo*.¹¹ The verse is rather vexed in meaning and appropriate punctuation; should a comma be placed after *patriam*?¹² Aeneas does not realize that he is speaking to his mother; the goddess is dressed in the style and accoutrements of a huntress or virgin warrior.¹³ If the passage is indeed genuine,¹⁴ one observation that we can make here in light of the poet's subsequent reference to the *genus ab Iove summo* is that there is something of a connection between Venus/Aphrodite in her Diana-like disguise, and the Venus/Aphrodite who is either the daughter of Jupiter and Dione, or of the severed members of Ouranos: in both cases, there is a question of Venusian identity and confusion. Aeneas, after all, does not recognize his divine mother (regardless of the question of whose daughter she is).

Venus' response to her son contains two interesting details along these lines (1.387 ff.). The goddess begins her remarks by underscoring the question of identity (or lack thereof) in her address to her son: *quisquis es*. The appellation neatly encapsulates the problem of origins, indeed of national and ethnic identity, and also

⁹ Cf. here K. Maclennan, *Virgil Aeneid VI*, London: Bristol Classical Press, 2003, ad loc.

¹⁰ On this passage see especially N. Horsfall, *Virgil: Aeneid 7*, Leiden-Boston-Köln, 2000, ad loc., with particular reference to the question of whether or not the passage is meant to contrast with the *Saturni gentem* of 7.203.

¹¹ Cf. here especially A. Wlosok, *Die Göttin Venus in Vergils Aeneis*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1967, 75 ff.

¹² See further here R. Conway, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus*, Cambridge, 1935, and R. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus*, Oxford, 1971, ad loc.; G. Conte, *P. Vergilius Maro: Aeneis*, Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009, apparatus criticus ad loc.

¹³ Cf. 1.314 ff.

¹⁴ Cf. Conte, *op. cit.*, ad loc.

reflects something of the fact that Venus herself is in disguise. Second, the goddess announces the omen of how twelve swans have found land in the aftermath of a disruption caused by an eagle, the bird of Jove (1.394-395 *aetheria quos lapsa plaga Iovis ales aperto / turbabat caelo*).¹⁵ Interestingly, here the avian avatar of Jupiter is depicted as being responsible for the disturbance in the sky that imperiled the swans that were traditionally sacred to Venus.

The swan omen of Book 1 finds its conclusion in the swan omen of Book 12 (247-256), where Juturna conjures a portentous avian wonder: the bird of Jove moves to seize a swan, and all the other birds of the sky (12.251 ... *cunctaeque volucres*) move to drive on the eagle through the sky, until the predator bird is forced to drop the swan to the presumed safety of a river.¹⁶ The omen is designed to rouse the Italians to break the truce; Juturna is principally worried about the fate of her brother Turnus, and so she deceives the Rutulians by means of the avian omen (12.246 ... *monstroque fefellit*). Put another way, while concerned with the fate of her all too mortal brother, Juturna is as unaware of the larger issues of Roman ethnicity that surround the drama of the twelfth *Aeneid*.

In both passages, then, the eagle or bird of Jupiter is depicted as preying on the swan that was sacred to Venus.¹⁷ In Book 1, the disguised Venus announced the

¹⁵ On this passage cf. P. Hardie, "Aeneas and the Omen of the Swans (Verg. *Aen.* 1.393-400)," in *Classical Philology* 82.2 (1987), 395-400, with consideration in particular of the exact construction of what the swans are imagined to be doing with respect to both the seizing of land, and the gazing down on Africa from the heavens. On Virgilian swans more generally, see L. Fratantuono, s.v. "Swans," in R. Thomas and J. Ziolkowski, eds., *The Virgil Encyclopedia*, Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, Vol. 3, 1230-1231. Significantly, at 9.563-564, Turnus is compared to an eagle that has captured a hare or a swan; cf. 7.699-702, where Messapus' men are compared to a bevy of swans, and also 11.456-457, where the Latins are similarly described upon receipt of the news that Aeneas has resumed military operations. Camilla hunted swans in her youth (11.580). Aeneas' Ligurian ally Cupavo is the son of Cycnus, who underwent a cygnine metamorphosis in the wake of the death of Phaëthon (cf. 10.185-197); it is interesting that the bird of Venus is thus frequently the target of both Jupiter's eagle, as well as heroes (and one special heroine) associated with the Latin cause. The lone exception is the case of the swan-feathered Cupavo, who is, after all, a *native* ally of Aeneas, and further one who is associated with a transformation that may reflect something of the metamorphosis that the Trojans themselves are undergoing – from Trojan to Roman, though a Rome that will be Latin and not Teucrican. On the eagle as preeminent bird of Jupiter see especially R. Katz, "Eagles," in *VE I*, 393-394.

¹⁶ For commentary on the passage, see especially R. Tarrant, *Virgil: Aeneid XII*, Cambridge, 2012, ad loc.

¹⁷ For the bird's association with the goddess see J. Pollard, *Birds in Greek Life and Myth*, Plymouth: Thames and Hudson, 1977, 147.

omen to her son, and reported that the twelve swans represented the twelve Trojan ships that were saved.¹⁸ In Book 12, Juturna – the last defender of Turnus – announces an omen that is explicitly associated with trickery and deceit; Juturna wants the truce to be broken, and the augur Tolumnius is happy to oblige (12.257 ff.). In Book 1 the swans are the equivalent of Trojans; in Book 12, the swan is clearly meant to represent the Rutulian Turnus.

From twelve Trojan swans we move to one Italian; all the swans are saved from the assault of the bird of Jove. The first omen is presumably “true”; the second is deceitful (*fefellit*). We might well wonder about the precise nature of the deceit; is the point merely that the Italians should refrain from fighting with the Trojans, and that they should agree to maintain the established terms of the truce?

The answer to all of these problems may lie in the final disposition of affairs in Latium, the settlement discussed by Jupiter and Juno in the last book of the epic (12.791 ff.). There, Jupiter's accedes to Juno's wish that the Latins might remain Latin, and that Trojan customs and *mores* might be suppressed. The language employed by Jupiter echoes the description of the swan portent; we may compare 12.833 *do quod vis, et me victusque volensque remitto* (of Jupiter as he grants his wife's demands) with 12.254-255 ... *donec vi victus et ipso / pondere defecit* (of the eagle as it becomes weary of the constant harassment of the implicitly Italian birds).¹⁹

But none of this directly answers the question of why a Jovian eagle should have been harassing *Trojan* swans, as in the Venusian omen of Book 1. The closest parallel to such an action is the image of the eagle that abducted the Trojan prince Ganymede, a scene that is embroidered on the cloak of Cloanthus during the memorial games for Anchises (5.250-257).²⁰ The seizure of Ganymede was one of the main causes of Juno's anger at the Trojans (1.28 ... *et rapti Ganymedis honores*).²¹

¹⁸ The twelve swans point also to the twelve books of the epic, and to how the swan imagery will return in Book 12.

¹⁹ All the birds of the portents may well be Italian, of course (the swan, after all, represents *Turnus*) – but in the immediate context of the portent, the *cunctae volucres* of 12.251 represent the *Itali* (12.251). The portent is striking in part because *all* the birds are on the same side except the bird of Jupiter; even the swan that we might have associated with Venus and her Trojans is now Rutulian. The first avian omen paves the way for the second; the first prepares for the concessions of the second, and the victory was won by the Italians and their divine patroness Juno.

²⁰ For commentary, cf. here R. Williams, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Quintus*, Oxford, 1960, ad loc.

²¹ On the cloak, see especially the sensitive reading of M. Putnam, *Virgil's Epic Designs: Ekphrasis in the Aeneid*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998, 55-74.

An eagle had indeed seized a swan, as it were, once before; the Trojan Ganymede had been honored as cupbearer of the gods and *eromenos* of the supreme immortal – to the resentment and ardent anger of Juno. The swans of Book 1 are saved from a similar fate – and by Book 12, the imperiled swan is not even Trojan. The progression of images serves to illustrate the advance from a Trojan past to an Italian future, and the transformative process by which we move from the dead city of Troy to the living city of Augustan Rome.

Aeneas, for his part, is ignorant of all of these ethnic considerations – as are Turnus and his Volscian heroine Camilla, for that matter. Aeneas' mother Venus is disguised in Book 1; the goddess succeeds for a while at least in deceiving her son.²² Her address of her son as *quisquis es* (1.387) is telling; she has chosen to trick him as to the question of her identity, though ultimately, the goddess may be as unaware as her mortal son as to the ultimate state of affairs in central Italy. Venus thinks that all is reasonably well (for the moment at least); it is possible that she does not understand the full import of the omen of the swans – these Trojans will *not* be seized in the manner of Ganymede, as it were. Certainly by Book 12, mortal ignorance abounds on both the Trojan and the Italian sides; further, on the immortal plane only Jupiter and Juno are privy to the announcement that the future Rome will in effect be Italian and not Trojan.

All of these considerations are reflected in the Sibyl's address to Aeneas. When the Trojan hero presented Cloanthus with his Ganymede cloak, he was identified explicitly as the one sprung or sown from Anchises: *tum satus Anchisa* (5.244). When *Aeneas heros* (6.103) addresses the Sibyl before he commences his descent to Avernus, despite the central role of Anchises in the mission to the underworld, the resounding close of the hero's speech comes on a Jovian note: *et mi genus ab Iove summo* (6.123).²³ And indeed (for those with good memories of the fifth *Iliad*), in the mention of Jovian descent there may be a recollection of not only Zeus, but also Dione, not to mention Aphrodite's rescue of Aeneas from harm.

The Sibyl – herself a prophetic figure as the servant of Apollo – rebukes Aeneas.²⁴ To her, Aeneas is the Trojan son of Anchises, and the one sprung not from

²² Cf. 1.407-408 *quid natum totiens, crudelis tu quoque, falsis / ludis imaginibus?*

²³ See further here C. Mackie, *The Characterisation of Aeneas*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988, 117-119.

²⁴ On the question of the Sibyl's veracity, see especially E. Henry, *The Vigour of Prophecy: A Study of Virgil's Aeneid*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, 69.

Zeus and Dione (or even principally from the line of Zeus and Dardanus), but from the severed members of Ouranos – the one who is thus rightly addressed as *sate sanguine divum* (6.125). The evocation of the Hesiodic genealogy of Aphrodite – in contrast to the Homeric – serves to divorce Jupiter from the hereditary lineage. In concert with the powerful vocative *Tros Anchisiade*, the Sibyl's address serves to foreshadow the essentially Trojan heritage of Aeneas, in contrast with the ultimately Italian nature of the future Rome.²⁵

The sky god Ouranos was succeeded by his son Cronos, who in turn was driven from power by his son Zeus. In the Sibyl's subtle appellation *sate sanguine divum*, there is the shadow of a prediction to Aeneas that his Troy, too, will be succeeded – by a Rome that will be Latin, however haunted by the memory of the Troy that once was.²⁶

²⁵ Cf. here R. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Sextus*, Oxford, 1977, ad loc. We might also note that the arguments raised in this study may point to an explanation for the celebrated inconsistency (not to say “pseudo-problem” – so Horsfall ad loc.) about the reference to Theseus at 6.122 in light of 6.617-618, where Theseus appears destined to remain in the underworld. For the lore of the Athenian hero's infernal journeys and fate, see Horsfall ad loc.; the poet may well have crafted a deliberate inconsistency, whereby Aeneas speaks to the Sibyl of the returned hero Theseus, while the Sibyl Deiphobe tells a rather different story. On Virgilian inconsistencies more generally, cf. the remarks of J. O'Hara, *Death and the Optimistic Prophecy in Vergil's Aeneid*, Princeton, 1990, 26-28.

²⁶ On the “taint of Troy” see F. Cairns, *Virgil's Augustan Epic*, Cambridge, 1989, 127.