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Hercules iuxta Patavium

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The case of the *Hercules* at Abano, in the environs of Padova, already well-known and controversial in the eyes of Bayet⁽¹⁾, is generally considered an example of an epichoric cult whose roots reach far back into a very ancient past. We here provide a brief survey of the *status quaestionis*, as found almost unanimously in secondary literature.

There is one single occurrence of the figure of Hercules emerging among archaeological finds from *Patavium* and its *ager*, namely a small bronze *Herakliskos*, unearthed in the centre of Padova in the course of an excavation in 1928: the exact point, via Zabarella, would have coincided with the left bank of the *Meduacus* in the ancient city, possibly level with Padova's river port⁽²⁾. Hercules is represented as a child, his arms outstretched away from his body, and his hands must have held tightly in closed fists the two snakes sent to him by Hera. The bronze, which depicts the hero in a rarely seen pose for this iconographic type, has generally been dated to the Imperial period; its authenticity, however, has recently been debated, due to the presence of stylistic features which are typical of small Renaissance sculpture⁽³⁾.

Moreover, even in the case that its authenticity were to be confirmed, its intended use would be difficult to reconstruct, given the uncertain physiognomy of the terrain where it was retrieved⁽⁴⁾.

As for the evidence provided by literary sources, we are faced with a more complex picture.

The most ancient source, which takes the form of an indirect Herculean citation, is a passage in Suetonius' *Vita Tiberi* XIV which recounts a visit by the future emperor, who was *en route* towards *Illyricum* and a particularly challenging war, to the oracle of Geryon *iuxta Patavium*. The latter, according to Suetonius, directed Tiberius to yet another oracle near the *fons Aponi*, and there Tiberius would have received a favourable response with regard to his future after tossing golden dice into the water; the historian claimed that these

(1) BAYET, 1926, p. 97 ff., considered its Greek origin corrupted following multicultural contact with the Etruscans, Veneti and Celts.

(2) On the bronze, ZAMPIERI, 1986, p. 246 ff., n° 146; BOLLA, 2002, p. 117, n° 8; HILLER, ZAMPIERI, 2002, p. 143, n° 31; LAVARONE, ZAMPIERI, 2000, p. 74, n° 80. I hereby do not make mention of a number of small bronzes preserved at the *Museo di Padova*, whose origin is wholly unknown and may well be of collection provenance.

(3) The proposal of this chronological reconsideration is by Margherita Bolla, cf. BOLLA, 2002, p. 117, n° 8. On the *Herakliskos* iconography, WOODFORD, 1988, p. 827 ff.

(4) It appears that the area did have, at least in part, a commercial vocation, but traces of its having been a residential district have also been unearthed. For the archaeological investigations carried out in via Zabarella in Padova, BAGGIO, TOSO, 1997, p. 987 ff.; BUSANA, 2002, p. 127.

were still visible in his day⁽⁵⁾: “*cum Illyricum petens iuxta Patavium adisset Geryonis oraculum,, sorte tracta, qua monebatur ut de consultationibus in Aponi fontem talos aureos iaceret, evenit ut summum numerum iacti ab eo ostenderent; hodieque sub aqua visuntur hi tali*”.

There are no further known testimonies of such an oracular cult, whether for Northern Italy or elsewhere.

In Hecateus and Diodorus Siculus, however, there are mentions of the existence of a Geryon who was somehow unconnected with the Herculean myth both in Epirus⁽⁶⁾ and that in Sicily⁽⁷⁾. Such mentions led Lorenzo Braccesi to reconstruct a Balcanic origin, more precisely from Illyricum-Epirus, for the cult practiced at Abano; this cult, according to Braccesi, would initially have been drawn from a non-Greek substratum, and only later assimilated to the Herculean saga with its three-bodied monster, thus conveying a sort of mythical legitimization to Greek colonising claims in the Adriatic region, whose vehicle would have been Hercules himself, the monster-killing civilising hero.

The Geryon cult in *Patavium* would thus have been brought to the area either by Sicilians who, originally coming from Illyria, were heading towards the Adriatic area in the second half of the II millennium, or by Greek colonisers from Phocaea or Corinth who reached the Adriatic in the VII-VIc. or, further still, by means of the IVc. expansionistic policies of the Syracusan ruler Dionisus the Elder in the Adriatic area⁽⁸⁾. There is, however, no conclusive evidence in the sources to support the hypothesis of a substratum cult.

The other mention of Hercules' presence in the area, in this case a direct one, is found in Claudian, whose *Carmen XXVI*, dedicated to Abano with a description of its thermal waters, contains a reference to some *sulci* which would mark paths (*semitae*) traced by Hercules' plough⁽⁹⁾.

These paths have been interpreted as being the traces of the *via Herculea*, which ancient sources concur in relating to Hercules' return journey from the far Western regions leading the cattle of Geryon all the way back to Eurystheus, but which was not traditionally understood as passing through the territory of *Patavium*⁽¹⁰⁾. Braccesi, instead, claims that this *via Herculea* is clearly connected with the one which is pointed to in Ps.-Aristoteles *De*

(5) On this episode see among others PASCAL, 1964, p. 95-96; LAZZARO, 1981, p. 48 ff.; SUSINI, 1985, p. 9-10; MASTROCINQUE, 1987, p. 44 ff.; ZANOVELLO, 1998, p. 317.

(6) Hecateus depicts Geryon as a peaceful hero from Ambracia: this, furthermore, is a minor tradition as opposed to his more common collocation on the edges of the Western Mediterranean Sea. *FgrHist* 1F2 = *Arr.* 2, 16. See further, LIOU-GILLE, 1980, p. 19.

(7) Diodorus Siculus mentions a cult of the hero Geryon, founded by Hercules himself during his journey towards the West in Diodorus' own birthplace *Agyrion* (DIOD., 4, 24, 1-4).

(8) For these various hypotheses, CIACERI, 1919-1920, p. 77 ff.; BRACCESI, 1977, p. 18 ff.; BRACCESI, 1984, p. 23 ff. and BRACCESI, 1994, p. 129-134. For the interpretation of Geryon as a local cult see also SUSINI, 1985, p. 14-16. For the westward journey of the herds as a trace of the colonisation from Euboea, cf. D'AGOSTINO, 1995, p. 13. See also, ROSSIGNOLI, 2004, p. 219 ff., who discusses an Euboean origin of the Geryon cult.

(9) For an attempt to compare the complex topography of the thermal area and Claudian's verses, LAZZARO 1981, p. 55 ff.

(10) The road's path would cross Spain, France, the Alps, the Ligurian territories, that of Tuscany, Lazio all the way to Sicily. On the *via Herculea*, WEICKER, 1922, col. 1266 ff.; SBARDONE, 1941, p. 178 f.; MARTIN, 1972, p. 252 ff.; LIOU-GILLE, 1980, p. 18 ff.; MASTROCINQUE, 1987, p. 46 ff.; BRIZE, 1988, p. 186 ff.; JOURDAIN-ANNEQUIN, 1989, p. 221 ff.; D'AGOSTINO, 1995, p. 7 ff.

mirabilibus auscultationibus as the road which wound its way in the opposite direction to the better-known one just mentioned, from Italy to Iberia through the regions of the Celto-Ligurian and Celto-Cisalpine populations⁽¹¹⁾.

An archaic Herculean road connected with the myth of Hercules and Geryon would, it seems, have reached all the way to the Po delta, linking Spain with the Adriatic Sea and reaching the Greek emporia of Adria and Spina, almost a mythological transfiguration of an even more ancient caravan route whose roots lay in the presence of Phocaeans in the area⁽¹²⁾. Abano would, therefore, preserve the traces of an ancient, pre-Greek cult, subsequently manipulated by the Greeks in the VII or VI century along propagandistic lines, whose tradition the Romans would later have carried forward⁽¹³⁾.

This cult, which draws a connection between Geryon, Hercules and the thermal springs at Abano in a dimension both of oracle and health sanctuary to which the god has prior connections⁽¹⁴⁾, furthermore has features in common with the Phlegrean area where, around lake Avernus and nearby a spring of hot, thermal waters – the seat of a famous oracle – Hercules would have built a road separating the lake from the sea.

So far, this paper has illustrated albeit briefly what critics propose on the present topic.

Aspects remain, however, which are not entirely convincing.

Firstly, it is not easy to explain how a tradition whose force would have enabled it to survive through centuries or, indeed, millennia all the way to Suetonius would have left no trace prior to the IIc. A.D.⁽¹⁵⁾ Likewise, it is not clear how come the memory of this epichoric cult disappeared after the II c. A.D. only to emerge once again, in a changed form, at the end of the IVc. A.D.; also unexplained are the reasons whereby it left no mark in any other late-antique or medieval sources.

Another unexplained aspect of the question is the fact that this cult, so important and so ancient as to leave traces in literary sources through the centuries, is nevertheless unattested in epigraphic and archaeological finds throughout the *ager patavinum*, apart from one single bronze statuette whose

(11) PS. ARIST., *Mir. Ausc.*, 85=837a. For this hypothesis BRACCESI, COPPOLA, 1996, p. 107 ff.; BRACCESI, 2001, p. 75 ff. and BRACCESI, 2003, p. 92 ff.

(12) BRACCESI, 2001, p. 77; BRACCESI, 2003, p. 95 ff. On the various theories on this subject, CIACERI, 1919-1920, p. 77 ff.; BAYET, 1926, p. 97 ff.

(13) BRACCESI, 1977, p. 18 ff. See, further, CHEVALLIER, 1983, p. 495 ff., who alludes to an indefinite, more ancient *substratum*.

(14) For the connection between salutary waters, especially in Gaul, Africa, Dacia and significantly, as we shall later see, at Thermopylae, cf. MASTROCINQUE, 1987, p. 46 ff.; MOITRIEUX, 1992a and 1992b, *passim*; MOITRIEUX, 2002, p. 218. PLUTARCH, *Mor.*, 776D, calls him a discoverer of springs; see also, LIVY, XXII, 1, 10. For the oracular dimension there are occurrences in Greece (PLUT., IV, 23, 10, for Messene), but also at Tivoli and Sulmona, GUARDUCCI, 1981, p. 225 ff.; VERZÁR BASS, 1985, p. 319 ff.; BUONOCORE, 1989, p. 193 ff.; VAN WONTERGHEM, 1992, p. 325 ff.; MASTROCINQUE, 1996, p. 34 ff.; MOITRIEUX, 2002, p. 223.

(15) No mention is found, even in Livy, with reference to his beloved *Patavium*, despite the fact that the historian is known to discuss similar events, as exemplified by the famous passage containing the episode centred on the *augur* Cornelius, subsequently picked up by Plutarch (*Caes.*, 45), by Lucan (*Phars.*, VII, 192), by Gellius (*Noct. Att.*, XV, 18, 1-5) and by Cassius Dio (XI, 61, 4-5).

authenticity is doubted; this absence, moreover, contrasts starkly with a high number of votive inscriptions to the god *Aponus* found in the same area⁽¹⁶⁾.

These open questions seem to call for an alternative hypothesis in quest for an answer.

First of all, as far as concerns the identification of the *via Heraclea* with a pre-Roman road connecting the Po with the Rhône for commercial purposes⁽¹⁷⁾, documentary evidence is by no means stringently⁽¹⁸⁾. Indeed, this hypothesis is based essentially on a circular argumentation: the Hercules cult in the territory of *Patavium* would constitute evidence for the two roads coinciding, while at the same time the Herculean route from the Rhône to the Po would stand as proof for the presence of a Herculean cult at Abano.

Moreover, the observation that the cities of Marseilles and Padua, linked to one another at the extremities of this possible route, both preserve a memory of Antenor seems a further unconvincing item of evidence, given that this mythical reference is by no means exclusive to these two locations⁽¹⁹⁾. In addition, it seems of no small importance in evaluating this hypothesis and its foundations to observe that the archaeological material – for the most part Greek pottery – which, starting from the emporium of Adria, was certainly present with a broad circulation throughout the lagune area, appears to have penetrated very sparsely into the *hinterland*⁽²⁰⁾. As it stands at present, this fact – albeit susceptible to being altered by new discoveries – should surely lead experts to adopt a certain measure of caution in identifying Padua as a stop on a hypothetical ancient *via Herculea* which would have enabled the transit of goods between Greece and Gaul in ancient times.

There are some points of note to be drawn from a reconsideration of Suetonius' text. At *Tib.* 1, 14, the historian declares: "*et mox, cum Illyricum petens iuxta Patavium adisset Geryonis oraculum, sorte tracta, qua*

(16) GORINI, 1984, p. 465-466. On the possibility of a syncretic phenomenon, *cf.*, in addition, CHEVALLIER, 1983, p. 488 ff.; BASSIGNANO, 1981, p. 218 ff.; SUSINI, 1985, p. 9 ff.; BASSIGNANO, 1987, p. 316 f.; MASTROCINQUE, 1991, p. 221; ROSSIGNOLI, 2004, p. 219. See also LAZZARO, 1981, p. 242, who already notes the incongruity with the presence of devotion to *Aponus* and mythic traditions. In general, for the sacred area between Abano and Montegrotto defined in antiquity with the names *fons Aponi*, *Patavini Fontes* or *Aquae Patavinae*, BASSIGNANO, 1981, p. 218 ff.; LAZZARO, 1981; DÄMMER, 1986; BASSIGNANO, 1987; MASTROCINQUE, 1987; TOSI, 1987, p. 157 ff.; CAPUIS 1993, p. 86; BODON, RIERA, 1998, p. 289 ff.; ZANOVELLO, 1998, p. 311 ff.; BASSO, ZANOVELLO, 2002, p. 31; CAPUIS 2005, p. 509; ZENAROLLA, 2008, p. 82-84, 222-229; MURGIA, 2013, p. 235 ff.

(17) BRACCESI, 2003, p. 94. The legend of a route connecting the Po and the Rhône is found in Aeschylus (fr. 104M) and in Apollonius Rhodius (4, 627-634).

(18) The hypothesis is based on pseudo-Aristotle's *de mirabilibus auscultationibus*, a text whose date is controversial among scholars and which would have undergone interpolations in the Imperial age. Moreover, its author remains unknown and its collocation uncertain: scholarship is divided on the supporters of a later chronology (after Hadrian) and an earlier one (III/IIC. B.C.). It seems noteworthy that chapters concerned with mythological information always relate versions which differ from the canonical ones, and in some cases even versions each of which constitutes an *unicum* (VANNOTTI, 1997, p. XI-XVII).

(19) BRACCESI, 2003, p. 95.

(20) In any case, the circulation of these goods – the Greek ones, at any rate – appears to be disproportionately modest for the importance of a possible commercial hub situated along a caravan route, MOREL, 2001, p. 60; BRACCESI, VERONESE, 2006, p. 183 ff.

no means exhaustive witness of this ancient tradition. After all, as masterfully highlighted by Bruno D'Agostino, the Greek tradition always reveals a certain dose of embarrassment when treating the myth of Hercules and Geryon, the latter being a divine character towards whom the Greek hero behaves in the manner of a brigand and thief. This is, notably, a myth structured according to a pattern whereby the transgression of a norm is, by contrast, the foundation of the realm of *nomos*, in which the founding sacrifice is made possible precisely by means of the theft of the herds, and by the same means the human-god relationship is enabled. This fact, and the myth's own centrality, certainly explains how widely it spread throughout the ancient world; however, it fails to fully dispel the perplexity and ambiguity ingrained in the manner in which the episode is retold by the ancient sources⁽²⁶⁾.

In any case, it can be claimed beyond doubt that Suetonius' text is by no means derived or dependent on Diodorus⁽²⁷⁾, who does not mention an oracular cult nor sacred springs.

The grounds for this comparison, otherwise hard to explain, must certainly be found in the fact that nowadays a sort of equation has become commonplace between the idea of a Geryon oracle and a "good" Geryon figure, quite different from the three-bodied monster of the Greek tradition.

If, therefore, the idea of the Greek-Sicilian origins of the *Patavian* Geryon as retold by Diodorus is set aside, the sources from which Suetonius derived his information about the oracle remain to be explained. The passage in which the episode is recounted belongs to a chapter in which the historian, who has not yet expressed himself in negative terms with regard to Tiberius – as he will do in subsequent chapters – elaborates on the importance of oracles and divine forecasts in the life of the *princeps*, starting from those consulted by his mother Livia at the time when she was pregnant, which had unanimously foretold that her son was to ascend to imperial power⁽²⁸⁾. Tiberius' own love for oracles is, after all, well known, and described as well by Cassius Dio⁽²⁹⁾ and by Tacitus⁽³⁰⁾; it was, moreover, a passion shared by the cultural *élite* of that time, as exemplified by Germanicus' astronomical poem⁽³¹⁾. It is likely that the three historians had a common source for the so-called Tiberian books, namely Servilius Nonianus, a historian who died in 59 A.D., from whom they adopted, among other things, a strict attitude towards the Emperor. Suetonius drew on other sources as well, probably not known to the *Vita Tiberi* scholiasts whose comment, on this issue, is *de hoc oracolo nihil constat*.

What sources did Suetonius have which, in an almost exclusive manner, he was able to rely upon to the extent of reporting from them such information as even ancient authors found incomprehensible?

(26) D'AGOSTINO, 1995, p. 7-8.

(27) Suetonius may have known Diodorus, given that the latter is known and made use of – as is well known – by Pliny the Elder, as emerges from the *Indices* and *Praefatio*, ZECCHINI, 1990, p. 347-348.

(28) Suet., *Tib.*, XIV.

(29) Dio., XV, 7-8.

(30) Tac., *Ann.*, VI, 20-21, which tells of Tiberius' encounter with the sorcerer Thrasyllus in Rhodes, where the latter predicted his ascension to the throne.

(31) In general, CRAMER, 1954, p. 81 ff.; MONTANARI CALDINI, 1987, p. 155 ff. On Germanicus' works, MONTANARI CALDINI, 1987, p. 153 ff.; JACQUINOD, 1993.

It is known that, in his role as Hadrian's secretary *ab epistulis*, Suetonius had the privileged access to the State archives⁽³²⁾, especially as far as the lives of the first three emperors are concerned, documents which, as reported by Tacitus, were generally not consultable⁽³³⁾; Suetonius, however, being comparable to a *novus* Varro, a polygraph whose knowledge was encyclopaedic and who wrote in Greek as well as Latin, undoubtedly drew upon other sources as well, including the collections of prodigies by *Asklepios* of Mendes⁽³⁴⁾. It naturally is not possible to answer the question about Suetonius' sources in a definitive manner; nevertheless, it is of interest that the historian himself reported at paragraph 613: *etsi commentario, quem de vita sua summam breviterque composuit*, from which we can infer that Tiberius, who was himself a man of great erudition – a fact which even denigratory sources recognise – had written a brief autobiography which Suetonius evidently knew⁽³⁵⁾. If by any chance these brief notes written by the Emperor's own hand were Suetonius' source, and if news of the visit to the oracle of Geryon had been found, somehow and for the first and last time, in Tiberius' memories, it would be important to understand what significance this episode might have had for him and what traditions Tiberius himself would have been able to draw upon.

The most authoritative point of reference at the time must undoubtedly have been the *Aeneid* and in particular Book VI, where Geryon *forma tricorporis umbrae* stands as the last guardian of the access to the Underworld, into which Aeneas descends in order to see his father and receive from the latter the prophecy regarding the glorious future of Rome and of his descendants⁽³⁶⁾. Furthermore, Geryon is associated with the *Inferi* well before Virgil; indeed, in the Greek tradition, he can at times be seen to be overlapping with the figure of *Hades* himself⁽³⁷⁾. Perhaps it was Tiberius who, as we learn from another passage in Suetonius (70, 5), was extremely curious about rare mythological matters⁽³⁸⁾, was seduced by the peculiarity of the location and led to draw a parallel between his own person, heading as he was towards a war which his own contemporaries deemed difficult and dangerous for Rome herself, and Aeneas as portrayed in Virgil's poem⁽³⁹⁾.

These are simply suggestions, which could nevertheless explain how come, on the one hand, this news did not take root in the tradition about

(32) AILLOUD, 1967, p. VIII-IX.

(33) TAC., *Hist.*, IV, 40, Domitian, who had been the custodian of the archives before becoming emperor, denied access to Senator *Iulius Mauricius* who wished to view them for matters of public interest.

(34) AILLOUD, 1967, p. XIX-XVII, for the sources esp. p. XXI-XXII.

(35) On the attitude of sources, AUBERGER, 1995, p. 3. On Tiberius' autobiography, BALDWIN, 1983, p. 153 ff.

(36) VERG., *Aen.* VI, 289. See also, NARDO, 1985, p. 698.

(37) This is found, among others, in Stesichorus' *scholia* to Hesiod, cf. BRIZE 1988, p. 186-190. In the wall-painting decoration of the Tomb of Orcus, moreover, Geryon appears to be seated on the throne of Hades beside Persephone, ROBERT, 1884, p. 483.

(38) That Tiberius took an interest in oracles and extraordinary, curious events is proved by the Pan episode, quoted by Plutarch (*De defectu oraculorum*, 17 C-D).

(39) Ancient authors agree in describing the area as being immersed in infernal vapours and featuring caverns through which the worlds of the living and the dead were able to communicate; cf. *supra*, n° 59. As is well known, the pattern of the descent to the Underworld is replayed by Lucan who, with an anti-Virgilian stance, sends Sextus Pompeus down to Hades, NARDUCCI, 2002, p. 128-130.

Abano (neither prior nor subsequent) and, on the other hand, the peculiar description of the episode of an oracle which invites the person who consulted it to seek answers elsewhere (*adisset Geryonis oraculum, sorte tracta, qua monebatur ut de consultationibus in Aponi fontem talos aureos iaceret*). The form of doubling may be the trace of an operation found rather frequently in Suetonius, whereby he juxtaposed events distant in time⁽⁴⁰⁾; equally, it may be the sign of the historian's original attempt at finding a connection between two sources which, whatever their own origin may have been, appear to diverge on this matter at least in part. In this regard, it must be noted that the oracle of the *fons Aponi* – which Suetonius was acquainted with, given that he writes about golden dice still visible in the water of the spring – is the one which provides the decisive response: this was a tradition which was evidently founded on an oracle from a more ancient tradition, which Suetonius knew about and considered to be more trustworthy and credible.

It could be, therefore, that this passage from Suetonius, is not connected to an ancient tradition but, rather, is itself the product of Virgilian allusions and parallelisms; if this is the case, the Geryon in the passage would be not the owner of the cattle stolen by Hercules but, instead, the monstrous guardian of the entrance to the Underworld.

One problem with this interpretative frame is the issue of the collocation within it of the mention of *semita Herculea* in Claudian. In *Carmina minora* XXVI, v. 23-42, the poet thus describes the place:

*“Praeterea grandes effosso marmore sulci
saucia longinquo limite saxa secant
Herculei (sic fama refert) monstratur aratri
semita, uel casus uomeris egit opus.
In medio pelagi late flagrantis imago
caerulus immenso panditur ore lacus
ingenti fusus spatium; sed maior in altum
intrat et arcanae rupis inane subit:
densus nube sua tactuque immitis et haustu,
sed uitreis idem lucidus usque uadis.
Consuluit natura sibi, ne tota lateret,
admisitque oculos, quo uetat ire calor:
turbidus impulsu uenti cum spargitur aer
glaucaque fumiferae terga serenat aquae,
tunc omnem liquidi uallem mirabere fundi,
tunc ueteres hastae, regia dona, micant
(quas inter, nigrae tenebris obscurus harenae,
discolor abruptum flumen hiatus agit;
apparent infra latebrae, quas gurgis opacus
implet et abstrusos ducit in antra sinus)”⁽⁴¹⁾.*

These lines abound in citations, including direct ones, of passages from Book VI of the *Aeneid*, from Lucan's *Pharsalia* and from Silius Italicus' *Punica*, containing descriptions of Baia, of lake Lucrino, Lake Averno and

(40) AUBERGER, 1995, p. XI. On this doubling effect, see also TOSI, 1987, p. 157 ff.

(41) Ed. HALL 1985.

of the sacred area between Abano and Montegrotto – the location of the *fons Aponi* tradition – couched in similar terms which highlight the analogy among all these places famed for their chthonian, oracular dimension, where visitors could find dark chasms and fuming vapours and waters springing from beneath the earth's surface⁽⁴²⁾.

Upon reading these analogies in Claudian's work, one hypothesis is for his poem to be read as a manifestation of a sort of literary *topos*, a genre-specific composition in which the references to literary models strongly influences the contents itself. Claudian, after all, was an author whose learning and erudition encompassed a vast range of literary works; he was the *paganus pervicacissimus*, who makes no secret of the fact that Virgil, and also Lucan, Horace and Martial, are his models⁽⁴³⁾. We should not, therefore, be hasty to dismiss the hypothesis that the reference to Hercules is drawn from an impression based on the *topos* of Baia, a location which was itself closely associated with the episode of Hercules, who would have crossed the coastal resort with Geryon's herd; the road itself, *semita* in ancient sources, would have been the fruit of Hercules' action, thus separating lake Lucrino from the sea⁽⁴⁴⁾. A sign could be traced in the formulation employed by Claudian in order to retell the story, and particularly in the uncertain attribution of the *sulci* to chance, as well as in the words *sic fama refert* which echo Lucan's *si vera fides memorantibus*⁽⁴⁵⁾ with reference to the authoritative nature of his own source, namely Livy himself, as we learn from Plutarch in his *Life of Caesar*⁽⁴⁶⁾.

In partial support of this hypothesis it should be mentioned that, in the polemic between pagans and Christians at the end of the VIth c. A.D., particular attention is devoted to Hercules; Praetextatus, a well-known figure in aristocratic pagan circles at the time, was a curial of Hercules⁽⁴⁷⁾. These are also years when works with Herculean subject-matter are republished, among which Seneca's *Hercules furens*⁽⁴⁸⁾. Moreover, a reference to the area of Baia can be found in a letter by Quintus Aurelius Symmachus⁽⁴⁹⁾, in which he produces an etymology of the toponym *Bauli* (modern Bacoli, which in ancient times came straight after Baia following the line of the Misenum gulf), where his wife Rusticana had inherited an estate: its root would have been

(42) *Exempli gratia*, scholars have found echoes of Silius at v. 4, whereas v. 11 contains a reference to Lucan (7, 192); v. 35 another reference to the *Pharsalia* (LUC., 7, 194); at v. 40 we hear a clear echo of Virgil (*Aen.*, VI, 204) and at v. 72 of *Aeneid* (VI, 550). Moreover, as is well known, throughout Lucan's own work we find signs of a constant, conflictual dialectic relationship with the *Aeneid*, NARDUCCI, 2002, p. 72.

(43) On the figure of Claudian, CAMERON, 1982, p. 217 ff.; FO, 1984, p. 815 ff.

(44) Propertius writes of *semita Herculeis litoribus* and of *Herculea structa labore* (1, 11-3, 18, 1-4). For Silius Italicus, see SPALTESTEIN, 1990, p. 156-157.

(45) As far as concerns LUC., *Phars.* VII, 192, it is worth mentioning that this episode is retold by Gellius (*Noct. Att.*, XV, 18). See, further, GAGLIARDI, 1975, p. 36. In Lucan's lines we can detect an explicit reference to *Aeneid* (II, 324). CONTE, 1988, p. 34.

(46) PLUT., *Caes.* 47.

(47) For the Christian polemic against Hercules, see TERT., *Nat.* 2, 14, 7-8; LACT., *Inst.* 19, 1-11; MORT., *Pers.*, 52, 3. Cf., further, BRUGISSER, 1989, p. 380.

(48) See also CRACCO RUGGINI, 1986, p. 110.

(49) BRUGISSER, 1989, p. 381-382. See further, with a brief commentary, LAZZARO, 1981, p. 53.

Boaulia, from the stables where Hercules would have kept Geryon's cattle when returning from Spain. A further witness to the fact that Baia, Abano and Thermopylae – another place made famous by its volcanic springs – were held together in ancient imagery by a thematic *fil rouge* is a passage in Anth. Lat. 36, 1: *exultent Apono Veneti, Campania Bais/Grecia Thermopilis*⁽⁵⁰⁾.

As a final remark, it is important to remember that no mention of Geryon at Abano or of Hercules, for that matter, has emerged within the body of Carolingian scholastic authors, to whom the Suetonius *scholia* are assigned and who were very well acquainted with Claudian's work. I hope to have shown by means of the above discussion, whose tortuous path seems almost to mimic the traces of Geryon's cattle, that the latter seem to have dissolved, as if to prove that there are journeys which even for Hercules can turn out to be fatal.

(50) The thermal springs at Thermopylae are associated with Hercules by Diodorus (IV, 23, 5).

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SUMMARY

Federica FONTANA, *Hercules iuxta Patavium*

The case of *Hercules* at Abano, in the environs of Padua, is generally considered an example of an epicchoric cult rooted in very ancient times. The hero would in this context have a particular connection to an oracular cult of Geryon, within the space of a sacred area dedicated to *Aponus* and which was characterised by the presence of thermal waters. This paper opens with an essential treatment of the *status quaestionis* before offering a critical assessment of available documentation and evidence, highlighting aspects which remain obscure and proposing an alternative explanation for the atypical association of mythological figures at the heart of this cult.

Hercules – Padova – *Aponus* – Tiberio – Gerione – culti epicorici

RIASSUNTO

Federica FONTANA, *Hercules iuxta Patavium*

Il caso di *Hercules* ad Abano, nel territorio patavino, è in genere considerato un esempio di culto epicorico con radici antichissime. L'eroe sarebbe, in particolare, connesso con un culto oracolare a Gerione nel quadro dell'area sacra dedicata ad *Aponus* e caratterizzata dalla presenza di acque termali. Il contributo, dopo un sintetico richiamo allo *status quaestionis*, affronta criticamente la documentazione disponibile, mettendone in rilievo gli aspetti ancora oscuri e propone una spiegazione alternativa per questa atipica associazione di figure del mito.

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ANTIQUITÉ – OUDHEID

CHR. FLAMENT, <i>Les décrets octroyant l'isotélie à Athènes aux V-III^e s. av. notre ère</i>	5
M. MEULDER, <i>Temple de Séjan ou temple de la Fortune de Séjan (Plin., H.N. XXXVI, 46.163) ?</i>	45
D. VAN LIMBERGEN, <i>Debating the yield potential of vineyards in Roman Italy</i>	69
E. MURGIA, <i>Culti romani e non romani nella regione istriana</i>	111
F. FONTANA, <i>Hercules iuxta Patavium</i>	143
M.-Th. RAESAET-CHARLIER, <i>Culte public et panthéons civiques dans les cités des Trois Gaules. Le rôle des pagi et des sanctuaires du territoire dans leur reconnaissance</i>	159
S. MARCHAND, <i>Devotus numini maiestatique eius. La formule de dévotion à la puissance divine et à la majesté de l'empereur en Dacie au 3^e s. apr. J.-C.</i>	209
A. PAPINI, <i>The <e>/<i> spelling variation in Latin inscriptions from Rome (250 BC AD 300). A preliminary (historical) sociolinguistic analysis based on the inscriptional data</i>	231