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Abstract
My title has a double meaning; Hercules as a figure representing imperialism both as a pre-historic forerunner for the subjects of imperial Rome themselves, and as a point of pre-historic reference for this collection. There is a danger in contributing an essay on classical material to a collection of studies of the contemporary world; a danger that the specificity of ancient society will be passed over in the urge to find similarities, or worse, to find origins and causes. However, it is a danger that can be productive, in that a recognition of similarity can restrain an unjustified sense of the uniqueness of modern conditions. And for the classicist to look at the configurations of ancient empire from a modern perspective is to look at an area traditionally characterized by its political irrelevance, and to find new possibilities in the details of how different imperial subjects related to each other.
My title has a double meaning; Hercules as a figure representing imperialism both as a pre-historic forerunner for the subjects of imperial Rome themselves, and as a point of pre-historic reference for this collection. There is a danger in contributing an essay on classical material to a collection of studies of the contemporary world; a danger that the specificity of ancient society will be passed over in the urge to find similarities, or worse, to find origins and causes. However, it is a danger that can be productive, in that a recognition of similarity can restrain an unjustified sense of the uniqueness of modern conditions. And for the classicist to look at the configurations of ancient empire from a modern perspective is to look at an area traditionally characterized by its political irrelevance, and to find new possibilities in the details of how different imperial subjects related to each other. This paper will look at Hercules as the mythical founding figure of the Roman empire, in two very different accounts of his presence in pre-historic Rome. In one, Hercules acts as the bearer of an ideal civilization; in the other, he boasts of his credentials as a woman. In both accounts, the figure of Hercules can be read as the focus for conflicting interpretations of maleness, and these interpretations are themselves part of a larger discourse concerning the role of the citizen or subject within an imperial context.

But first some historical background. My two texts, Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Roman Antiquities* and poem 4.11 of Propertius, come from the beginning of the Roman empire; empire in the sense of the rule of the emperor, in this case Augustus. Augustus, however, acceded to a realm that already included most of the Mediterranean world, since the expansion of the city of Rome to world rule had already been underway for several centuries. In terms of augmenting the empire with new territories, Augustus was not as active as some of his fore-runners, the generals at the heads of the republican armies. However, together with his remarkable achievements on the constitutional front, supplanting an oligarchic democracy with
permanent rule by one man, Augustus did effect great changes in the way in which the Roman empire came to be perceived and understood. There had been sporadic indications throughout the course of Rome's expansion that her conquests required consolidation in the form of a new understanding of the justice of Rome's position in the world. Both in historical and literary works which propagated comprehension of Rome's rule, and in religious institutions which integrated its celebration among Rome's new subjects, Rome laid a reasonable basis for a stable imperial future. The Greek historian Polybius is the most significant apologist for the increase of Roman power, but even earlier, a Roman, Fabius Pictor, had written a history of Rome in Greek, intending thereby to explain and justify to her new subjects how Rome had reached her present prominence. As well as these appeals to a small, literate audience, even if it was the elite-in-power, Rome's growth was accompanied by a growth in cults of the goddess Roma and similar institutions, which gave a focus in Rome's new communities for the profitable exercise of loyalty to central authority. Under Augustus, these two strands, the religious, and the literary/ideological were brought more closely together. Veneration of the person of the emperor became enhanced by a sense of the inevitable and divinely pre-ordained role of Rome in the world, both in Rome's provinces, and in the capital itself. In Virgil's *Aeneid* the nexus of an imperial presence, territorial expansion, and divine destiny fulfilled find their most subtle and wide-rangling expression, in a work of unparalleled influence on other forms of ideologically-loaded representation. Ideas which we encounter in isolation on monuments or in the work of other poets gain in their breadth of significance by virtue of the existence of the *Aeneid*, which functions as the expression of Roman imperial ideology in its fullest form, and as a repository of significance from which all other descriptions of Rome inevitably derive a greatly enhanced language of symbols and ideas.

Perhaps the most significant peculiarity of the Roman way of representing empire is its aetiological tendency. In common with much other ancient thought, the definition of empire itself was made by reference to an origin or a cause. You would not ask 'what is the Roman empire like?', but rather, 'what caused the Roman empire?', and thereby acquire an understanding of its character. So the origins of the city of Rome became a vital part of imperial ideology. For the opponents of empire, Rome's founders were barbarian shepherds, Rome's rule the manifestation of the randomness of the caprice of Fortune. More commonly, at least in the sources which have survived, the foundation and early history of Rome demonstrate and guarantee the virtue and wisdom which is characteristic of the whole history of Rome, from the beginnings to the present day. In this discourse, it is difficult to make clear demarcations between history and myth, and
indeed, important not to. But it should not be forgotten that for the Romans and their subjects, history was the dominant mode of explaining, and thus of understanding, the nature of Rome’s empire.

**Heracles**

It would be an immense task to describe the multitude of manifestations which the figure of Hercules undergoes, and to give an introduction to the figure in the same manner as I have introduced the historical context would be incompatible with how I understand both Hercules and ancient myths in general. To prioritize any one representation of Hercules over another, or to suggest that any particular representation is more true to tradition or to the *real* myth, is to misunderstand the important fact that myths live only in their representations, and that to interpret a myth necessitates looking at its representational context. Perhaps particularly with Hercules, in Greek Heracles, versatility is a defining feature, and if we are to chart the significance of particular representations of him, it will be an encumbrance to think in terms of original meanings or fixed identity. So the only introduction I shall make will be to point out that both Heracles and Hercules were very popular, had a long history, and could take on a wide variety of roles and characteristics. From this multitude one episode had special significance in imperial Rome: the arrival of Hercules in Italy on his return journey from Spain, where he had stolen the cattle of the triple headed monster Geryon, and his battle with Cacus over the cattle on the Palatine hill. The story was an old one, appearing at least as early as the fifth century B.C.E., but gained in popularity in the early empire, perhaps as a result of taking a central position in book 8 of the *Aeneid*, where Cacus is depicted as a fire-breathing monster. The first narrative I shall present gives us Heracles as a pre-historic civilizer. It comes from the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek rhetorician and historian, who came to work in Rome shortly after Augustus had decisively installed himself as head of the Roman state.

Dionysius’ subject matter is the origins and early history of the Romans. His history ends at the point at which Polybius begins, and he clearly has the same aim, of mediating the Roman empire to its Greek subjects. Polybius’ stress on autopsy in historical writing gives his work a heavy bias towards contemporary events. Dionysius, on the other hand, employs a variety of techniques to press mythical material into service. He goes back as far in time as he can to demonstrate the character and virtue of Roman rule. Indeed, his trump card in making Roman supremacy acceptable to a Greek readership is the claim that the earliest inhabitants of Italy were colonists from Greece. His zeal to reconcile his Greek readers to the virtues of Roman rule thus leads him
to put forward a historical interpretation in which the good aspects of Roman rule can be seen to have their origin in the Greek origin of the Romans themselves. As part of his survey of pre-Roman Italy, Dionysius includes two versions of Hercules' visit, distinguished from each other in terms of their historical credibility. ‘Of the things said about this god’, Dionysius begins, ‘some are rather mythical, others are more true’. He takes the mythical material first, and describes how, in the course of one of his twelve labours, Heracles came to Italy, fought and killed a bandit called Cacus, who had tried to steal the cattle, and how the inhabitants commemorated the event in the establishment of one of the most important of Rome’s public altars, the Ara Maxima in the Forum Boarium, which was still in use in Dionysius’ own day. Dionysius concludes the account by reiterating ‘this is the mythical story handed down about him’. There are two curious features of Dionysius’ categorization of this narrative as mythical: the first its restraint; there is nothing remotely supernatural. The second is the emphasis upon the aetiologies; in discussing the Ara Maxima Dionysius stresses the continuity of the traditions of the priestly families, the handing down of Greek sacrificial custom, and the spread of cults of Heracles throughout Italy. He also says that it was in premonition of Heracles’ apothesis that the local king, Evander, set up this altar. The mythical, then, does not in any sense exclude the believable. Indeed, Dionysius has reserved the category of mythical specifically to grant a particular kind of credibility to these aetiologies; a credibility which takes into account the possibility of apothesis, and which stresses the sanctity of institutions central to Roman sacred practice.

What Dionysius is doing with the mythical elements becomes clearer when he comes to the truer story, introduced thus: ‘The truer version, which is used by many of those narrating his deeds in the form of history, goes like this:’ Heracles was the greatest general of his age, and commanded a large army which was engaged in an expedition involving all the territories bounded by Ocean. If he encountered a tyranny, or a city that caused suffering to its neighbours, or any kind of hegemony of uncivilized and dangerous men, he would dispose of them, and replace them with monarchies operating within the law, states based upon wise constitutions and ways of life directed towards harmony and love of mankind. He resettled Greeks and barbarians, inland and coastal dwellers, who were traditionally distrustful of each other, so as to live together, and built cities in deserts, diverted rivers so as to stop them flooding, and constructed roads through inaccessible mountains, among other engineering feats. The battle with Cacus is transformed into that between the invading conqueror and the recalcitrant native warlord. After Heracles’ successful defeat of resisting Ligurians, who seriously delay his entry into Italy, many cities
voluntarily gave themselves up; especially the Greek ones. Cacus was a barbarian leader of an uncivilized people, and a plague to his neighbours. On his defeat, his territory, including the site of the future city of Rome, was divided up among the natives who had shown their loyalty to Heracles by participating in the expedition. Others who benefited from this resettlement programme were those whom Heracles had taken with him as prisoners from earlier campaigns. They had taken part in subsequent military actions, and were now rewarded with liberty and colonies. As a result of his actions in Italy, Heracles was awarded divine honours. The colonists he left behind near Rome maintained their own (Greek) form of government for a while, but gradually became wholly assimilated to the original inhabitants of the area, the Aborigines.

Dionysius' narrative displays concerns central to his mission of the justification and explanation of the empire of his own day. The division between barbarian and Greek is a major preoccupation. For Greeks it was normally a linguistic division between Greek and non-Greek speakers. The term barbarian also had pejorative associations based upon an evaluation of a way of life, and in a passage at the end of his survey of pre-Roman Italy, Dionysius extends these and argues against the linguistic distinction. The Romans cease to be barbarians because they live a civilized life. Likewise Cacus is described as completely barbarian (komide barbaros); he not only did not speak Greek; he also behaved like a barbarian. The distinction acquires further depth in Dionysius' distinction between the different kinds of Italian inhabitants. Those that were Greek, in effect those to whose Greek origin Dionysius has devoted considerable attention earlier in the work, recognized their invading kin, and responded accordingly. So any distinction between the victim of aggression and the aggressor is submerged in the general vision of Greek supremacy over barbarians.

The native barbarians all live in remote mountain landscapes. Both the Ligurians and Cacus have a wildness which is a complement to their geographical location. Two other sections of the work provide resonance here: first a luxuriant description immediately before this episode of the fertility of early Italy, by which Dionysius seeks to explain the common conception of a golden age of Saturn; second, the emphasis upon Heracles' manipulation of natural resources as part of his civilizing mission. Heracles here is certainly taming nature, but only in a clearly defined manner, and one which corresponds to the vision of Italy as essentially a land of plenty. His works are all designed to create better opportunities for human exploitation. The damage caused by unpredictable rivers is prevented. What was previously inaccessible is made available. But it would be wrong to distinguish between his effect on nature and his effect on people. His resettlement programme, like
his political reforming, is designed to rid communities of undesirable characteristics, and install a uniform, Greek idea of civilization.

Jourdain-Annequin has amply documented the idea of Hercules as the civilizer and dispenser of culture, basing her account on Diodorus’ more copious evidence for the rest of his adventures. She employs structuralist dichotomies of nature/culture, and suggests that the urban community was essential to the appeal of the reiteration of this distinction in the form of a proliferation of Hercules’ myths. What her analysis lacks, perhaps because she favours Diodorus Siculus as a source over Dionysius, is the sense of a political context to this vision of Heracles. The idea of the Greek civilizer imposing a uniform world order could only make sense within the empire; it is not the urban context, so much as the idea of world empire, which gives credibility to Heracles as the civilizer. For Dionysius, this version is the one more close to truth, more resembling history. Hercules is more believable as a civilizer than as a hero because in Dionysius’ world, it was thoroughly possible to be granted divine honours for political reform, centralizing government, military campaigning and engineering projects, and less likely that without these you would be. And vitally, it is the explanation of Heracles’ apotheosis which gives direction to both versions. Dionysius needs to explain how, as a result of his actions in Italy, Heracles became a god.

So a believable version of Heracles, one appropriate to a serious historical enterprise, shows the hero acting to modify the environment to make it more serviceable to humankind; destroying those natives who stubbornly adhere to their barbaric modes of existence, while bringing prosperity to those earlier victims who have now seen reason and can be trusted to perpetuate the civilized values for which the hero stands. To those who have studied the representation of European world conquests, this is all very familiar. It is crucial, however, not to misplace the mythical element in Dionysius’ narrative and hasten to identify Heracles with the imperial ruler of his own day. Such identification was possible: Horace compares Augustus returning from Spain to Hercules in Odes III.xiv, and elsewhere Hercules is the prototype for Augustus’ imagined deification. Mark Antony actually claimed descent from Hercules, although this laid him open to criticism. But in Dionysius’ narrative it is precisely the differences established by the pre-historical setting which give Heracles his power. We should not look in Heracles for a kind of fore-shadowing of Augustus which is pointedly political in the sense of making direct reference to the living monarch. Rather, it is what Dionysius finds believable in his depiction of the ideal imperialist which can reveal to us his vision of the ideal foundation for Roman world rule. Because the Romans are Greeks, Heracles’ Greek empire acts as a pre-historic foundation for comprehending Dionysius’ own world.
the first person to do anything of note on the site of the city of Rome, provides a model for the glory which was to grow from that place.

Hercules

Set against Dionysius, the poem of Propertius which deals with a small episode from the same story is quite remarkable. It comes from Propertius’ troublesome fourth book, the book in which the poet who has consistently asserted that the delicate poetry of love was all that he was capable of, moves to treat themes taken from Rome’s epic pre-history. Propertius’ main point of reference for his encounters with pre-history is Virgil. Without Virgil’s treatment of Hercules and Cacus, Propertius’ would be almost incomprehensible, since brevity and stylistic compression are one side of the elegist’s method for adapting the verbosity of epic poetry to his own slighter genre. The tone of the poem is difficult to place; there are clearly comic elements, but the poet is at pains to recreate a Virgilian sense of the wooded sanctity that characterized the site of Rome long before the foundation of the city.

The challenge in taking this theme and adapting it to a different kind of poetry is the creation of a blend of epic elements with those which have characterized the passionate love-poet: a finely-wrought, delicate style; an exclusive and personal form of expression. All the poems in this book can be viewed as different versions of rising to this same challenge. Many of them are aetiologies; Propertius effectively establishes the idea that in looking for the origin of something familiar from contemporary Rome, a link can be established between the personal and the historical spheres. In contrast to Dionysius, and also to Virgil, the self-consciousness of the poetic persona, the awareness in the reader of a more or less uninterrupted dialogue with the poetic I, makes the relevance of the present in these aetiologies much more apparent.

In the Hercules poem, the elegiac rendering of Hercules in Rome boils down to the innovative adaptation of the story from Virgil, with many clear verbal echoes, and the addition of a new episode, building on Virgil’s structure, but departing quite drastically from it in tone. The landscape is once more important: it features in the introduction, and in the transition from the Cacus episode to that concerning the sacred grove. We must bear in mind the contrast which would have been vivid to Propertius’ readers, used to this convention, between the urban density of Rome, and this picture of what Propertius describes as the unconquered hill, the Palatine. The rivers which are commonly imagined to overflow the whole area recall Dionysius’ picture of Heracles’ beneficent actions with rivers; the Tiber neatly contained within its banks is clearly a potent image of civilization. So in this moist landscape we can read the symbols of an untouched, pre-urban idyll.
However, Propertius makes water into the focal point for his new addition: after dispatching Cacus and sending the cattle down to graze in what he names as the Forum in a moment of strange clairvoyance, Hercules is beset by a terrible thirst. He hears water flowing in a nearby grove sacred to the Bona Dea, the good goddess, who was tended exclusively by women, and pleads with the priestesses to let him enter and drink. He speaks what we are told are words not worthy of a god: the high point of his rhetoric involves disavowing his masculinity: he assumes that the reason for a women's cult is their fear of man, so he points out that he himself was once enslaved as a girl, taking servile tasks, spinning, wearing a fine silk frock, and enclosing his hairy chest in a soft bra. The priestess is unconvinced, however, and explains why no men may enter the shrine. This kind of question was a common topic of antiquarian investigation; the priestess equates her goddess with Athena, caught bathing by Tiresias; a ban on men was the result. This explanation is peculiar; but Hercules at any rate ignores the priestesses' admonitions and uses force to break in and quench his thirst. Almost as a curse, he then vows to set up the Ara Maxima to commemorate his visit, and in revenge refuses women the right to worship at it.

So we have the aetiology not just of the Ara Maxima, but of why these two cults are open only to one sex. The cults have at their intersection the figures of Hercules and Tiresias, both of whom have lived as both man and woman. It is this congruency which explains the otherwise bizarre aetiology given by the priestess: as antiquarian conjecture it is noticeable bogus. The vision of transvestite Hercules was a familiar one to Propertius' readers. Hercules was sold as a slave to the Lydian queen Omphale, who became his mistress in both senses. His enslavement took the form of exchanging roles with the queen; she disported herself with his club and lion skin, he sat inside taking the clothes and the tasks of a domestic slave-woman. Representations of the couple, and of Omphale alone dressed as Hercules, were extremely popular subjects of sculpture, painting, and most especially, engraved gems worn as jewellery during this period. However, it remains to observe what Propertius achieves by introducing this story to these aetiologies of Rome.

To begin with, Propertius imbues Hercules with more personality than any other version of these events; and as well as Omphale, he recalls the long-standing Greek interest in Hercules' inordinate appetites: that he should be driven by thirst to destroy the shrine clearly manifests the tradition of Hercules as insatiable. And his exploits too are scaled down, to divest them of the grandiose: instead of invading Italy, he invades this particular shrine; and his words of angry entreaty to the priestess have a formal similarity to the popular genre of poems written in the person of the excluded lover. All this helps to
gloss the poet's comment that Hercules' words were rather less than a god's.

Hercules tries first to gain access by displaying his femininity; when this fails, he resorts to his strength. In one traditional vision of Heracles, this combination of gender transformation and gender reinforcement is very apparent. Both forms of expression, like the inordinate thirst, seem incompatible with the aura of sanctity which the poem strives to create. Propertius' Hercules is absurd, comic, a travesty of the heroic founder; but the processes whereby he comes to be so are all carefully integrated into the aetiological mechanism which link Hercules to Rome in the first place. There is no clear point of conflict in the poem: Hercules bragging of his credentials as a woman is a vital stage in this dramatization of the foundation of the *Ara Maxima*; and by explaining not just the altar, but also the nature of its rites, Propertius justifies the apparent digression which this dramatization produces. No reader could suggest that the manipulation of gender here is just a device to produce amusement.

It would be ideal to be able to conclude that by focusing upon transformations of gender, Propertius strikes a blow at the bodily integrity of Hercules, with serious consequences for his role as the heroic fore­runner of Roman imperialism. In the contrast between Dionysius and Propertius, we can observe that in Propertius' dramatization, in bringing Hercules to speak, he makes him considerably less monolithic than the objectified conqueror of the historical version. Indeed, by making thirst the motivating factor, the philanthropic selflessness that characterizes Dionysius' imperial reformer is disallowed from the start. This Hercules does articulate his desires, and it is they which lead him to fulfil his function in founding his altar. The central question is how far the poem actually presents the mutability of Hercules' gender as a problem.

Gender inversion is a frequent theme in Propertius' poetry; the most obvious manifestation is in the poet's subjection to his mistress, which provides the material for several poems on powerful women and subservient men. In the preceding poem in the book, this inversion takes the form of a pitched battle between the conquering mistress and the effeminate and defeated poet/lover. In that poem, the mistress is figured as a triumphant Roman general; perhaps she displays the triumphant features lacking in our Hercules; I argue elsewhere that she also provides the element of triumph lacking in Propertius' treatment of the battle of Actium. The focus on Hercules and Tiresias as figures who have lived as both sexes picks up upon the vision of the poet as one whose sexuate identity questions the boundaries of female/male. Perhaps the broader question of identification can provide a link between both these versions of Hercules: as the first visitor to Rome, Hercules represents for Dionysius the ideal imperialist; he shows the
way for Dionysius' own Greek culture to be assimilated to Roman world rule. In Propertius the identification with that first visitor produces a comic and desiring body, one who has experienced, in heroic form, the subjection to a woman and effeminization which the poet claims for himself, likewise with pride. Griffin has suggested the figure of the poet in Propertius bears a striking resemblance to Mark Antony. Antony started by heightening his masculinity by associating himself with Hercules, and then slipped into being lampooned for effeminacy and subordination to Cleopatra, following the example of Hercules and Omphale. Finally he abandoned Hercules for Dionysus, the god whose gender was the most unstable of all. By taking Hercules at the point where he represents the first Roman, and making a display of his flawed masculinity, Propertius is integrating into history a constellation of gender attributes which belong to the counterculture of gender transgression which characterizes the world of love-elegy. We should not mistake the humour in Propertius, but in striving to combine historical etiology with the gender inversion which characterizes the love poet, Propertius is careful to produce a version of Hercules which, like Dionysius', is believable in its own terms. And for both authors, this credibility involves a degree of personal identification, but also identification in the plane of historical understanding.

I'd like to end by returning to an initial methodological point: we must be careful about awarding either of these versions, or indeed any narrative retelling of myth, the status of the right account. Dionysius has his own agenda, and it would be simplistic to claim that he represented a more traditional or more acceptable Hercules than Propertius', who after all looks in some ways a lot more traditional, in the sense of less modern, than Dionysius'. That said, I have the feeling that in both accounts we are dealing with reworkings aiming at greater verisimilitude. That Dionysius' Hercules is truer is explicit in the context of his history: he is truer because he is an object lesson in conducting a successful colonial venture, routing barbarism, instilling civilization, and rewarding his faithful and right-thinking subjects. Hercules represents, in other words, a paradigm of Greece's current salvation through Rome. Propertius' Hercules has a similar redemptive function: just as for Dionysius, he allows himself to be reformed in the ideal image of his narrator, but an image that gains in potency and appeal through exaggeration, grotesquerie, humour, all elements which give a sense of the greatness of the hero which is accessible, recognizable, but not mundane. The poet can identify with Hercules, but he isn't like him. Hercules' gender inversion may assimilate him to the elegist, but if we concentrate on what keeps Hercules an extraordinary figure in Propertius' poem, it is that his effeminization does not cause him shame; Hercules boasts of his womanly qualities even at the moment where his invasive imperialistic actions are the
centre of attention. It's a model of conquest and power which builds upon the deferral of the Actium narrative to suggest that the poet can endorse imperial activity, if he takes the time to reconsider its emotional ramifications. And looking at the wider context of Propertius' last book, the account of Hercules is yet another reassessment of the poet's stance in relation to the affairs of the great world. So as a figure of the pre-historic colonist, Hercules, by virtue of his malleability and appeal, provides an ideal ground both for Propertius and Dionysius to work out their own versions of Roman pre-history, and although their accounts differ on predictable lines, it remains important to weigh up the attractions of their respective accounts with the contextual elements which make their narratives credible.

Propertius IV.9: A provisional translation

At the time when the son of Amphitryon had driven the calves from your stables, Erythea, he came to the unvanquished hills on sheep-covered Palatine, and halted his tired cattle (he was tired himself), where the regions of Velabrum were flooded in river water and where a boatsman was setting sail through the city waters. But they did not remain safe from the faithless host Cacus: by theft he dishonoured Jove. Cacus was a local inhabitant, a robber from a fearful cave, who made sounds divided from three mouths. To hide the clear signs of his obvious theft he dragged the oxen backwards by the tail into the caves, but not without the god seeing; the calves sounded out the thief, and anger destroyed the thief's terrible doors. Cacus lay smitten on his three foreheads by the Herculean branch, and the offspring of Alceus spoke thus: 'Go, oxen, go, oxen of Hercules, last labour of my club, sought twice by me, twice my prize, oxen, and sanctify the Bouanian fields by your lowing: the noble forum of Rome will be your pastures'.

He spoke, and thirst tortured his dry mouth, but the barren land did not provide water. But from afar he heard secluded girls laugh, where a copse's shady circle made a glade, a place closed off for the women's goddess and sacred springs, a shrine protected safely from any men. Purple wreaths veiled the hidden threshold, and in a shabby hut a fragrant fire smoked. A poplar decorated the shrine with its great leaves, its shady branches hiding song-birds. He rushed in, his beard dry and dusty, and hurled out before the doors these words not fitting to a god: 'You, I pray, who play in the sacred hollow of the grove, open your kindly doors to a tired man. I'm wandering in need of water around the sounds of splashing springs; a cupped palm filled in the stream would be enough. Have you heard of the man who lifted the world on his back? I am he whom all the world calls Hercules. Who has not heard of the brave deeds of Hercules' club, my arrows that never miss the great wild beasts, the one man who saw the shades of the Styx lit
up? Now I bring my lot to this corner of the world, but, though tired, this country hardly welcomes me. Even if you prayed to bitter Juno, my step-mother, she wouldn't have closed off her waters. But if my face and lion-skin are scaring anyone, even I have played the part of slave girl in a silk dress, and done my daily spinning with a Lydian distaff. A soft brassiere held in my hairy chest, and in spite of my hard hands, I was a good girl'.

To these words of Hercules, the gentle priestess replied, 'Spare your eyes, stranger, and go away from the awesome shrine. Leave now, and flee safely from this threshold. The altar hidden in this hut is sanctified by a fearful law as forbidden to men. Tiresias the prophet, when he glimpsed Pallas as she bathed, putting down her Gorgon shield, paid a great price. Let the gods grant you other springs. This one flows alone for girls, secret and out of reach'. So the old woman: he battered the dark door-posts with his shoulders, as the closed door could not bear his angered thirst. And after he had quenched the heat in the drained river, he made this solemn vow through still-moist lips: 'Great Altar, vowed when I found my cattle, altar made great by these hands, never shall girls be suffered to worship here, so that Hercules' thirst will be eternally avenged'. This man, who had travelled the world and sanctified it with his hands, Tatius' men of Cures comprehended as Sancus. Holy father, greetings, now favoured by harsh Juno: Sancus, may you enter propitiously into my book.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Chris Gittings for inviting this paper, the audience at the conference, and my colleagues at the West Midlands Classical seminar. Their helpful suggestions, even if I have not been able to incorporate them here, will enable me to take this work further.


7. 1.39.1
8. 1.40.6
9. 1.41.1
10. 1.36-38
15. I include my own rough translation of the poem at the end. The translation of W.G.Shepherd, *Propetius: The Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) is to be recommended to those who want a more elegant and faithful version of the Latin.
16. The poem ends with a further etiology, linking a lesser local god, Sancus, to Hercules. This accumulation of anecdotal wisdom is typical of the refined style of Callimachus, Propertius’ poetic mentor.
19. See *Roman Historical Myths* pp. 166-169. Actium was Augustus’ final defeat of Antony, the only obstacle to his sole domination of the Mediterranean. Virgil’s account of Hercules and Cacus is widely believed to be an allegory of Actium. So that there is a double displacement: the battle of Actium displaced from its place in 4.6, only to be reworked as a battle of lovers in 4.8, and the displacement of Hercules’ victory over Cacus into his conquest of the women’s shrine.