G yawp ius IN VirgiL, Aeneid 12 AND LITERARY LACONIANS*

ABSTRACT

This note examines the significance of Gylippus at Aen. 12.271–83 and argues that Virgil’s narrative is an epitaphic gesture alluding to Nicander of Colophon, Anth. Pal. 7.435 and other epigrams from Anth. Pal. 7. Virgil’s bilingual reader would participate in the Hellenistic Ergänzungsspiel and supplement further meaning to this otherwise generic scene.

Keywords: Virgil; Nicander; epigram; Aeneid Book 12; Sparta; Gylippus; Peloponnesian School; Garland of Meleager

In this note, I argue that Virgil’s use of the name Gylippus in Aeneid 12 (270–83) is a learned reference to an epigram attributed to Nicander of Colophon (c. 150 B.C.E.) in the Garland of Meleager (Anth. Pal. 7.435).1 In addition to the shared name Gylippus, both Nicander’s epigram and Virgil’s composition employ equine language which suggests Virgil was expanding on Nicander’s wordplay. Finally, Virgil’s passage evokes a particular distillation of Spartan traditionalism seen in Nicander’s epigram and other compositions in the Garland of Meleager on Laconizing topoi. Taken together, this analysis suggests Virgil is employing a concise epitaphic obituary for a minor hero. As Dinter has shown, Virgil often seeks to access the ‘generic and thematic versatility of epigram’ in order to ‘insinuate telling metapoetical comments,’ creating, in Dinter’s analysis, a particular ‘epitaphic gesture’.2 I propose another epitaphic gesture outside of Dinter’s analysis: the death of an anonymous son of Gylippus, Gylippus himself, and his

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anonymous Tyrrenian wife. This allusion is an effective engagement in the Ergänzungsspiel. Such a literary nod adds further layers of referential meaning in Virgil’s own composition in what otherwise would be generic battle narrative. This literary game between Hellenistic epigram and Virgilian epic points to Virgil’s bilingual reader in Rome. Beyond the epitaphic aesthetic, Virgil transposes an idealized image of Sparta and transfers this martial image onto his mythical proto-Romans. This allusion may also allow Virgil to monumentalize his poetic and intellectual debt to Nicander.

In Book 12 of the Aeneid, following his misguided speech, Tolumnius the augur launches his spear at the enemy Trojans and their allies. Virgil expands and slows the narrative, and presents his reader with the following passage (270–83):

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hasta uolans, ut forte nouem pulcherrima fratrum
corpora constiterant contra, quos fida crearat
una tot Arcadio coniuncx Tyrrenha Gylippo,
horum unum ad medium, teritur qua sutilis aluo
balteus et laterum iuncturas fibula mordet,
egregium forma iuuenem et fulgentibus armis,
transadigit costas fuluaque effundit harena.
at fratres, animosa phalanx accensaque luctu,
pars gladios stringunt manibus, pars missile ferrum
corripiunt caecique ruunt. quos agmina contra
procurrunt Laurentum, hinc densi rursus inundant
Troes Agyllinique et picits Arcades armis:
sic omnis amor unus habet decernere ferro.
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The focus on the flight of the spear (hasta uolans) is followed first by a description of the nine brothers (nouem ... fratrum), and then their reaction on the mythical field of battle when one of their kinsmen is struck (at fratres, animosa phalanx accensaque luctu). The spear kills one of the nine anonymous sons of the Arcadian Gylippus.

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3 For a concise definition of Ergänzungsspiel, see P. Bing, ‘Ergänzungsspiel in the epigrams of Callimachus’, A&A 41 (1995), 115–31, at 116 and n. 3. Bing writes that ‘Hellenistic epigram was often deliberately severed from its object or monument, and set in the as yet uncharted landscape of the book. Here, poets came to exploit, and play with, this process of supplementation in a deliberate and artificial way. Indeed, it became a favored and self-conscious device’.


and his unnamed Tyrrhenian wife (*horum unum ad medium*). Tarrant notes that this Glyippus is not otherwise mentioned in the poem, before analyzing the rest of the passage, particularly the status of the *fida ... una ... conium* Tyrrhena in the context of Augustan Rome.\(^7\) The name and context is significant, and while Glyippus is not central to Virgil’s plot *per se*, he is employed to allude to *Anth. Pal.* 7.435 and contribute further intergeneric meaning through epitaphic gesture.\(^8\)

*Anth. Pal.* 7.435 evokes the topos of six deceased Spartan brothers buried by their surviving seventh brother, also named Glyippus. An epitaph for the sons of Iphicratides and Alexippa, it reads as follows:

> Εὐπυλίδας, Ἐράτων, Χαϊρίς, Λύκος, Ἄγης, Ἀλέξων, ἐξ Ἰφικρατίδα παῖδες, ἀπαλόμεθα
> Μεσσαίας ὑπὸ τεῖχος ὅ δ’ ἐβδομος ἄμμε Γυλλπος
> ἐν πυρί θεῖς μεγάλαν ἠλθε φέρον σποδίαν,
> Σπάρτα μὲν μέγα κύδος, Ἀλεξίππα δὲ μέγ’ ἀχθος
> ματρ’ τὸ δ’ ἐν πάντων καὶ καλὸν ἑντάριον.

Eupylidas, Eraton, Chaeris, Lycus, Agis and Alexon, six sons of Iphicratides, we were destroyed under the wall of Messene; but our seventh Glyippus having placed us on a pyre came bearing a great heap of ashes, a great glory for Sparta, but for Alexippa a great grief to our mother. One beautiful shroud for all of us.

Gow and Page locate this poem in a Meleagrian context.\(^9\) It is likely that Nicander is alluding to the Hellenistic conflict between Sparta and the new Messene with its massive circuit walls (*Μεσσαίας ὑπὸ τεῖχος*) rather than the archaic conquest of Messene (Tyrt. frs. 5–7 W.\(^2\)).\(^10\) This epigram is not unique in the idealization of Spartan martial valour through the theme of sibling trauma. *Anth. Pal.* 7.434, the poem just before Nicander’s in the Meleagrian sequence and attributed to Dioscorides, similarly reflects a Spartan wife Demaeneta as she inters eight anonymous sons under a single stone marker:

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\(^8\) Glyippus is absent from studies of names and ethnography in the *Aeneid*; e.g. B. Rehm, *Das geographische Bild des alten Italien in Vergils Aeneis* (Leipzig, 1932), 12; cf. L.A. Holland, *Place names and heroes in the Aeneid*, *AJPh* 56 (1935), 202–15, and C. Saunders, *Sources of the names of Trojans and Latins in Vergil’s Aeneid*, *TAPhA* 71 (1940), 537–55. See also O’Hara (n. 1), 234. For the significance of names, M.N. Wilcock, ‘Battle scenes in the Aeneid’, *PCPhS* 29 (1983), 87–99, at 98–9 n. 20 quotes N. Horsfall, who remarked ‘that we should never forget the erudition of Virgil; we may simply be failing through ignorance to pick up allusions. Any or all of the minor names may have carried some sort of learned resonance, which the educated reader of the time would comprehend’; Paschalis (n. 1), 386 and 417 treats Glyippus not in reference to Nicander but rather to internal Virgilian wordplay discussed below. On minor names, see also T. Power, ‘Vergil’s citharodes: Crethus and Iopas reconsidered’, *Vergilius* 63 (2017), 98–9.

\(^9\) Gow and Page (n. 1), 423–4. For the historical Glyippus, see P. Poralla, A.S. Bradford, *A Prosopography of the Lacedaemonians from the Earliest Times to the Death of Alexander the Great* (Chicago, 1985), 38–9, s.v. Γυλλπος 196.

Both of these epigrams have been discussed by historians in attempts to recover the realia of Laconian burial. Hodkinson articulates the communis opinio, arguing that these poems are of a fictitious, pseudo-historical nature, though they show knowledge of the Spartan literary tradition. For instance, λόχος in the Dioscorides poem may allude to Spartan military arrangements, and the καλὸν ἐντάφιον in Nicander’s composition may be a reference to Spartan military cloaks. Nevertheless, these poems represent the free movement of sepulchral epigrams, now decoupled from their monuments, creating a literary representation of an idealized ahistorical Sparta. Regarding verse inscriptions specifically, Page remarks that ‘verse epitaph is strange to Sparta at all times’, suggesting that these compositions are firmly a part of the Spartan mirage. The topos of mass burial or the polyandria tomb of siblings was a particularly strong evocation of idealized Sparta developed by poets in the Hellenistic period. Both Anth. Pal. 7.434 and 7.435 represent an image of a Spartan wife in the extreme, a literary absurdity since six or eight military age sons from a single mother is statistically a near impossibility in antiquity. The mass tomb for the deceased is a form of literary monumentalizing.

For the sceptical reader, the only aspect that links these two passages is the strange name Gylippus. In Virgil’s poetry, he is the Arcadian father, but in Nicander’s epigram, he figures as the seventh surviving son. As scholars have noted, Virgil and other Roman poets including to Lucretius and Catullus were especially indebted to...
Nicander’s poetry. This name in Virgil’s passage is enough to evoke Anth. Pal. 7.435 as a subtle allusion or literary nod to Nicander’s poetic corpus.

For the connection to be convincing, more must be made of the name Gylippus. Paschalis sees word play in the etymology, a Latinization of the Greek Γύλιππος from γυάλον (‘cavity’) and ἵππος (‘horse’), with Tyrrhena as an etymological refiguring of τύρσις (‘tower’). For Paschalis, when taken alongside alius, these words present a semantic environment that evokes the Laocoön–Horse sequence. The son of Gylippus (‘hollow horse’) is struck down with his belly pierced by a spear, evoking the hollow Trojan horse in Aeneid 2, whose belly the priest Laocoon pierces with a spear (2.40–56). A number of motifs in this way seem to be directly transposed onto the scene in Book 12: a priest, hollow horse, the type of wound, and a father and his sons.

Our passage in Book 12 also seems to have further name parallels with Anth. Pal. 7.435, suggesting that Virgil structured his text to encourage internal rereading back to Book 2 and epitaphic gesture to these external epigrams. Nicander’s poem suggests a rather equine family: Iphicratides (‘son of one who is powerful from strength’, perhaps conflated for a Latin reader as ‘son of strong horse’ ἵππος for ἰπτι) and Alexippa (‘defending from a horse’) have a son Gylippus (‘hollow horse’). Note the first son listed as Eupylidas (‘son of good gate’) at the beginning of the epigram as well. In my view, Nicander’s epigram was not so much about commemorating Spartan war dead than recherché onomastics and ambiguous word games. Virgil’s mention of the name Gylippus invites his reader to continue playing the game and think of the Trojan horse. Virgil’s Tyrrhena for τύρσις (‘tower’) may be modelled on Eupylidas in Nicander’s epigram. Such equine names, along with puns on the urban landscape seen in Eupylidas and Tyrrhena further link Anth. Pal. 7.435 to Virgil’s passage.

I have argued that, in addition to the primary reference to the Trojan horse sequence identified by Paschalis, the equine semantic signaling employed around Gylippus and his sons point to Nicander’s own horsey composition. The use of alius may further strengthen the epigrammatic gesture with respect to Spartan mothers and sons, alluding to the parallel between combat wounds and childbirth which is seen in the Laconian epigrams and the apothegms. It might be tempting to imagine, in a satirizing sense, that Virgil is commenting on both this Tyrrhenian woman and her Spartan counterparts, Alexippa and Demaeneta, as bearing as many martial children as the Trojan horse itself. In this reading, Virgil is humorously pointing to the absurdity of Nicander and Dioscorides’ epitaphs in his own iteration of the topos. A more somber note is likely. Virgil’s use of alius should be understood simultaneously to evoke the horrific pain of a gut wound and the pain of childbirth for the Tyrrhenian wife (Aen. 12.271 fida crearat), which is amplified by the death of her own son.

16 Hollis (n. 1).
17 Paschalis (n. 1), 386.
18 alius is used of the Trojan horse: Aen. 2.51, 2.401, 6.516, 9.152. Aen. 10.211 is the only other usage for the belly of a ship.
19 See discussion at nn. 8, 15; cf. O’Hara (n. 1), 21–42 for onomastic games; also 66–9 for a discussion on etymologizing and 92–5 for Virgil alluding to earlier poetic etymologizing.
20 See T. Figueira, ‘Gynecocracy: how women policed masculine behavior in Archaic and Classical Sparta’, in S. Hodkinson and A. Powell (edd.), Sparta: The Body Politic (Swansea, 2010), 265–96, at 285–6. Figueira catalogues the sayings of the Spartan women (as received in Plutarch) and provides their textual sources, including poems from the Greek Anthology.
The theme of trauma on the battlefield and in childbirth is well-established and can be seen in other Laconizing epigrams, particularly *Anth. Pal.* 7.230 (Erycius of Cyzicus), 7.433 (Tymnes) and 7.531 (Antipater of Thessalonica, Virgil’s near contemporary: perhaps another example of an Augustan poet reworking epigrams from the *Garland* of Meleager). These epigrams respectively illustrate the tension between the battlefield and childbirth as well as the idealization of Laconian social attitudes. These compositions invert the trope of heroic conduct with the mother killing her own cowardly son in an act of filicide.21 Implicit in these texts is the pain of attitudes. These compositions invert the trope of heroic conduct with the mother killing between the battlefield and childbirth as well as the idealization of Laconian social from the contemporary: perhaps another example of an Augustan poet reworking epigrams from the composition of Dioscorides in *Anth. Pal.* 7.434. When these two epigrams are read alongside this passage in the *Aeneid*, it appears that Virgil is creating a broader evocation of epitaphic gestures. As Dinter has argued, the *Aeneid* absorbs Hellenistic sepulchral epigram and allows for the composition of embedded epitaphs within the narrative of the poem.24 Glyippus here, and his eight surviving sons, provide not just a fitting memorial for their lost brother, but possibly an epitaph for Nicander as well, in the vein of Hellenistic literary culture and the commemoration of literary history.


21 See S.D. Smith, *Greek Epigram and Byzantine Culture* (Cambridge, 2019), 182–4, who analyses these epigrams on Spartan childbirth and battle, and their reception among Late Antique poets in the Agathian cycle.

22 Paschalis (n. 1), 386 takes costae as yet another semantic reference to the Trojan horse; but *transadigit costas* at *Aeneid* 12.508 in the exact same position as at 12.277 suggests there is nothing equine about the phrase.


'Peloponnesian School’ in epigram.\textsuperscript{25} While we need not take this school as a literary circle, the designation reflects the preoccupation among certain Hellenistic poets with Greek bucolic landscapes, Arcadian and more broadly Peloponnesian rustic life, and nostalgia for Hellenic glory. Some of these poems also engage with Laconizing ideological tendencies.\textsuperscript{26} These compositions allow Virgil to imbricate the image of Spartan traditionalism in his exemplum of a woman who is seemingly \textit{uniuira}, unnamed, and represents an extreme idealization of motherhood. The poet thus grafts the idealized Spartan mother’s ethos of fertility and civic duty alongside the martial virtue of her sons, and repurposes these images for the needs of the Augustan regime.\textsuperscript{27} Virgil’s inversion of the topos, with eight surviving sons and only one deceased, in contrast to the Spartan mass burial, may reflect a broader claim to the martial superiority of ascendant Rome outdoing prior Hellenic visions of greatness.

In the name Gylippus and the gesture to Nicander’s composition in the \textit{Garland} of Meleager, Virgil in his own passage evokes epitaphic epigrams in the \textit{Garland} of Meleager: nostalgic poets recalling images of Greek traditionalism in a Hellenistic context. In analyzing both Nicander’s epigram and Virgil’s composition, I have argued that the name Gylippus is significant, not merely as a character for the internal plot of the \textit{Aeneid}, but for Virgil’s learned reader in Rome who was bilingual and knew Greek epigrams well. Virgil’s epitaphic evocation would recall the sequence of epigrams on Sparta and images of Laconian traditionalism, now applied to Virgil’s proto-Romans.

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\textsuperscript{26} See A. Sens, \textit{Hellenistic Epigrams: A Selection} (Cambridge, 2020), 209–10, with a brief discussion of Laconizing topoi.

\textsuperscript{27} For Augustan interest in Sparta, see the discussion in A.J.S. Spawforth, \textit{Greece and the Augustan Cultural Revolution} (Cambridge, 2012), 86–100. In Augustan literature, see e.g. Hor. \textit{Carm.} 3.2.13 and the recasting of Tyrt. fr. 10.1–2 W.\textsuperscript{2}. See also R.G.M. Nisbet and N. Rudd, \textit{A Commentary on Horace: Odes, Book III} (Oxford, 2004), 26–7. There may be Tyrtaean echoes with Gylippus and his sons: \textit{egregium forma iuuenem et fulgentibus armis} (\textit{Aen.} 12.275) is much like Tyrtaeus’ description of a young man falling in battle: \textit{καλὸςδ᾽ ἐν προμάχοισι πεσών} (fr. 10.30 W.\textsuperscript{2}). The anonymous youth bleeds out in the sand (\textit{Aen.} 12.276 \textit{fuluaque effundit harena}), and here we may see a parallel to the old man who dies in the dust in Tyrt. fr. 10.24 W.\textsuperscript{2} \textit{θυμὸν ἀποσπειόντι ἀλκημον ἐν κονίῃ}.

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