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The Tiber River as a Source of National Identity in *Aeneid* VIII

At the beginning of Book VIII of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas is troubled by the outset of war with the Latins. As Aeneas sleeps on the banks of the Tiber River, Tiberinus, the personified deity of the Tiber, rises from the waters and reassures Aeneas in a vivid dream. The river god informs Aeneas that he has arrived at his destined location and advises him to make an alliance with Evander and his son Pallas (8.26-65). Aeneas awakes rejuvenated and prepared to continue both with his journey and the war. As with other bouts of indecision, Aeneas' encounter with a dreamlike figure serves to provide both information and reassurance (vision of Creusa: 2.775-789 and vision of Penates: 3.147-171). When Aeneas falls asleep, it is war that troubles him. After the appearance of Tiberinus, it is Rome and the power of the place Rome will become that incites and calms him. In this paper I suggest that the profound effect of the Tiber vision upon Aeneas, as well as an ancient Roman reader, is dependent on Vergil's perception of the Tiber River as a source of national identity.

The scene of Tiberinus' appearance to Aeneas is Vergil's unique addition. Dionysius of Halicarnassus records that when Aeneas reached his destination in Italy he was greeted in his sleep by the Penates (*Ant. Rom.* 1.57)—a scene that Vergil instead inserts into Book III (3.147-171). Jenkyns attributes this adaptation to the poet's desire for Aeneas to encounter a being who is both foreign to him, but familiar to the city he will establish (R. Jenkyns 1998, 533). Scholars have noted Vergil's careful alternation between the sacral Roman name for the Tiber River, Tiberinus, and the Graecized literary name, Thybris (R. Jenkyns 1998, 401-3 & A. Momigliano 1966, *Terzo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, 609-639). Certainly, as Jenkyns argues, this is an indication of the river's integral function in emphasizing Aeneas' status as both foreigner and native (R. Jenkyns 1998, 528 f.). However, a closer look at the role of rivers throughout the *Aeneid*, particularly in Book VIII, demonstrates a larger ancient Roman association of rivers with national identity and recognition of place.

When Aeneas first appears in the text of the poem, he laments the possibility of death on the sea, rather than among fellow Trojan corpses in the Simois River beneath the walls of Troy (1.94-101). While the conception of death in battle on one's home soil is preferable for an ancient hero and consequently motivation for Aeneas' plea, this passage also illustrates Aeneas' association of the rivers of Troy with home. Similar associations are made in Book III when Aeneas visits Helenus and Andromache and envies the replicas of the Xanthus and Simois that he sees there (3.349-351, 497-499). In addition, the prophecies and directives that Aeneas receives urging him to Italy often include references to the establishment of a new kingdom on the banks of the Tiber River (Thybris) (2.782, 3.500). Importantly many of these references are found during Aeneas' recounting of his journey, thus specifically locating the conception of the river as a symbol of his new home within Aeneas' own consciousness. The vision of Tiberinus in Book VIII is an appropriate culmination of Aeneas' progression from one river to another. This emphasis on rivers as the embodiment of a city and one's home surrounds the overall composition of Book VIII. Not only does Vergil personify the Tiber River at

the book's opening, but the book concludes with Aeneas once again gazing upon personified forms of rivers: the Euphrates, the Rhine and the Araxes, all conquered by the Romans and participating in Augustus' triumph (8.724-728). At this point Vergil's depiction of rivers as symbols of nations and cities transcends Aeneas' personal experience and illustrates a larger ancient Roman conception of rivers as a source of national identity.