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# ***Alma Phoebe: Lunar References in Virgil's Aeneid***

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## **Abstract**

The moon and lunar phenomena are frequently referenced in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Close study of these allusions reveals that the poet employs lunar imagery as a key element in his depiction of the characters of both the Carthaginian Dido and the Volscian Camilla, in particular the deliberately crafted juxtaposition between the two women.

## **Keywords**

Virgil; Moon; Luna; Dido; Camilla

The moon serves as astronomical witness to a number of key events in Virgil's *Aeneid*.<sup>1</sup> The present study will seek to explicate the various references to the moon in the text of the epic (including mentions of the goddess Luna or Phoebe), with a view to illustrating how Virgil employs lunar imagery to significant effect in his poem, in particular in delineating the contrast between the opposing pairs Venus/Dido and Diana/Camilla, and as part of his pervasive concern with identifying the relationship between Troy and Rome.<sup>2</sup>

Near the close of the first book of the epic, the "wandering moon" is cited as the first of the subjects of the song of Dido's bard Iopas (*A. I*, 742 *hic canit errantem lunam solisque labores*).<sup>3</sup> The passage echoes similar languages in the song of Silenus from the sixth eclogue (*E. VI*, 64 *tum canit, errantem Permessi ad flumina Gallum*),<sup>4</sup> where one of the Muses and the divine shepherd Linus rise to give honor to the poet Gallus as he wanders by the Permessus. Iopas sings a song marked by astronomical and related phenomena; it stands in contrast to Dido's invitation to Aeneas to tell the (martial) epic story of the Trojan War.<sup>5</sup>

The song of Iopas has ominous implications for the relationship between Aeneas and Dido. It comes as the third reference in Book I to certain aspects of the goddess Diana. At I, 305–417, Aeneas has a memorable encounter with his divine mother Venus, who is disguised as a Diana-like huntress (Aeneas speculates that she may in fact be the virgin goddess of the chase).<sup>6</sup> The Venus-as-Diana scene contains a verbal connection to the lunar reference of Iopas' song; as Venus masquerades as Diana, she asks if Aeneas and his companion Achates have seen one of her sisters wandering about (I, 321–322 ... *iuvenes, monstrate, mearum / vidistis si quam hic errantem sororum*).<sup>7</sup>

Venus pretended to be Diana, as it were; when Aeneas first sees the Carthaginian queen Dido, she is explicitly compared to Diana in a celebrated simile.<sup>8</sup> Neither Venus nor Dido is Diana; the doomed union of Aeneas and Dido will find its commencement at a fateful hunt, where Aeneas will be compared to Diana's brother Apollo – a baleful allusion to the incestuous union of Ptolemy and Cleopatra from the recent history of

1 On the moon in Virgil note C. Santini, "Luna," in Della Corte (1987: pp. 280–281); D. Mark Possanza, "Moon," in Thomas & Ziolkowski (2014, Vol. II: pp. 841–842); Bailey (1935: pp. 183–184): "Luna ... consistently with Roman thought and usage, is still less of a deity in Virgil than Sol." The moon and sun feature prominently as the *clarissima mundi lumina* of the proem to the *Georgics*. I am grateful for the helpful comments of the anonymous referees that greatly improved this study.

2 All texts from Virgil's epic are taken from Conte (2009).

3 For the force of *errantem*, see especially Austin (1971: *ad loc.*); cf. Conway (1935: *ad loc.*). The "lunar" reference of the *lunatae peltae* of I, 490 will be considered below. The present passage is an echo of *G. II*, 478 *defectus solis varios lunaeque labores*.

4 Passages from Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics* are taken from Ottaviano & Conte (2013).

5 *A. I*, 749–756.

6 I, 329.

7 As we shall soon enough see, the true "wanderer" they will encounter is Dido, and the true "wandering moon" of the moment will be Carthage's queen.

8 I, 494–504. On the comparison of Dido to Diana (borrowed from Homer's association of Nausicaa and Artemis), note Henry (1989: p. 75); cf. Cairns (1989: pp. 129 ff.).

Virgil's own day.<sup>9</sup> Two explicit references to Diana are followed in *Aeneid* I by the mysterious song of Iopas that opens with the moon; Iopas is said to have been a student of the Titan Atlas, the rebellious giant who serves as a powerful visual landmark and stopover for Mercury as the messenger god travels to convey to Aeneas Jupiter's injunction that he must depart from Dido's Carthage.<sup>10</sup> Besides the inaugural mention of the moon, the song of Iopas also includes references to the bear lore surrounding the story of Diana's *quondam* favorite Callisto.<sup>11</sup> Storm imagery is not absent.<sup>12</sup>

There are two mentions of the moon in *Aeneid* II, both times with reference to nocturnal military operations. At II, 254–256 *et iam Argiva phalanx instructis navibus ibat / a Tenedo tacitae per amica silentia lunae / litora nota petens ...* Greek forces withdraw to Tenedos as part of the ruse of the Wooden Horse; the silent moon is seen as being a friendly presence that lights the way for the doom of Aeneas' city of Troy.<sup>13</sup> The passage is not without controversy; some have even preferred to read *noctis* for *lunae*.<sup>14</sup>

The moon figures too in the gathering of Trojan warriors at II, 339–340 *addunt se socios Ripheus et maximus armis / Epytus, oblatis per lunam ...*, where Ripheus and Epytus are cited as having been brought to light, as it were, by the moon.<sup>15</sup> Ripheus is certainly killed in the ensuing action (II, 426–428), where Virgil observes that he was noteworthy for his sense of justice and right, *dis aliter visum*. Epytus is not mentioned again; if he is one and the same as Iphitus, he apparently survives at least for a while.<sup>16</sup> Forbiger wondered why the two heroes Ripheus and Epytus should be associated with the moon.

9 IV, 129–150. For the Virgilian allusion to the sibling marriage of Ptolemaic Egypt, see Hardie (2006: pp. 25–41). The salient Artemisian quality that both Venus and Dido lack is virginity.

10 IV, 238–255.

11 I, 744–746.

12 I, 744 *Arcturum pluviasque Hyadas*. The rising and setting of Arcturus were associated with tempests and “unsettled” seasons of the year; see here Thomas (1988: *ad* I, 204–205): “... his September rising and his evening setting in November were notorious for stormy weather ...” (Mynors 1990: *ad* I, 204). I, 744 is repeated at III, 516, as Palinurus surveys traditional weather signs; Aeneas' helmsman may be doomed, but the stars of Book III do not portend a storm *per se* (see further Heyworth & Morwood 2017: *ad loc.*) – but Palinurus is destined to die at sea, and so any ominous import of the stars will find its fulfillment in his death (cf. here Hannah 1993). The relationship between Dido and Aeneas will have disastrous implications for Rome (as also that between Cleopatra and Mark Antony).

13 For a meticulous analysis that connects this passage with the lunar imagery associated with Dido, note Nurtantio (2014: pp. 62 ff.).

14 A good starting point for study is the exemplary note of Casali (2017: *ad loc.*); cf. also the sober analysis of Austin (1964: *ad loc.*). For the moon as “a kind of celestial accomplice ... at Greek trickery,” see Horsfall (2008: *ad* 255) – he considers Giardina's emendation of *noctis* both “unedifying and unnecessary.”

15 “Epytus” has occasioned not a little critical commentary. Casali (2017: *ad loc.*) reads *Epytus* here; for the correction to *Iphitus* see Horsfall (2008: *ad loc.*), following Paratore. Cf. the “son of Epytus” from V, 545–551. Below we shall explore how moonlight may figure in betraying Euryalus on another nocturnal military escapade; to be illumined by the moon can be hazardous in circumstances such as this.

16 Cf. II, 435–436. But the fate of Iphitus is not recorded anymore than that of Epytus. Paschalis (1997: p. 81 and cf. pp. 109–110) reads *Aepytus* for *Epytus* and connects the names Aepytus and Ripheus with imagery of being hurled down from a height. We may wonder about the fates of Epytus/Aepytus and Iphitus – but if Creüsa's end could pose a mystery, why not that of these relatively minor companions of Aeneas?

Ultimately, these Trojans will yield to the temptation to engage in trickery;<sup>17</sup> the decision to exchange Trojan arms for Greek will ultimately prove quite hazardous.<sup>18</sup> In some sense the moon presided over the trickery and deceit of the Greeks; so also lunar light shines on Trojans who will prove capable of their own tricks. Admittedly, those interested in astronomical precision will speculate on when the moon set on this fateful night: perhaps by II, 360 ... *nox atra cava circumvolat umbra*; perhaps by II, 397 ... *per caecam ... noctem*.<sup>19</sup> The noteworthy darkness, at any rate, comes before the decision of the Trojans to don Greek arms.

Ripheus is the first Trojan to respond to Aeneas' call to arms (II, 339), and the first to give in to the temptation to indulge in trickery (II, 394). The former accords with his description as being especially just; the latter is more difficult to reconcile.<sup>20</sup> Epytus is large in size (II, 339 *maximus armis*); otherwise he is not particularly characterized. We may be intended to recall the Epytus of Homer, *Iliad* XVII, 319 ff.; there, too, the Trojans were in serious discomfiture when Apollo appeared to Aeneas in the form of Periphas, the son of Epytus. Homer notes that the herald Periphas had grown old in the house of Aeneas' father Anchises.<sup>21</sup> Aeneas recognizes the Trojan patron Apollo, and proceeds to rouse his men (as here).<sup>22</sup> Virgil's situation has a reference not to Apollo but, obliquely, to his sister Diana (*oblata per lunam*). Ripheus and Epytus are not under divine protection or summons, however – and thus Aeneas' poignant note about *dis aliter visum* with respect to Ripheus' fate. Apollo, in any case – inveterate patron of Troy notwithstanding – will be nowhere in the final struggle for his favored city, and the military operation of these men who are *oblata per lunam* is doomed to failure as Troy faces its end.

Three more lunar references follow in the third *Aeneid*. The first comes with respect to the dream visit of the Penates to Aeneas; they were clearly made manifest in the bright light of a full moon (III, 151–152 *in somnis multo manifesti lumine, qua se / plena per insertas fundebat luna fenestras*).<sup>23</sup> The scene is Crete, and the dreadful plague that serves as an omen that the island is no suitable home for the Trojan exiles. The Penates announce that they have with the message that Apollo planned to share with Aeneas when

17 II, 386–412, at the behest of Coroebus.

18 II, 410–412. “Most of the heroes who were named when they joined Aeneas are mentioned at their death ...” (Jackson Knight 1932: p. 39).

19 It seems unlikely that Virgil intended his readers to pay this close attention to fairly conventional descriptions of the darkness of night, though it is perhaps noteworthy that we move from a moonlit night to one that is black and blind.

20 If anything, it may point to the profoundly untrustworthy character of the Trojans, if Ripheus is taken as being an exceptionally honest and upright one. The verdict of heaven may have been quite different, at any rate, from that of Aeneas (who may well be considered an unreliable narrator, at least in some matters of judgment).

21 For the significance of the name with reference to “calling” (appropriate for a herald), see Edwards (1991: *ad* XVII, 322–326). Here the names Ripheus and Epytus in conjunction may indeed reference a downward call.

22 The Homeric parallel may serve ultimately as persuasive evidence in favor of the reading *Epytus* and not either *Aepytus* or *Iphitus*.

23 See further here Steiner (1952: pp. 37–44); also Kragelund (1976: pp. 46, 72).

he reached Ortygia (III, 154–155). They announce the promised home of the Trojans in Hesperia (III, 163 ff.). The moon on this night is explicitly full.<sup>24</sup> The Penates echo what the ghostly apparition of Creüsa had already announced to Aeneas about Hesperia (II, 781–784).<sup>25</sup> In a sense, the divine twins Apollo and Diana are in union in this brief dream interlude; the Penates herald the coming arrival at Hesperia, though with less information than Aeneas' wife had provided, and with no announcement of the battles that loom in Latium.<sup>26</sup>

The second mention of the moon comes in the terrifying night the Trojans spend in the shadow of Etna:

*nam neque erant astrorum ignes nec lucida aethra  
siderea polus, obscuro sed nubila caelo,  
et lunam in nimbo nox intempesta tenebat.* (III, 585–587)

The passage harks back to *Georgics* I, 247–248 *illic, ut perhibent, aut intempesta silet nox, / semper et obtenta densentur nocte tenebrae*, where the poet notes that at the Antipodes there is either perpetual dark, or else (he goes on to opine) Aurora returns from us and bestows her light on them in turn.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, this passage comes in the immediate wake of a reference to the Bears that fear to be dipped into the ocean (III, 245–246), in recollection of the song of Iopas, and even of the “Riphaean citadels” of Scythia (III, 240; cf. *G. I*, 240–241), which recalls the hero Riphaeus of Book II, thus drawing closely together all of our passages. No full moon here, in any case.

Virgil proceeds from the Etna episode to the story of the Odyssean companion Achaemenides (III, 588–691). Here the desperate Greek recounts his terrifying experience in the realm of the Cyclopes, and notes the passage of time: *tertia iam lunae se cornua lumine complent* (III, 645). It has been about three months, Achaemenides claims, that he has spent in his desperate state. Since antiquity it has been noted that the chronology is askew; one needs only to consider the admittedly vexed chronology referenced at I, 755–756 *septima / aestas*. Achaemenides – a doublet of the liar Sinon, we might note – could very well be deliberately misleading his Trojan audience, though it is unclear to what end.<sup>28</sup>

The significance of the lunar reference – erroneous as it may be – may well be made clearer near the end of the episode. The Trojans escape the accursed land, and they take along their hapless Greek castaway. As they depart, the Cyclopes are seen, a veritable

24 Verse 152 is a golden line.

25 Aeneas had presumably forgotten about this prophecy in his agreement to settle in Crete; Creüsa also noted both the Thybris and a new, royal bride for the Trojan hero.

26 Cf. the Sibyl's more ominous vatic information at VI, 86 ff. The only hint of war in the Penates' announcement is at III, 164 *potens armis* (of Hesperia).

27 For the additional echoes of Ennius, Accius, and Lucretius see Horsfall (2006: *ad loc.*). Virgil has replaced Ennius' *lumen* with the moon.

28 A longer duration for his sojourn with the Cyclopes might well be expected to be more deserving of sympathy.

brotherhood of Etna (III, 678 *Aetnaeos fratres*), like oaks or cypresses, like the lofty forest of Jove or the grove of Diana (III, 681 ... *silva alta Iovis lucusve Dianae*).<sup>29</sup> The Cyclopes episode ends with a direct reference to the moon goddess, and one that helps to tie together the lunar references of Book III.<sup>30</sup> Once again, the moon imagery spells trouble for the Trojans, or at least exceedingly ominous circumstances; Diana is linked with her father Jupiter in interesting juxtaposition.<sup>31</sup> Sinon was the mendacious Greek who was instrumental in the ruse of the Wooden Horse; as the Trojans reverse their course in the face of a strong north wind, Achaemenides, for his part, points out the shores he had already seen as a companion of unfortunate Ulysses (III, 690–691 *talia monstrabat relegens errata retrorsus / litora Achaemenides, comes infelicis Ulixis*). There is of course no direct insinuation that Achaemenides is harmful – but the mention of *infelix Ulixes* contributes to the ominous atmosphere.<sup>32</sup> The “full moon” that shone on the happy announcement of the forthcoming Hesperian landing (an albeit selective prophecy given the future war) has taken on a darker character, as references to both the moon and Diana’s cypress mark the ominous character of the perilous stopover.

Like Book II, Book IV also has two references to the moon. The night’s light is associated with the growing infatuation of Dido for Aeneas:<sup>33</sup>

*post ubi digressi, lumenque obscura vicissim  
luna permit suadentque cadentia sidera somnos,  
sola domo maeret vacua stratisque relictis  
incubat.* (IV, 80–83)<sup>34</sup>

The moonlight of this passage is ominous in terms of the dire consequences of the love affair; the moonlight of IV, 513 is ghastly. The priestess who is attendant at the rites by Dido’s pyre calls on Hecate, who is associated explicitly with Diana (IV, 509–511 *stant arae circum et crinis effusa sacerdos / ter centum tonat ore deos, Erebumque Chaosque / tergeminamque Hecaten, tria virginis ora Dianae*). Herbs cut by moonlight are part of the

29 The simile is all the more striking given how rare such imagery is in Book III. “This is one of the most striking pieces of visual imagery in Virgil” (Williams 1962: *ad* 577–581).

30 The goddess is also referenced allusively in the mention of Ortygia at II, 693–694; Ortygia was a name for Delos, the place of the nativity of the divine twins of Latona. Any dark associations toward the end of Book III, in any case, presage the loss of Anchises. Cf. the mention of the cypress at II, 714–715, before the loss of Creüsa.

31 The funereal cypress may recall Diana in her infernal capacity (as Hecate), *pace* Horsfall’s commentary (Horsfall 2006: *ad loc.*). Heyworth & Morwood (2017) note here that “we return to the comfortable world of Roman divinities” – though these two divinities will figure significantly in the ultimate revelation of the fate of Troy. For cypresses in the iconography of Diana note Dyson (2001: pp. 148–149).

32 Cf. III, 613. Heyworth and Morwood *ad loc.* interpret the reference to the growing compassion of Aeneas, who is able to express sympathy even for a notorious enemy of the Trojans like Ulysses. Aeneas may also be happy – even triumphant – on account of the fact that unlike his Greek predecessor in adventure, he did not lose any men to the Cyclops. But his great loss is imminent.

33 For a sensitive analysis of this passage, note Schmitz (1960: p. 53).

34 “It is remarkable what an important part of the Dido story is laid in the night-time” (Pease 1935: *ad* 80). With the *obscura luna* of these verses compare the *obscura nox* of 461.

accoutrements of the dreadful liturgy, herbs that are rich with the milk of black venom (IV, 513–514 *falcibus et messae ad lunam quaeruntur aënis / pubentes herbae nigri cum lacte veneni*).<sup>35</sup>

The reference here is unquestionably to Diana in her infernal capacity; in the narrative of the Dido story we have come quite far from the playful scene of Venus disguised as a huntress or the comparison of Dido and her retinue to the goddess and her companions. The moon's light oversees the encroaching tragedy and even horror.<sup>36</sup> Dido will eventually be revealed as having associations with all three aspects of the complex, triform Diana; she had been linked to the goddess' manifestation on earth as a huntress (an inappropriate comparison, as we have noted); now her impending death comes with a reference to the goddess' infernal identity as Hecate.<sup>37</sup> The nascent Didonic lunar imagery of the song of Iopas has taken on hellish dimensions, as the queen moves inexorably closer to her auto-destruction.

The moon does not figure in *Aeneid* 5; in Virgil's book of the underworld, however, there are three references. The first comes as Aeneas and the Sibyl prepare to enter the lower regions; the lunar imagery is appropriately ominous and characteristically baleful:

*quale per incertam lunam sub luce maligna  
est iter in silvis, ubi caelum condidit umbra  
Iuppiter, et rebus nox abstulit atra colorem.* (VI, 270–272)

“The moon is so phantom-like that one cannot be sure that it is there at all.”<sup>38</sup> The moon is *incerta*; her light is *maligna*; the sky-god has darkened the heavens, and the black night has stolen the color from nature.<sup>39</sup> This beautiful, much studied passage may well strike the reader of poetry as an admittedly exceptional example of conventional enough imagery; the underworld is associated with the night, and the night's preeminent light is lunar. How different is this scene from the night of the full moon of the Penates' dreamy apparition!

This sinister scene is succeeded by the dramatic moon image of Aeneas' encounter with the ghost of his former lover Dido. Aeneas sees her shade in the underworld forest she inhabits; Virgil describes the visual impression in verses that link back to earlier associations of Dido and the moon:

35 “Henry argues that *ad lunam* means at full moon, not merely by moonlight. Macbeth's witches go one better and sliver their slips of yew in the moon's eclipse, and La Cerda refers to this practice” (Irvine 1924: p. 112).

36 “La luna ha una parte necessaria nella magia, anzi presiede a ogni rito del genere” (Buscaroli 1932: p. 357).

37 See further here Smith (2005: pp. 116–118). For Diana in her underworld capacity see especially Green (2007: pp. 131–134; with exploration of the connection of the waxing and waning of the lunar cycle to death and rebirth).

38 Austin (1977: *ad loc.*). Cf. the splendid analysis of Delaunoy (1958: pp. 71–75).

39 For chromatic analysis of the passage, with reference to Michael Putnam's comparison of this (perpetual) night with the night Troy fell, see Edgeworth (1992: pp. 79–80).



*inter quas Phoenissa recens a vulnere Dido  
errabat silva in magna; quam Troius heros  
ut primum iuxta stetit agnovitque per umbras  
obscuram, qualem primo qui surgere mense  
aut videt aut vidisse putat per nubila lunam* (VI, 450–454)

Aeneas stood near her and recognized Dido (one has the impression of the effect of seeing something “emerge” from fog and mist, where suddenly one begins to recognize that which is very close by); she was like the moon that rises at the beginning of the month, when one sees or thinks that one has seen the moon through the mist.<sup>40</sup> We are reminded of IV, 80–83, where the moon was also described as *obscura*, as well as of the description of Aeneas and the Sibyl as *obscuri* at VI, 268. The seeing or thinking one has seen the moon’s light recalls the *incerta luna* of VI, 270 as Aeneas commenced his descent.

Dido was associated with Diana on her first appearance to Aeneas; the comparison was problematic on any number of levels (especially once the poet compared Aeneas to Diana’s divine brother Apollo at the fateful hunt). Dido was no Diana, and here Aeneas’ glimpse of her wandering shade in the underworld is compared deliberately to the experience of a man who sees the moon *or thinks that he has seen her light*. The Phoenician (VI, 450) Dido is no Diana; she wanders like the moon (cf. I, 742), but any resemblance she has to the triform goddess is noteworthy for its incomplete, inexact, inappropriate character.<sup>41</sup> Dido had been associated with Diana as huntress and as underworld specter; now she is linked to the goddess in her heavenly, lunar capacity – but *in fine* she is no Diana, despite the more than passing resemblance.<sup>42</sup> The experience of seeing her final form in Avernus is like that of seeing the new (and not the full) moon, or thinking that one has seen the new moon. The misty apparition constitutes a lunar simulacrum and no reality.

In terms of the story of Carthage’s queen, we have come full circle from the *errans luna* of Iopas’ song that served as an avatar of Dido. And indeed, fittingly the moon figures near the start of the great revelation of the shade of Anchises to his son in Elysium, a cosmological song that has affinities to the earlier learned entertainment at Dido’s banquet:

*Principio caelum ac terras camposque liquentis  
lucentemque globum lunae Titaniaque astra  
spiritus intus alit ...* (VI, 724–726)

The moon, we might note, is now shining and bright; small wonder given the matter of the great exposition of the rebirth of souls that serves as the dramatic, unexpected

40 On the visibility of the new moon note Horsfall (2013: ad 453–454).

41 On the etymological associations of Dido and *errans*, see O’Hara (2017). Cf. IV, 211 (with Bartelink 1965: p. 64).

42 Virgil effectively plays on the nature of Dido’s troubled resemblance to the new moon in his description of Aeneas’ vision of her shade. Significantly, Aeneas will never gaze on Camilla.

climax of Virgil's afterlife.<sup>43</sup> Like the moonlit appearance of the Penates, this passage offers a lunar vision of unadulterated positive import.

We have moved markedly from the dark lunar imagery of the Dido passages to a brighter day, and indeed the light of the moon will continue to shine as Aeneas and his men continue on their way toward their date with an Italian, Hesperian destiny:

*adspirant aerae in noctem nec candida cursus  
luna negat, splendet tremulo sub lumine pontus.* (VII, 8–9)<sup>44</sup>

The imagery is one sense conventional enough, at once pretty and practical.<sup>45</sup> What we might call the positive imagery of a bright moonlight on a seemingly happy event continues in the vein of the mention of the glowing moon from the start of Anchises' speech. It leads at once, however, into the relatively brief but memorable vignette of how the Trojans successfully skirt the realm of Circe, the *filia Solis* (VII, 10–24), an evasion and escape from harm that is credited to the god Neptune.<sup>46</sup> The Trojans are fortunate in that they avoid the perils of a landfall at the abode of Circe with her predilection for zoological metamorphoses; the mention of the sorceress may point to less auspicious future events for the Trojans.<sup>47</sup> The moon is also mentioned in close association with Circe, we may note, at *E. VIII*, 69–70.<sup>48</sup> The moon is *candida*; the color adjective was also used of Dido (V, 571).<sup>49</sup>

The single lunar reference of Book VII is followed by the single reference of Book VIII. The context is the celebrated first simile of the book, where the rapid thoughts of the anxious Aeneas are compared to the reflected light of the sun or moon that plays over the water in a bronze vessel and strikes the lacquered ceilings overhead. The image is Apollonian;<sup>50</sup> the Colchian sorceress/princess Medea is consumed with worry about

43 Austin (1977) notes *ad* 724–751 that “The manner is constantly and pointedly Lucretian; the matter would have excited Lucretius’ disdain ...”

44 Some editors capitalize the moon of verse 9.

45 Cf. Horsfall (2000: *ad* 8–9): “Trojans, poet and reader are all in a hurry: wind and moonlight are both lovely and necessary!”. Ennius lurks here.

46 We may recall the similar divine assistance that enabled the Trojans to avoid the lair of the Sirens; cf. V, 862–863. Neptune had promised Venus that he would ensure a safe passage for the Trojan fleet (V, 779–826), and the mention of the god near the opening of Book VII continues the same nautical patronage that commenced near the end of V. Neptune is of mixed associations in the *Aeneid*; he is sympathetic to Venus’ request for Aeneas, and he calmed the Junonian storm of Book I after taking umbrage at the Aeolian infringement of the prerogatives of his realm (I, 124–156).

47 For the connection between the Circe of the opening movement of Book VII and the Camilla of the close note Fratantuono (2009).

48 *Carmina vel caelo possunt deducere lunam, / carminibus Circe socios mutavit Ulixi*, where the “drawing down of the moon” is used as one of the standard tricks in the magician’s bag. Some editors have preferred to capitalize *Luna* here, with explicit reference to the goddess.

49 Cf. *inter al.* the description of Venus at VIII, 608 as the *dea candida*; also Euryalus’ white body at IX, 432 as he is slain.

50 *Argonautica* III, 755–760, on which note especially Nelis (2001: pp. 331 ff.). There are also Homeric antecedents lurking here (cf. *Odyssey* IV, 45–46; VII, 82–85).

the fate of her beloved Jason. One lunar reference, then, near the start of Book VII, and in connection with Circe – and one near the start of Book VIII, and in connection with another witch-like figure. The connection between the two images is further secured by the repetition of the adjective *tremulus* from VII, 9:

*sicut aquae tremulum labris ubi lumen aënis  
sole repercussum aut radiantis imagine lunae  
omnia pervolitat late loca iamque sub auras  
erigitur summiq; ferit laquearia tecti.* (VIII, 22–25)

Whatever dark foreboding could be sensed in the description of the moonlight of the start of Book VII has come to a more certain exposition in the (at least allusive, literary) metamorphosis of the Trojan hero Aeneas into the sorceress Medea in the wake of the outbreak of the Latin War.<sup>51</sup> Aeneas' stress is further cast by the poet in deliberately geographical terms: the war alarms are in Latium, and he is the Laomedontian hero – the onomastic descriptor a stereotypical Trojan appellation of dubious reputation (VIII, 18 *Talia per Latium. quae Laomedontius heros*).<sup>52</sup>

The last two explicit mentions of the moon in Virgil's epic may offer the only references in the poem to the moon as a goddess;<sup>53</sup> they are artfully balanced so that the one reference in Book IX is to the goddess Luna (her Latin name), while the one in Book X is to Phoebe (the goddess' Greek name). In Book IX, the scene is the doomed night raid of the Trojans Nisus and Euryalus. The two men are separated, and Euryalus is captured; Nisus could have managed to escape, but devotion to his friend prompted a different course. Nisus makes a prayer to the goddess Luna as he brandishes his weapon:

*ocius adducto torquens hastile lacerto  
suspiciens altam et Lunam, sic voce precatur:  
'tu, dea, tu praesens nostro succurre labori,  
astrorum decus et nemorum Latonia custos.  
si qua tuis umquam pro me pater Hyrtacus aris  
dona tulit, si qua ipse meis venatibus auxi  
suspendive tholo aut sacra ad fastigia fixi,  
hunc sine me turbare globum<sup>54</sup> et rege tela per auras.'* (IX, 402–409)<sup>55</sup>

51 Cf. here Johnston (1981).

52 On the force of the geographical terms here note Fratantuono & Smith (2018). "Laomedon's crime was advertised by the Augustan poets as the sin of the Trojan fathers continually visited on their Roman descendants ..." (Eden 1975: *ad loc.*).

53 Certainly the former; the reference to Phoebe at X, 215–216 may be read as one of Bailey's "vague personifications."

54 In *turbare globum* (with reference to the crowd of enemy forces that surrounds Euryalus), there is a nice play on the language of the *globus lunae*.

55 On the formal structure of the prayer see Hardie (1994: *ad* 403–409).

Nisus' prayer will not succeed; he was not aware that it was likely the moon's very light that had betrayed Euryalus in the first place:

*et galea Euryalum sublustri noctis in umbra  
prodidit immemorem radiisque adversa refulsit.* (IX, 373–374)

The *sublustris umbra noctis* refers most probably to moonlight; the adjective is relatively rare and occurs only here in Virgil.<sup>56</sup>

We may begin our analysis of this difficult sequence by noting that Nisus' prayer to Luna was born out of his connection to the goddess Diana (with whom he explicitly equates Luna)<sup>57</sup> via his parentage: he was the son of Hyrtacus and (apparently) the huntress Ida, a young woman who shares her name with the famous Phrygian mountain range. Ida, in fact, is credited with having sent Nisus to Aeneas.<sup>58</sup> Ida is a problematic figure. She clearly evokes the sylvan world of the goddess Diana; she is a huntress, and Hyrtacus is himself credited by his son with having made offerings to Diana, just like Nisus (IX, 406–408). But as with the story Diana tells of Camilla in Book XI, there are as many questions as answers. Was Ida in actuality the mother of Nisus, and if so, how did a presumably virginal companion of Diana become the mother of a Trojan warrior? All that is certain is that “Ida” is preeminently Trojan (indeed, strikingly so given her name), and a huntress who sent Nisus as a companion to Aeneas.<sup>59</sup> Hyrtacus is also the father of Hippocöon;<sup>60</sup> this parental identification was made during the narrative of the archery race in Book V, the *libro dei ludi* in which both Nisus and Euryalus were introduced (and with no mention of Hyrtacus' parentage of the former, let alone of Ida).<sup>61</sup> Ida was either assaulted like Callisto, or she willingly abandoned the virginal devotion that is peculiar to the devotees of Diana.

Luna/Latonia makes no response to Nisus' prayer, which is left utterly ignored and unfulfilled – if the object of the prayer was to secure the salvation of Euryalus (let alone his own).<sup>62</sup> Nisus does succeed in slaying Sulmo and Tagus (IX, 411–419). Enraged, Volcens decides to take revenge for the deaths on Euryalus (IX, 420–424); the assault on his friend compels the emotionally overwrought Nisus to draw the fire of his enemies (IX,

56 See further Dingel (1997: *ad loc.*); cf. Horace, c. III, 27.31 (with Nisbet & Rudd 2004: *ad loc.*). For the influence of Virgil's image and language on Ammianus Marcellinus (26.9.9), see Paschoud (2009). Procopius is decapitated by order of the emperor Valens after all chance of escape is taken away by an unusually bright moonlight after the disastrous Battle of Nacolia (A. D. 366). We may note also that when Nisus prays to Luna, he notes that she is *praesens* (IX, 404).

57 Cf. De Mirmont (1894: pp. 542 ff.).

58 IX, 176–178 *Nisus erat portae custos, acerrimus armis, / Hyrtacides, comitem Aeneae quem miserat Ida / venatrix iaculo celerem levibusque sagittis*. Virgil allows huntress and mountain to shade nearly into one; at first we might well think the reference to “Ida” is to the celebrated mountain, before we learn that the homonymous huntress is meant.

59 Interestingly, there is no mention of Ida in Nisus' prayer to Luna/Latonia, only of his father Hyrtacus.

60 V, 492, 503.

61 V, 294–296, where the focus is on Nisus' *pious amor* for Euryalus, not on any genealogy.

62 The goddess is *alta Luna* at IX, 403, not *alma Luna*.

424 ff.). In the end, both Euryalus and Nisus are slain (though not before Nisus is able to kill Volcens). The outcome, then, is mixed. Nisus had wondered how he might save Euryalus (IX, 399–400 *quid faciat? qua vi iuvenem, quibus audeat armis / eripere?*), and he considered the possibility of rushing madly into the fray (IX, 400–401 ... *an sese medios moriturus in enses / inferat et pulchram properet per vulnera per mortem?*). His prayer to Luna asks that she might be aid his labor (*nostro succurre labori*), with attendant (and studied) ambiguity on the part of the poet: is Luna supposed to aid Nisus in rescuing Euryalus, or in rushing forth to die? The former might well require significant divine intervention, while the latter requires none. In reality the hunter Nisus chooses a middle course – he tries to fell as many Rutulians as he can from afar. The plan arguably benefits from divine aid (none, however, is explicitly given, whether by Luna or any other deity); in the end, all it does is draw down more Rutulian rage on Euryalus, thus prompting the *moriturus in mortem* alternative Nisus had contemplated from the start. And it was the treacherous half-light of the moon that had spelled doom for Euryalus in the first place.<sup>63</sup>

Balancing this passage concerning *alta Luna* (IX, 403) is the very different reference to *alma Phoebe* during the night voyage of Aeneas and his new Etruscan allies.<sup>64</sup>

*Iamque dies caelo concesserat almaque curru  
noctivago Phoebe medium pulsabat Olympum;  
Aeneas (neque enim membris dat cura quietem)  
ipse sedens clavumque regit velisque ministrat.* (X, 215–218)

This is the night after that which witnessed the drama of Nisus and Euryalus.<sup>65</sup> The description of night is modeled (*teste Macrobio*) on a dawn passage of Egnatius.<sup>66</sup> The *errans luna* is now personified as the goddess Phoebe with her *currus noctivagus*. Aeneas is not able to succumb to sleep on account of his anxiety (cf. the situation at the beginning of Book VIII, where the moon also figured); he will only find some security after the appearance of one of the nymphs who had been given power at the behest of *alma Cybebe*, the Trojan goddess *par excellence*.<sup>67</sup> We see here in close conjunction two very different goddesses: *alma Phoebe* and *alma Cybebe*; the appearance of the first imparts no serenity to Aeneas, while Cymodocea (the nymph of the second) brings an announcement of both danger and impending victory, victory that will come with the advent of the dawn goddess Aurora (who will implicitly supplant Phoebe).<sup>68</sup> In response to Cymodocea's epiphany, Aeneas will fittingly make a response to *alma parens Idaea deum* (X, 252), in

63 “Nisus’ futile prayer to the moon for aid ... supplies a discordant note to all this romance ... The reader is bound to think of Diana/Dido ... it was her mixing bowl which was on offer.” (Newman & Newman 2005: p. 222).

64 *Alma* is applied to Diana at VII, 774 and XI, 557.

65 For meticulous analysis of the chronology see Mandra (1934: pp. 142–146, 168–169).

66 See further here Harrison (1991: *ad* 215–216).

67 X, 219 ff.

68 Cf. X, 241–245.

invocatory language that underscores the significant adjective *alma* even as it might remind us of *Ida parens* and the disaster of her son Nisus and his *eromenos* Euryalus.<sup>69</sup>

The Greek Phoebe stands in marked contrast to the Trojan Cybele; we may recall the role of the Roman Luna in the drama of the Trojan son of Ida, Nisus. But the mention of Phoebe after Luna also recalls two very different passages where Virgil names the goddesses in his *Georgics*.<sup>70</sup> In his earlier work, Virgil moves from Phoebe to Luna; he reverses the order in the *Aeneid*, where first we find Luna, and then Phoebe.<sup>71</sup> At G. I, 424–463, the poet describes signs given by the sun and moon. The virginal purity of the moon (i.e., Diana) is highlighted:

*at si virgineum suffuderit ore ruborem,  
ventus erit: vento semper rubet aurea Phoebe.* (G. I, 430–431)

Golden Phoebe ever blushes in the wind. “An exquisite touch to describe the soft glow of the moon (the goddess Diana, virgin and therefore prone to blushing).”<sup>72</sup> The blushing moon comes too as the middle panel in the reverse acrostic of the poet’s name (*ve* for *Vergilius*), in imitation of the similar trick in Aratus.<sup>73</sup>

At G. III, 391–393 however, Virgil concludes his description of ovine wool with a reference to one of the most obscure myths attested in extant Augustan poetry, in a passage that stands in striking, even shocking contrast to that of the image of the blushing virginal moon:

*munere sic niveo lanae, si credere dignum est,  
Pan deus Arcadiae captam te, Luna, fefellit  
in nemora alta vocans; nec tu aspernata vocantem.* (G. III, 391–393)

The story of Luna’s apparent seduction by Pan was already a subject of learned speculation in the time of Macrobius.<sup>74</sup> Virgil is diffident about the veracity of the story (*si*

69 Aeneas is at this point ignorant of the events of the night raid.

70 “Phoebe” and “Luna” may thus have two appearances each in the two works, once in each poem (Phoebe at G. I, 431 and A. X, 216; Luna at G. III, 392 and A. IX, 403), though as we have seen there are passages where some editors would prefer to capitalize “Luna” or not (cf. G. I, 276 and I, 396, where Conte e.g. considers the first a common and the second a proper noun, and on which Bailey notes that Luna is at best “a vague personification”). For Luna note also the aforementioned case of E. VIII, 69; there is but one lunar reference, onomastic or not, in the *Bucolics*. It may be safest to conclude that there is only one “mythological” scene of the moon goddess in the *Georgics*, and only one in the *Aeneid*.

71 We have only a few examples to compare, but Virgil uses “Phoebe” when referring to astronomical phenomena, and “Luna” when the goddess is depicted in connection with someone else (Nisus, Pan).

72 Thomas (1988: *ad loc.*).

73 Cf. *Phaenomena* 733–8921; 909–1042, with Kidd (1998: *ad loc.*).

74 Besides Thomas (1988: *ad loc.*), and Mynors (1990: *ad loc.*), note Erren (2003: *ad loc.*); also Frenzt (1967: pp. 129 ff., 137). The story may be Nicandrian in origin (so DServ., who observes that only a Greek could have conceived such a story).

*credere dignum est*).<sup>75</sup> Some have speculated that Virgil has mistaken Endymion for Pan, though this is difficult to reconcile with the implications of verse 392.<sup>76</sup> Pan's means of seduction involved some sort of trickery (*fefellit*);<sup>77</sup> he may have transformed himself into a snow-white ram.<sup>78</sup> The whole matter is a mystery, not least in terms of its ultimate resolution.<sup>79</sup> Pan does not figure in the *Aeneid*, except at VIII, 344, where the Lupercal is identified as the grotto of Pan.

The image is especially discordant with the traditional association of wool-working with the chastity of Roman women.<sup>80</sup> Sexual violence here implicitly intrudes on the virginal world of Diana; the same invasion may lurk in the story of Nisus' apparent mother Ida, the mysterious huntress who manages to have a union with the hunter Hyrtacus. The story of what happened between Luna and Pan is obscure, and so too the details in Virgil's compressed account. Besides the poet's customary shyness about expressing anything explicit about sexual congress, there is also the apparent melding of a version of the story in which Pan tricked Luna with a fleece (i.e., via likely metamorphosis), and one in which Luna is depicted as having been seduced by a beautiful gift.<sup>81</sup> The two versions are reconcilable, admittedly – and we grope in the dark in the absence of any extant Hellenistic source.<sup>82</sup> We may do well to note that Virgil's reticence about what happened in the *nemora alta* does allow for one to imagine that the goddess escaped the clutches of the goat god once his trick was discovered.

We might note that there are snow-white fleeces in the *Aeneid*, specifically as decoration in the chapel dedicated by Dido to the memory of her husband Sychaeus (the *vellelibus niveis* of IV, 459). The locale is haunted by the sounds and speech of her husband as he calls her: *hinc exaudiri voces et verba vocantis* (IV, 460), where the repeated emphasis on voice (*voces, vocantis*) recalls the *vocans, vocantem* of G. III, 393. The *vellera nivea* represent the devotion of the *univira* Dido to her dead husband; the ghostly, nightmarish imagery of the passage reflects her abandonment of her vow of chaste honor.<sup>83</sup> We may compare the snow-white wool of the fillets of sacrificial victims at G. III, 487, and the imitation of said passage for the brow bands of the blessed in Elysium at A. VI, 665: Dido certainly has more in common with a sacrificial victim than a soul in the Isles of

75 Cf. A. VI, 173, of the encounter of Misenu and Triton.

76 The story of Endymion does not figure in Virgil's extant work.

77 On Virgilian uses of the form *fefellit* note Grillo (2010: pp. 54–55).

78 “Pan, Arcadian magician of the snowy fleece, plays on the moon's narcissism, luring light by light, with repeated calling she cannot ignore.” (Putnam 1979: p. 212).

79 Possanza wryly concludes his article on the moon in Virgil with the note, “Whether Luna blushed in this instance, we will never know.” (Thomas & Ziolkowski 2014, Vol. II: pp. 841–842).

80 Cf. P. J. Jones, “Wool,” in Thomas & Ziolkowski (2014, Vol. III: p. 1393).

81 See further here Thomas (1999: p. 162).

82 For the connection of the god Pan to light in his capacity as “shepherd of the starry flocks of heaven” note Sitlington Sterrett (1901: pp. 399–401).

83 Venus seduces Vulcan with her snow-white arms, *niveis lacertis* (VIII, 387). For more on the color adjective see Edgeworth (1992: pp. 142–143). Snow imagery can have obscene undertones that may lurk in the description of Pan's lustful advances; on this note Fratantuono (2010). In the *Aeneid* the rich adjective *niveus* is used to very different effects depending on context.

the Blessed. When Aeneas saw Dido in the underworld, she was compared to the moon (i.e., Luna/Diana); the scene of her haunting at Sychaeus' shrine has lexical connection to the obscure myth from the *Georgics* of the attempted seduction of Luna by Pan. In the *Aeneid*, the voices are not of some randy goat god seeking an inappropriate liaison with a goddess, but rather of the ghost of a betrayed husband, a ghost who will ultimately successfully summon his unfaithful wife to the underworld, where at last they will be reunited.<sup>84</sup> If Dido were truly Diana (as per the simile of Book I), she would not have been seduced by Aeneas; it is absurd to imagine that the pure and unsullied, virginal moon could be seduced by Pan (and so *si credere dignum est* is a fitting comment). But Dido is, as we have observed, no Diana.

There is one final “lunar” reference in the *Aeneid*, though it is oblique. At XI, 659–663, Virgil compares Diana's devotee Camilla and her battle companions to the Amazons, to Hippolyta and Penthesilea with their crescent moon shields:<sup>85</sup>

*quales Threiciae cum flumina Thermodontis  
pulsant et pictis bellantur Amazones armis,  
seu circum Hippolyten seu cum se Martia curru  
Penthesilea refert, magnoque ululante tumultu  
feminea exsultant lunatis agmina peltis.* (XI, 659–663)

The crescent moon shield was a standard feature of Amazon iconography.<sup>86</sup> In the immediate context of the cavalry battle in which Camilla and her retinue participate, we may think of the associations of the moon and Diana (Camilla's special divine patroness), and perhaps even a hint of the image of the infernal Diana as Camilla and her heroine sorority proceed to battle.<sup>87</sup>

The mention of the “lunate” shields of the Amazonian warriors recalls the same image from the pictures on the walls of Dido's temple to Juno in Carthage, and in essence bring Virgil's lunar imagery full circle. There, the last picture on the wall was the image of Penthesilea:

*ducit Amazonidum lunatis agmina peltis  
Penthesilea furens mediisque in milibus ardet,  
aurea subnectens exsertae cingula mammae  
bellatrix, audetque viris concurrere virgo.* (I, 490–494)<sup>88</sup>

Dido was no true Diana, and the only associations of the goddess' celestial moon with Carthage's queen were baleful. Camilla, like her cyclic epic antecedent Penthesilea is

84 VI, 473–474.

85 On this simile note especially Moskalew (1982: p. 132).

86 Cf. e.g., Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Posthomerica* I, 147–149.

87 So Alessio (1993: p. 128, with commentary on XI, 662).

88 Austin (1971) notes *ad loc.*: “Virgil seems to have introduced both noun and epithet into Latin poetry.”



doomed – but in the narrative of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the virginal Camilla retains the favor and honor of the goddess (who sees even to the business of her being avenged).<sup>89</sup> Camilla's father Metabus had invoked the aid of Diana to aid his infant daughter; the language quoted recalls the prayer Nisus made in vain to the moon goddess.<sup>90</sup>

The “lunar” references to Penthesilea/Camilla in a sense provide a frame to the moon imagery of the epic. In total there are fifteen references to the moon in the epic; two of these refer explicitly to the goddess Luna and Phoebe (in Books IX and X). The other references are divided between Books I (1x); II (3x); III (also 3x); IV (2x); VI (3x); VII (1x); and VIII (also 1x). It is noteworthy that in the second, Iliadic half of the epic there is but one reference each in Books VII–X (also XI if we count the lunate shields of the Amazons); in the Odyssean half of the poem, Books I and IV each have two if again we count the *lunatae peltae*, while Books III and VI have three each and II and IV two. Dido figures prominently in the moon imagery: Book I (Iopas' song at her banquet; also the lunate shields in the picture in her temple); Book IV (both occurrences); Book VI (Dido is compared to the moon, though dimly and in misty simulacrum, as befitting her status as one who is not, in fact, like Diana).<sup>91</sup> In Books VII and VIII, the specter of Dido is recalled too in the allusions to Circe and Medea.

Virgil plays with the inexorable phases of the moon; we have seen the significance of when the moon is either full and bright, or more sparing with her light. Three times the moon is mentioned in connection with Aeneas' sleep patterns; in Book III he is asleep for the Penates dream (to what degree is a matter of learned speculation – certainly not a deep, unconscious slumber), while in Books VIII and X he is unable to find rest on account of his anxiety and care.

On the divine plane, the moon was intimately associated with the goddess Diana. In Virgil's epic vision, this lunar connection between the preeminent nocturnal heavenly light and the triform goddess is manipulated in the complex depiction of the Carthaginian queen Dido, a veritable Venus in Diana-like dress.<sup>92</sup> The contrast between reality and illusion is further highlighted by the poet's depiction of the Volscian heroine Camilla, who despite her abandonment of the life of a sylvan huntress remains a favorite of Diana. The lunate shields of the Amazons, of Penthesilea and her retinue, provide a frame to the lunar imagery of Virgil's epic that expresses powerfully the triumph of maidenhood over the illusory playacting of both Venus and her doomed mortal avatar Dido.

89 XI, 590–592. On the complex question of Camilla's relationships with men a good start may be found at Rébelliau (1892: pp. 128–129).

90 XI, 556–560. Both Nisus and Camilla ultimately die, but the role of the goddess in their respective stories is appreciably different.

91 We may note also that Artemis/Diana is the Mistress of Animals; Virgil's Dido laments that it was not permitted for her to live a sinless life, *more ferae* (IV, 550–552), another point of emphasis on how the queen is not Diana-like.

92 Cf. again I, 314 ff., and note Wlosok (1967: pp. 76 ff.); also Kühn (1971: pp. 28 ff.).

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