

Volcano-giant and grove passages

NB Volcanoes in antiquity mythologically linked to giants buried underneath (e.g. fires of Aetna= Typhoeus in *Met.* 5.; Claudian has Aetna on top of Enceladus and Typhoeus under Inarime).

Fasti 4:

“Lofty Etna lies over the mouth of huge Typhoeus, whose fiery breath sets the ground aglow.” (*Fast.* 4.491-2)

Ovid *Fasti* 4.593-4 (Ceres refers to Titan Gyges/Gyas) “What worse wrong could I have suffered if Gyges had been victorious and I his captive?”

Met 5:

In the song-contest, the daughters of Pierus, the Pierides, challenge the Muses to a contest. They sing first:

“the muse was still speaking, the sound of whirring wings was heard and words of greeting came from the high branches of the trees. Jove’s daughter looked up and tried to see whence came the sound which was so clearly speech. She thought some human being spoke; but it was a bird. Nine birds, lamenting their fate, had alighted in the branches, magpies, which can imitate any sound they please. When Minerva wondered at the sight, the other addressed her, goddess to goddess: “’Tis but lately those creatures also, conquered in a strife, have been added to the throng of birds. Pierus, lord of the rich domain of Pella, was their father, and Euippe of Paeonia was their mother. Nine times brought to the birth, nine times she called for help on mighty Lucina. Swollen with pride of numbers, this throng of senseless sisters journeyed through all the towns of Haemonia and all the towns of Achaia to us, and thus defied us to a contest in song: ‘Cease to deceive the unsophisticated rabble with your pretence of song. Come, strive with us, ye Thespian goddesses, if you dare. Neither in voice nor in skill can we be conquered, and our numbers are the same. If you are conquered, yield us Medusa’s spring and Boeotian Aganippe; or we will yield to you the Emathian plains even to snow-clad Paeonia; and let the nymphs be judges of our strife.’

“It was a shame to strive with them, but it seemed greater shame to yield. So the nymphs were chosen judges and took oath by their streams, and they set them down upon benches of living rock. Then without drawing lots she who had proposed the contest first began. She sang of the battle of the gods and giants, ascribing undeserved honour to the giants, and belittling the deeds of the mighty gods: how Typhoeus [giant-type figure who challenged Jupiter for rule], sprung from the lowest depths of earth, inspired the heavenly gods with fear, and how they all turned their backs and fled, until, weary, they found refuge in the land of Egypt and the seven-mouthed Nile. How even there Typhoeus, son of earth, pursued them, and the gods hid themselves in lying shapes: ‘Jove thus became a ram,’ said she, ‘the lord of flocks, whence Libyan Ammon even to this day is represented with curving horns; Apollo hid in a crow’s shape, Bacchus in a goat; the sister of Phoebus, in a cat, Juno in a snow-white cow, Venus in a fish, Mercury in an ibis bird.’

“So far had she sung, tuning voice to harp; we, the Aonian sisters, were challenged to reply..” (*Ov. Met.* 5.294-333)

As part of Calliope’s song in response, she notes Sicily on top of Typhoeus; trembling> Dis’ check-up:

““The huge island of Sicily had been heaped upon the body of the giant, and with its vast weight was resting on Typhoeus, who had dared to aspire to the heights of heaven. He struggles indeed, and strives often to rise again; but his right hand is held down by Ausonian Pelorus and his left by you, Pachynus. Lilybaeum rests on his legs, and Aetna’s weight is on his head. Flung on his back beneath this mountain, the fierce Typhoeus spouts forth ashes and vomits flames from his mouth. Often he puts forth all his strength to push off the weight of earth and to roll the cities and great mountains from his body: then the earth quakes, and even the king of the silent land is afraid lest the crust of the earth split open in wide seams and lest the light of day be let in and affright the trembling shades.” (*Met.* 5.346–58)

Q: Why has Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* in particular introduced a reference to a giant-volcanic landscape?

Q: How secure are the boundaries between the upper and underworld? How does the physical aspect of a volcano contribute to the boundary theme introduced by Dis' journey to check everything secure?

Claudian *DRP*:

Q: How does Claudian work with gigantomachic material that appeared in the Persephone myth before? What is Claudian trying to do? What are the associations of gigantomachic material?

Many references to Gigantomachy and Titanomachy (confused by this point) in the *DRP*.

1.42-7 (Dis' anger almost unleashes war) "The elements, once again fighting with resisting matter, would have almost broken their bond, and the young Titans, their prison torn open within the depths and their chains unloosed, would have seen the light of heaven, and again bloody Aegaeon would have thrown off the knotted ropes from his enlarged body and battered at the thunderbolts hurled at him with the blows of his hundred hands."

1.66 (One of the Fates to Dis) "Why do you give the sinful Titans access to the airs of heaven?"

1.142-59 (Sicily description): "Trinacria was once a conjoined part of Italy, but sea and time have changed the lie of the land. Victorious Nereus burst his boundaries and washed between the severed mountains with his waters, and a small division keeps apart these kindred countries. Now Nature has set against the sea that three-pronged island that is broken from its related ground: at one point the headland of Pachynus spits back from its jutting cliffs the fury of the Ionian Sea; at another Gaetulian Thetis barks and, rising up, batters the curving arms of Lilybaeum; at another the raging Tyrrhenian, indignant at being restrained, shakes the barrier of Pelorus. In the middle Aetna stretches out with its charred crags, Aetna which will never keep silence about the triumphs over the Giants, the pyre of Enceladus, who, with his wounded back fast bound, breathes exhaustless sulphur from his flaming wound, and whenever with rebellious neck he shifts his burden on to his right or left side, then the island is plucked from its foundations and swaying cities totter together with their fortifications."

2.21-3 Pallas Athena's helmet (like references to Gorgon at 2.26 + 2.205f. "Now Pallas uncovered the Gorgon's face", "Iam Gorgonis ora revelat / Pallas") evoke her participation in the fight against the giants: 2.21-6: "Tritonia on her tawny bronze helmet bore an engraved Typhon, whose upper body was slain while his lower parts still thrived, part dying and part surviving; her spear, rising with terrible iron through the clouds, had the size of a tree; only the hissing neck of the Gorgon she shaded by spreading before it her gleaming robe."

2.156-62 (Dis seeking way to earth to abduct Proserpina): "And now the ruler of souls was seeking his way through the shadowy labyrinth beneath the earth and was trampling over groaning Enceladus with his heavy steeds. His chariot-wheels sliced the enormous limbs and the giant struggled at bearing Sicily along with Dis upon his crushed neck and tried to stir feebly and entangle the axle with his weary serpents; the smoking wheel-rim slid forward over his sulphurous back."

2.255-9 (Proserpina to Dis) "By what crime have I stirred such great anger in you? I did not bear standards against the gods when Phlegra was raging with fierce uproar; nor was it by my strength that icy Ossa carried frosty Olympus."

3.122f. Ceres makes Enceladus reference ("Because of the groaning and nearby flames of Enceladus, our shelter cannot go unmentioned.")

3.182-88 Titans etc: Ceres, in ignorance of her daughter's whereabouts, says:

"Does my husband still rule or do the Titans possess heaven? What hand has dared this, while the Thunderer is alive? Have Typhon's shoulders burst open Inarime? Has Alcioneus shattered the

structure of Vesuvius' ridge and sped on foot through the still waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea? Or has my neighbour Aetna brought forth Enceladus from its convulsed jaws? Or perhaps the hundred swarming hands of Briareus have attacked my dwelling?"

3.196-201 nurse to Ceres: "Would that the insane battle-line of giants had caused this destruction! Common troubles are lighter to bear. But the goddesses and, what you would least expect, her own sisters have conspired only too well to ruin us. It is the plotting of the gods above that you behold, the wounds of sisterly envy. Heaven has been more hostile towards us than Phlegra!"

3.332-62 (Grove with giants' spoil): "There was a grove near the River Acis, which shining Galatea often prefers to the sea and cleaves with her beauteous swimming—a grove of thick foliage, which covered as far as possible the peaks of Aetna with interwoven branches. It is there that father Jupiter is said to have laid down his bloody aegis and brought his captured booty after the battles. The wood exults in the spoils of Phlegra and victory clothes all the forest. Here hang the gaping jaws, here the monstrous hides of the giants, faces nailed to tree-trunks still threaten cruelly, the enormous bones of serpents whiten everywhere in bloodless heaps, and the stiff skins smoke from many thunderbolts; there is no tree which does not boast of some great name: this one supports with difficulty on its bending foliage the drawn swords of hundred-handed Aegaeon; that one exults in the leaden-grey plunder of Coeus; this one bears up the arms of Mimas; the spoils of Ophion weigh down these branches. But a silver fir, taller than all the trees and casting a broad shade, bears the smoking trophies of Enceladus himself, the supreme king of the earth-born giants, and it would fall, burdened by the weight, but that a nearby oak props up its weariness. Thence comes the awe and divinity of the place, and the old age of the grove is spared, and it is considered a sin to damage the trophies of heaven. No Cyclops dares to pasture his sheep there or injure the trees, and Polyphemus himself flees from the sacred shade.

But Ceres was not hindered by this. She was actually fired by the sanctity of the spot and brandished her axe aggressively, even ready to strike Jupiter himself; she hesitated whether to cut down pines or rather to lay low knotless cedars, and investigated manageable trunks and the line of the upright stem, testing out the branches with an assured force."

Q: Why might the felling scene in *Metamorphoses* 8 be evoked?

"No less power had the wife of Autolycus, Erysichthon's daughter. This Erysichthon was a man who scorned the gods and burnt no sacrifice on their altars. He, so the story goes, once violated the sacred grove of Ceres with the axe and profaned those ancient trees with steel. There stood among these a mighty oak with strength matured by centuries of growth, itself a grove. Round about it hung woollen fillets, votive tablets, and wreaths of flowers, witnesses of granted prayers. Often beneath this tree dryads held their festival dances; often with hand linked to hand in line they would encircle the great tree whose mighty girth was full fifteen ells. It towered as high above other trees as they were higher than the grass that grew beneath. Yet not for this did Triopas' son withhold his axe, as he bade his slaves cut down the sacred oak. But when he saw that they shrank back, the wretch snatched an axe from one of them and said: 'Though this be not only the tree that the goddess loves, but even the goddess herself, now shall its leafy top touch the ground.' He spoke; and while he poised his axe for the slanting stroke, the oak of Deo trembled and gave forth a groan; at the same time its leaves and its acorns grew pale, its long branches took on a pallid hue. But when that impious stroke cut into the trunk, blood came streaming forth from the severed bark, even as when a huge sacrificial bull has fallen at the altar, and from his smitten neck the blood pours forth. All were astonished, and one, bolder than the rest, tried to stop his wicked deed and stay his cruel axe. But the Thessalian looked at him and said: 'Take that to pay you for your pious thought!' and, turning the axe from the tree against the man, lopped off his head. Then, as he struck the oak blow after blow, from within the tree a voice was heard: 'I, a nymph most dear to Ceres, dwell within this wood, and I prophesy with my dying breath, and find my death's solace in it, that punishment is at hand for what you do.' But he accomplished his crime; and at length the tree, weakened by countless blows and drawn down by ropes, fell and with its weight laid low a wide stretch of woods around." (*Met.* 8.737-776) Tree nymphs ask Ceres for help. Ceres goes to Scythia

and asks Famine's help (she lives there: remember king of Scythians didn't get agriculture in book 5 as he attempted to murder Triptolemus). Erysichthon becomes so hungry he eventually eats himself)

Q: why might the scene depicting the deforestation of a sacred Druidic grove in Lucan's 'Civil War' (3.399-452) be evoked (as argued by Leigh, M. 2010. 'Lucan's Caesar and the Sacred Grove. Deforestation and Enlightenment in Antiquity' in *Lucan: Oxford Readings in Classical Studies* volume ed. C. Tesoriero, 201-38)?

"A grove there was, untouched by men's hands from ancient times, whose interlacing boughs enclosed a space of darkness and cold shade, and banished the sunlight far above. No rural Pan dwelt there, no Silvanus, ruler of the woods, no Nymphs; but gods were worshipped there with savage rites, the altars were heaped with hideous offerings, and every tree was sprinkled with human gore. On those boughs—if antiquity, reverential of the gods, deserves any credit—birds feared to perch; in those coverts wild beasts would not lie down; no wind ever bore down upon that wood, nor thunderbolt hurled from black clouds; the trees, even when they spread their leaves to no breeze, rustled of themselves. Water, also, fell there in abundance from dark springs. The images of the gods, grim and rude, were uncouth blocks formed of felled tree-trunks. Their mere antiquity and the ghastly hue of their rotten timber struck terror; men feel less awe of deities worshipped under familiar forms; so much does it increase their sense of fear, not to know the gods whom they dread. Legend also told that often the subterranean hollows quaked and bellowed, that yew-trees fell down and rose again, that the glare of conflagration came from trees that were not on fire, and that serpents twined and glided round the stems. The people never resorted thither to worship at close quarters, but left the place to the gods. For, when the sun is in mid-heaven or dark night fills the sky, the priest himself dreads their approach and fears to surprise the lord of the grove.

This grove was sentenced by Caesar to fall before the stroke of the axe; for it grew near his works. Spared in earlier warfare, it stood there covered with trees among hills already cleared. But strong arms faltered; and the men, awed by the solemnity and terror of the place, believed that, if they aimed a blow at the sacred trunks, their axes would rebound against their own limbs. When Caesar saw that his soldiers were sore hindered and paralysed, he was the first to snatch an axe and swing it, and dared to cleave a towering oak with the steel: driving the blade into the desecrated wood, he cried: "Believe that I am guilty of sacrilege, and thenceforth none of you need fear to cut down the trees." Then all the men obeyed his bidding; they were not easy in their minds, nor had their fears been removed; but they had weighed Caesar's wrath against the wrath of heaven. Ash trees were felled, gnarled holmoaks overthrown; Dodona's oak, the alder that suits the sea, the cypress that bears witness to a monarch's grief,¹ all lost their leaves for the first time; robbed of their foliage, they let in the daylight; and the toppling wood, when smitten, supported itself by the close growth of its timber. The peoples of Gaul groaned at the sight; but the besieged men rejoiced; for who could have supposed that the injury to the gods would go unpunished? But Fortune often guards the guilty, and the gods must reserve their wrath for the unlucky. When wood enough was felled, waggons were sought through the countryside to convey it; and the husbandmen, robbed of their oxen, mourned for the harvest of the soil left untouched by the crooked plough." (tr., Duff loeb)