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## CIRCE AND ROME. THE ORIGIN OF THE LEGEND

Many doubts still remain regarding the origins of the mythological Circe: no evidence is available to decide whether the character was simply invented by Homer in his *Odyssey* or had already appeared in earlier folk tales or old sailors' stories<sup>1</sup>. The figure of Circe may also have been the result of the mixing of Greek folklore and Homer's unrestrained imagination. Homer, in any case, was the first to give the impulse to promulgate the character of Circe in mass culture as a sorceress renowned for her vast knowledge of potions and herbs, which she used in her magical practices.

Yet, in ancient literature, the image of this dangerous witch-figure of Greek mythology got entrenched through various works of ancient dramatists. Thus, from that point onwards, she started to appear in comedies<sup>2</sup> and satyr plays<sup>3</sup>, later also to be interpreted in ironic and facetious contexts<sup>4</sup>.

Since the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, Circe has been mentioned in many scholarly works, often in connection with Italic toponyms – making her a purported prehistorical ancestor of the tribes that occupied the areas described by the respective authors. Here, a question arises: how did ancient writers come to associate the eminent witch known from Homer's poem with assorted Italic cities, including Rome? The present article – where the relevant literary testimony will be analysed – will not perhaps answer this question directly, but its aim is at least to highlight some possible origins of these thought-provoking references and hopefully to reveal the mechanisms that gave rise to the legend.

<sup>1</sup> G.S. KIRK, *Homer*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, vol. I, *Greek Literature*, ed. P.E. EASTERLING, E.J. KENNEY, Cambridge 1987, p. 85–91.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. the lost comedies entitled *Circe* by Chionides, Ehippus and Anaxilas; K. BARTOL, J. DANIELEWICZ, *Komedia grecka od Epicharma do Menandra. Wybór fragmentów*, Warszawa 2011, p. 32, 351, 416.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. the lost drama entitled *Circe* by Aeschylus; H. ZALEWSKA-JURA, *W rytmie sikinnis. Studium nad warstwą aluzji i podtekstów w greckim dramacie satyrowym*, Łódź 2006 [= RHUŁ], p. 50, 59.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. in the literary epigrams by Palladas of Alexandria (*The Palatine Anthology*, IX 395 and X 50; H. KOBUS-ZALEWSKA, *Wątki i elementy mityczne w epigramach Antologii Palatyńskiej*, Wrocław 1998 [= AFi, 54], p. 129–130) and Julianus Antikensor (*The Palatine Anthology*, XI 367); H. ZALEWSKA-JURA, *Mythical Motifs in Early Byzantine Epigrams*, [in:] *The Metamorphoses of Ancient Myths*, ed. M. BUDZOWSKA, B. İDEM DİNÇEL, J. CZERWIŃSKA, K. CHIŻYŃSKA, Frankfurt am Main 2017, p. 107.

One of the most noteworthy parts of the 10<sup>th</sup> book of the *Odyssey* is the fantastic story of Odysseus's visit to the mysterious island of Aeaëa, inhabited by the enchantress Circe, who turns Odysseus's crewmen into animals using her herbal *pharmaka*. Odysseus's journey as described in the epic takes place along a route that is partly a projection of real places; the fact that the location of Aeaëa nevertheless remains elusive seems an interesting issue to discuss<sup>5</sup>. Although the island could be merely a fictitious place invented by Homer, the genealogy of Circe as the daughter of Helios, the sun god, and Perse, an Oceanid nymph and the sister of Aeetes (*Od.* X 135–138), remains a conventional element of the myth<sup>6</sup>. It is worth mentioning that other, alternative accounts – attested in later testimonies<sup>7</sup> – make her the daughter of that same Aeetes and Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft. The second variant of her genealogy is nothing but a mental stereotype, emphasizing the relation between Hecate (the divine patroness of magic) with the famed sorceress<sup>8</sup>. It remains unknown whether Homer was aware of – and decided to neglect – this latter version of Circe's provenance. In any case, locating Circe high in the divine hierarchy in view of her genealogy gave the poet an opportunity to equip her with knowledge attributed to immortal gods; she could share it with Odysseus, revealing future events to him.

Nevertheless, none of the stories about Circe told in *Odyssey* leads to Rome.

As far as ancient sources are concerned, the first association of Circe with Roman Italy may be traced back to the final verses of Hesiod's *Theogony* (v. 1011–1016):

Κίρκη δ' Ἡελίου θυγάτηρ Ὑπεριονίδαο  
 γείνατ' Ὀδυσσεύος θαλασίφρονος ἐν φιλότῃτι  
 Ἄγριον ἢ δὲ Λατίνον ἀμύμονά τε κρατερόν τε  
 [Τηλέγονον δ' ἔτικτε διὰ χρυσῆν Ἀφροδίτην·]  
 οἳ δὴ τοι μάλα τῆλε μυχῶ νήσων ἱεράων  
 πᾶσιν Τυρσηνοῖσιν ἀγακλειτοῖσιν ἄνασσον

And Circe the daughter of Helius, Hyperion's son, loved steadfast Odysseus and bore Agrius and Latinus who was faultless and strong: also she brought forth Telegonus by the will of golden Aphrodite. And they ruled over the famous Tyrsenians, very far off in a recess of the holy islands<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Any attempts at a precise reconstruction of Odysseus's journey remain more or less widely accepted conjectures.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the semantics of the terms 'myth' and 'legend' cf. H. KOBUS-ZALEWSKA, *Wątki...*, p. 8–9.

<sup>7</sup> The first source would be the *Argonautica* by Dionysius Scytobrachion (ca. half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC), mentioned by the scholiast of the *Argonautica* by Apollodorus of Rhodes (III, 20). For more on the characteristics of Dionysius's texts see A. BOBROWSKI, "Dziennik wojny trojańskiej" *Diktysa z Krety. Studium historycznoliterackie*, Kraków 2009, p. 51. DIODORUS SICULUS confirms such a genealogy of Circe in *Bibliotheca historica* (IV, 45, 3).

<sup>8</sup> For some important remarks on Hecate see J. RYBOWSKA, *Hecate – bogini o wielu twarzach*, [in:] *Czary, alchemia, opętanie w kulturze na przestrzeni stuleci. Studia przypadków*, ed. J. PIETRZAK-THÉBAULT, Ł. CYBULSKI, Warszawa 2015, p. 53–68.

<sup>9</sup> HESIOD, *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, trans. H.G. EVELYN-WHITE, London 1914 [= LCL, 57].

Hesiod's mentioning the fact that Circe had a son by Odysseus called Latinus (the eponym of one of the Italic tribes, the Latins – the inhabitants of Latium, where the city of Rome was later founded), as well as his geographical reference to the tribes that lived by the Tyrrhenian Sea (whom the Greeks used to call *Tyrrenoi* or *Tyrsenoi*), might point to the Etruscans. This could be a sufficient premise for the recognition of Hesiod's *Theogony* as the source of the legend of Circe's relations with the mythical history of Roman Italy. Unfortunately, the fragment quoted above is considered to be a later interpolation by many scholars<sup>10</sup>. Further doubts concern the origin of the problematic supplement: was it written by Hesiod, and if so, is it an excerpt from one of his lost works, e.g. *The Catalogue of Women*? Or is it perhaps a later *apocryphon*? What is crucial for determining the origin of the legend is not so much the title of Hesiod's poem as the fact that the information about Latinus, son of Circe, appeared in his writings. We could then limit ourselves to stating that the earliest literary testimony dates back to one of the epic poems by Hesiod. However, it is hardly credible that the poet (who, moreover, admits that the only trip he ever made was sailing to Chalcis on the island of Euboea – *E.* in 648–655), actually possessed geographical information about the western coast of today's Apennine Peninsula and about the Tyrrhenian Sea, even if the elusive references merely place the Etruscans on certain vaguely specified 'holy islands'.

The second important piece of information is found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who relates the testimony of the lost *Chronicles* by 5<sup>th</sup> century BC historian Xenagoras. In the *Antiquitates Romanae*, Dionysius states (*AR* I, 72):

Ξεναγόρας δὲ ὁ συγγραφεὺς Ὀδυσσεῶς καὶ Κίρκης υἱοὺς γενέσθαι τρεῖς Ῥώμιον Ἀντίαν, Ἀρδέαν· οἰκίσαντας δὲ τρεῖς πόλεις ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν θέσθαι τοῖς κτίμασι τὰς ὀνομασίας.

Xenagoras, the historian, writes that Odysseus and Circe had three sons, Romus, Anteias and Ardeias, who built three cities and called them after their own names<sup>11</sup>.

The cities the author has in mind are Rome, Antium, and Ardea, respectively; they are all located in Latium, very close to each other. Xenagoras, however, underlines the connections between Circe and the Italic region in a manner different from Hesiod's. The testimony referred to by Dionysius obviously ennobles Circe, making her the mother of the eponymous founder of Rome and thus an ancestor of the city. The same version of the story is also later found in Plutarch (*Romulus*, II, 1, 1–5): *Some tell us that it was Romanus, a son of Odysseus and Circe, who colonized the city*<sup>12</sup> (οἱ δὲ Ῥωμανόν, Ὀδυσσεῶς παῖδα καὶ Κίρκης, οἰκίσαι τὴν πόλιν·). It is notable that three sons of Odysseus and Circe, the eponyms of Rome, Antium,

<sup>10</sup> See J.P. BARRON, *Hesiod*, [in:] *The Cambridge...*, p. 96–97.

<sup>11</sup> *The Roman Antiquities of Dionysius of Halicarnassus*, trans. E. CARY, London 1879.

<sup>12</sup> *Plutarch's Lives*, vol. I, trans. B. PERRIN, London 1914 [= LCL, 46].

and Ardea, appear once again in the 5<sup>th</sup> century in *De prosodia catholica* (3.1, p. 276) by Aelius Herodianus and in the 8<sup>th</sup> century in the *Ecloga chronographica* by Georgius Syncellus (p. 227). In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the story is evoked by Stephen of Byzantium in the *Ethnika*, where he mentions the city of Antea, i.e. Antium (p. 98):

Ἄντεια, πόλις Ἰταλίας ὑπήκοος Ῥωμαίων ἐκλήθη δὲ ἀπὸ Κίρκης παιδός. Ὀδυσσέως γὰρ καὶ Κίρκης υἱὸς [γενέσθαι] τρεῖς Ῥώμιον Ἀντεῖαν Ἀρδεῖαν·

Antea, Italic city under the rule of the Romans, took its name from the son of Circe. There were three sons of Odysseus and Circe: Romus, Anteias and Ardeias<sup>13</sup>.

In the same work, Stephen of Byzantium provides the etymology of the name of the city of Praeneste (now Palestrina) (p. 534):

Πραίνεστος, πόλις Ἰταλίας, ἀπὸ Πραινέστου τοῦ Λατίνου τοῦ Ὀδυσσέως καὶ Κίρκης υἱοῦ

The Italic city of Praeneste was named after Praenestos, the son of Latinus, who was the son of Circe and Odysseus,

referring to the version of the story known from Hesiod's *Theogony*. Stephen is not always consistent in his references to the different variants of the myth as regards the direct descendants of Odysseus and Circe.

In the fragments of the *Chronicles* by Xenagoras, there is no information on how the sons of Odysseus and Circe arrived in Italy. This *lacuna* is filled by Dionysius (AR IV 61, 3):

ἔστι δὲ χερσονησοειδῆς σκόπελος ὑψηλὸς ἐπιεικῶς ἐπὶ τοῦ Τυρρηνιοῦ πελάγους κείμενος ἔνθα λόγος ἔχει Κίρκην τὴν Ἥλιου θυγατέρα κατοικήσαι·

For it is a fairly high rock in the nature of a peninsula, situated on the Tyrrhenian Sea; and tradition has it that Circe, the daughter of the Sun, lived there.

Dionysius suggests that Aea was located somewhere in the Apennine Peninsula on the coastline of the Tyrrhenian Sea (note that Homer thinks of it as an island). Locating Circe's abode here corresponds with the information found in the *Argonautica*, the poem written by Apollonius of Rhodes in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. This poem had been popular for ages and the author of *Antiquitates Romanae* certainly must have been familiar with it. In the 4<sup>th</sup> book, Apollonius provides a detailed description of this place (Arg. IV 659–661):

<sup>13</sup> Translated by the author.

Καρπαλίμωσ δ' ἐνθένδε διέξ ἄλδσ ὄδμα νέοντο  
 Αὐσονίησ ἀκτὰσ Τυρσηνίδεσ εἰσορόωντεσ  
 ἴξον δ' Αἰαίησ λιμένα κλυτόν

And quickly from there they passed through the sea, beholding the Tyrrhenian shores of Ausonia; and they came to the famous harbour of Aeaea<sup>14</sup>.

During the Hellenistic Period, the name 'Ausonia' was given to the central part of the Apennine Peninsula, including Latium. As time passed, its meaning broadened and came to include the whole Peninsula. Auson, after whom the region was named, might have been a son of Odysseus and Circe or, according to other accounts, of Calypso. This model of the aetiological legend also makes Circe an important figure in the early history of the Roman Empire. Clearly, it must be admitted that Apollonius of Rhodes resorted to a version of the myth that was most unusual at the time, so that looking for its sources in earlier literary tradition would be a vain enterprise. It was his custom to put into practice one of the principal postulates of Hellenistic literature, i.e. to surprise the reader with an original conception of the topic and with erudition understood as profound scholarly knowledge, concealed *inter alia* in unexpected allusions to such themes as geography, astronomy, literature, or unexplored myths known exclusively from oral tradition. Authors would even make their own compilations of various versions of mythical stories. Apollonius exhibits his erudition by locating Circe's home in a real place: he uses a unique toponym (Ausonia) and makes indirect references to it with a non-widely known aetiological myth (the figure of Auson)<sup>15</sup>. Through the juxtaposition of a fictional and a real world in the *Argonautica*, a narrative filled with thorough knowledge, the mythical events gain the value of 'historicity', while the mythical characters – authenticity.

Apollonius's image of Circe is, in a way, quite novel. In his epic, her activities are not exclusively restricted to magic; rather, she is first and foremost a divinity associated with the purification ritual, which she performs twice during a short episode in the 4<sup>th</sup> book.

In the light of all the above, the statement that the *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes should be considered a literary breakthrough that transformed the image of Circe – both in locating her home on the mainland and in influencing the way in which she was perceived – seems reasonable and founded.

There is a wide gap between the fantasies of Homer and the profound geographical knowledge of Apollonius as regards locating Aeaea on an island or on the mainland, respectively. Strabo, in his *Geographica*, ventures to reconcile this incompatibility and at the same time to rationalize the poetic fiction of the author

<sup>14</sup> APOLLONIUS RHODIUS, *The Argonautica*, trans. R.C. SEATON, London 1912 [= LCL, 1].

<sup>15</sup> For useful information on Apollonius of Rhodes's scientific knowledge, including geography, see J. ROSTROPOWICZ, *Apollonios z Rodos epos o Argonautach*, Opole 1988, p. 95–109.

of the *Odyssey*. An outstanding researcher from the turn of the millennia, Strabo visited most of the regions described in his monumental work, and he dedicated two out of the seventeen books to the geography of Italy and Sicily. Concerning the places under discussion, he says the following (V 3, 6):

Μετὰ δὲ Ἄντιον τὸ Κίρκαϊον ἐστὶν ἐν διακοσίοις καὶ ἐνενήκοντα σταδίοις ὄρος νησίζον θαλάττῃ τε καὶ ἔλεσι. φασὶ δὲ καὶ πολύρριζον εἶναι, τάχα τῷ μύθῳ τῷ περὶ τῆς Κίρκης συν- νικειοῦντες ἔχει δὲ πολίχνην καὶ Κίρκης ἱερὸν καὶ Ἀθηνᾶς βωμόν, δείκνυσθαι δὲ καὶ φιάλην τινὰ φασὶν Ὀδυσσεύως.

At 290 stadia from Antium is Mount Circaeum, insulated by the sea and marshes. They say that it contains numerous roots, but this perhaps is only to harmonize with the myth relating to Circe. It has a small city, together with a temple to Circe and an altar to Minerva; they likewise say that a cup is shown which belonged to Ulysses<sup>16</sup>.

Even five centuries later, Procopius pays attention to this incongruity between the two epic writers in his work *De bellis* (V 11, 2–3):

πεδία γὰρ πολλὰ ἐνταυθὰ ἐσιν. ῥεῖ δὲ καὶ ποταμὸς ὃν Δεκεννόβιον τῇ Λατίνων φωνῇ καλοῦσιν οἱ ἐπιχώριοι, ὅτι δὴ ἐννεακαίδεκα περιῶν σημεία, ὅπερ ξύνεισιν ἐς τρισκαίδεκα καὶ ἑκατὸν σταδίου, οὕτω δὴ ἐκβάλλει ἐς θάλασσαν, ἀμφὶ πόλιν Ταρακίνην, ἧς ἀγχιστα ὄρος τὸ Κίρκαϊον ἐστίν, οὗ τὸν Ὀδυσσεῖα τῇ Κίρκῃ ξυγγενέσθαι φασὶ, ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐ πιστὰ λέγοντες, ἐπεὶ ἐν νήσῳ Ὅμηρος τὰ τῆς Κίρκης οἰκία ἰσχυρίζεται εἶναι. ἐκεῖνο μέντοι ἔχω εἰπεῖν, ὡς τὸ Κίρκαϊον τοῦτο, ἐπὶ πολὺ τῆς θαλάσσης διῆκον, νήσῳ ἐμφορὲς ἐστί.

For there are extensive plains there which furnish pasture for horses. And a river also flows by the place, which the inhabitants call Decennovium in the Latin tongue, because it flows past nineteen milestones, a distance which amounts to one hundred and thirteen stades, before it empties into the sea near the city of Taracina [Lat. Terracina]; and very near that place is Mt. Circaeum, where they say Odysseus met Circe, though the story seems to me untrustworthy, for Homer declares that the habitation of Circe was on an island. This, however, I am able to say, that this Mt. Circaeum, extending as it does far into the sea, resembles an island<sup>17</sup>.

Kirkaion (Lat. Circaeum), mentioned by Strabo, was the name of the contemporary Monte Circeo, which is located south of Anzio (old Antium) on the one side and west of Terracina (the one described by Procopius) on the other side. When one looks at Monte Circeo from the sea, it resembles an island full of trees. It is impossible to determine the origins of the name of the mountain, though it is phonetically close to the name of Homer's sorceress. The question arises

<sup>16</sup> *The Geography of Strabo*, vol. I–III, trans. H.C. HAMILTON, W. FALCONER, London 1903–1906. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Eustathius will refer to this information in his *Commentarium in Dionysii periegetae orbis descriptione* (694) in the context of the “Circaean plain” (Κίρκαϊον πεδίου).

<sup>17</sup> PROCOPIOUS, *History of the Wars*, vol. III, Books 5 – 6.15. (*Gothic War*), trans. H.B. DEWING, Cambridge Massachusetts 1916 [= LCL, 107].

whether Apollonius of Rhodes, the author most crucial for our deliberations, knew this particular name of the mountain. We may surmise that if he had known this name, he would have mentioned it in his work. However, the poet uses the phrase *the haven of Aeaea* (Αἰαίης λιμή); the toponym Kirkaion is just the name of the plain in Cholchis (II 400, III 199–200). On the other hand, in a passage from *On Marvellous Rivers* (Περὶ ποταμῶν παραδόξων) written by Philostephanus of Cyrene in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, we find the following passage (fr. 23): *The Italic river of Titon flows near Circaeum, which was named after Circe*<sup>18</sup> (Τῆτων ποταμὸς Ἰταλίας ἐγγυὺς Κίρκαίου, ὃ Κίρκαίον ἀπὸ τῆς Κίρκης καλεῖται).

The evidence provided in this article enables the conclusion that, at a certain stage, a number of elements of the myth became combined: the fact that Hesiod associated Circe with Latium by her son Latinus, the information found in the *Chronicles* by Xenagoras, and above all the location of Aeaea as determined in one of the episodes of the *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes. Other local accounts are also likely to have existed, but they did not survive in writing. All of this intriguing material, combined with favourable topographical conditions, may have given rise to the legend that the enigmatic Aeaea – the abode of Circe – was a mountain resembling an island, located on the west coast of the Italian Peninsula, and that the sons born from the sorceress's relationship with Odysseus (which is strongly embedded in the Homeric tradition) played an important role in the earliest history of the land as the founders of several cities, including Rome.

The notion that Circe was somehow connected with early Roman history did not escape the attention of Byzantine thinkers, as evidenced by the testimonies adduced in the course of the above reflections. Some authors refer to earlier testimonies<sup>19</sup>, while some furnish certain additional details. John the Lydian, the 6<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantine administrator and writer on antiquarian subjects, writes as follows in his treatise *De mensibus* (IV 4, 11–16):

φασὶ <δ>Λατίνον ἐκεῖνον τοῦ Τηλεγόνου μὲν ἀδελφόν, Κίρκης δὲ παῖδα πενθερὸν δὲ Αἰνείου κτίζοντα τὴν τῆς Ῥώμης ἀκρόπολιν πρὸ τῆς παρουσίας Αἰνείου εὐρεῖν ἐπὶ τοῦ τόπου δάφνην κατὰ τύχην καὶ οὕτως πάλιν ἔασαι αὐτὴν ἐκεῖσε διαμένειν·

And they say that the famous Latinus, Telegonus' brother, Circe's son, and Aeneas' father-in-law, when he was founding the "acropolis" of Rome before the coming of Aeneas, found a laurel tree [daphnê] by chance at the spot, and thus allowed it to remain there. For this reason, here too they designate the Palatium as "Daphne"<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Translated by the author.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. in the scholion *In Lycophronem* 1278 we find the above-quoted fragment 23 from the work by Philostephanus of Cyrene.

<sup>20</sup> JOHN LYDUS, *On the Months (De mensibus)*, trans. et ed. M. HOOKER, 2017, <http://www.rogerpearse.com/weblog/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/John-Lydus-On-the-Months-tr.-Hooker-2nd-ed.-2017-1.pdf> [28 I 2018].

Cassianus Bassus (6<sup>th</sup> century) explains these words in his *Geoponica* (XI 2, 8):

ἀλλὰ καὶ δάφνη τὸ παλάτιον ὠνομάσθη, ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπικλήσεως δάφνης τῆς ἐν Ῥώμῃ. Φασὶ γὰρ Λατίνον τὸν Τηλεγόνου μὲν ἀδελφόν, Κίρκης δὲ παῖδα, πενθερὸν δὲ Αἰνείου, κτίζοντα τὴν ἀκρόπολιν πρὸ τῆς Αἰνείου παρουσίας εὐρηκέναι ἐκεῖ δάφνην.

Palatium was named daphne (a laurel) after the name of the laurel tree in Rome. Some say that Latinus, Telegonos's brother, Circe's son, Aeneas's father-in-law, founding the acropolis before the coming of Aeneas, found a laurel there<sup>21</sup>.

Both of the aforementioned quotations reveal the mechanism of copying information among various authors, which facilitated the transmission of the legend about Circe's merits in Roman history. A certain carelessness and lack of criticism may be observed at least in the case of some writers – e.g. in *De mensibus*, where we find a version of the origin of the toponym different from the one quoted earlier (I, 12, 1–10):

Κίρκη τις ἦν ἐν Ἰταλία τῷ τε γένει περιφανῆς καὶ διαπρηγῆς, ἥτις καὶ τοῦ Ὀδυσσεύος πλανωμένου ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ σὺν Διομήδει ἐρασθεῖσα καὶ συγγενομένη τούτῳ ἔτεκεν ἐξ αὐτοῦ τὸν Αὔσονα, τὸν τῆς χώρας πάσης ἐν ὑστέρω κρατήσαντα, ἐξ οὗ Αὔσονία ἢ ἐσπέριος ἐκλήθη. αὕτη γοῦν ἡ Κίρκη διὰ κάλλους ὑπερβολὴν τοῦ Ἥλιου θυγάτηρ εἶναι ἐκόμπαζε καὶ εἰς τιμὴν τοῦ οἰκείου δῆθεν πατρὸς ἵππικὸν ἀγῶνα πρώτη ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ ἐτέλεσεν, ὃς δὴ καὶ ἐξ αὐτῆς ὠνομάσθη κίρκος.

There was in Italy a certain Circe, notable for her birth and remarkable for her beauty, who fell in love with Odysseus when he was wandering in Italy with Diomedes; after being united with him, she bore him Auson, who later took power over the entire territory, and from who[se name] the western [land] was called Ausonia. At any rate, this Circe boasted that she was the daughter of Helios on account of her exceedingly great beauty, and in honour of her own father, I suppose, she was the first in Italy to celebrate a chariot race, which indeed was named circus after her.

Incidentally, as concerns the quasi-scientific etymology of the Latin noun *circus*, there is a mental leap in John the Lydian's train of thought: the phonetic association with the name of Circe concerns not the equestrian competitions themselves, but the place where they could be held. The aetiology provided by the Greek historian relies not only on the homonymy, but also by the natural world associations that connect the name of the sorceress with the species of the falcon or the hawk (κίρκος) – birds which circle while hunting for prey. In his commentary on Dionysius Periegetes, Eustathius of Thessalonica, a philologist of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, brings up different variants of the legend (78):

Λέγονται δὲ Αὔσονες ἀπὸ Αὔσονος ὃς πρῶτος τῶν κατὰ Ῥώμην βασιλεῦσαι πρὸς τινῶν ἱστορεῖται, Ὀδυσσεῖ γεγωνῶς ἐκ τῆς Κίρκης

<sup>21</sup> Translated by the author.



The Ausones are called after Auson, who, as some authors say, was the first to rule over the tribes that lived near Rome, and he was the son of Odysseus and Circe<sup>22</sup>,

and in another commentary (350): *Rome is a region in Latium, and the Latins took their names after Latinus, son of Circe and Odysseus*<sup>23</sup> (ἡ Ἰώμη τῆς Λατίνης χώρας ἐστὶ, καὶ ὅτι Λατίνου ὁμώνυμοὶ εἰσὶν Λατίνοι, ὃς Ὀδυσσεύος καὶ Κίρκης λέγεται).

The remarks by ancient and Byzantine authors quoted in the course of our deliberations do not, as we can see, form a linear logical sequence. Rather, they are a mosaic of diverse versions of the myth, related to an array of geographical names. Whether it was the toponyms that shaped the legends, or whether it was the names that were shaped by the local accounts, must remain an unanswered question. Be that as it may, it is worth emphasizing that Circe had a permanent presence in the earliest history of several cities in the region of Latium (including in Rome) as the mother of their eponymous founders. In the post-Homeric tradition of Greek literature, there appear three variants of the legend about the sons of Circe and Odysseus, all related to Roman history: 1. Latinus (eponym of Latium), Agrios and Telegonos (also attested in the pseudo-Homeric *Telegonea*) in Hesiod's *Theogony*; 2. Romos (eponym of Rome), Antias (eponym of Antium) and Ardeas (eponym of Ardea) in the passage from the *Chronicle* by Xenagoras; 3. Auson, mentioned in connection with the name of the geographical region of Ausonia in the *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes. Later writers would choose freely from among these versions (not always consistently), adopting the one which was the most consistent with their own purpose, but always emphasizing the connection of a given mythical founder or a ruler with Circe – even in a later generation, as Stephen of Byzantium did in his *Ethnika* while writing about the prehistory of the Latin city of Praeneste. In this way, with time, the image of Circe shifted from the Homeric sorceress and magic wand-wielding *femme fatale* into her new role of the mother of Roman heroes. Perhaps it was due to Strabo's authority that, beginning at the turn of the millennia, the legendary connections between Circe and Italy – one of the most important territories in the geopolitics of those days – became issues widely discussed in Greek scholarly literature. The legend of the country's origins was later established on Roman ground, though not without a number of obvious references to Greek tradition<sup>24</sup>; it primarily emphasised the Roman part of Aeneas's adventures, thus omitting the accounts in which Circe was presented as the mother of the nation. Owing to the Greek authors, traces of this myth have survived, although it was rather unpopular from the perspective of Roman ideological propaganda.

<sup>22</sup> Translated by the author.

<sup>23</sup> Translated by the author.

<sup>24</sup> For more on Greek and Roman literary and historical source texts about the myth, known due to Vergilius's *Aeneis*, see S. STABRYŁA, *Wergiliusz. Świat poetycki*, Wrocław 1987, p. 171–177.

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**Abstract.** Circe is associated first of all with the episode narrated in the 10<sup>th</sup> book of the *Odyssey*, in which she turns Odysseus's crewmen into pigs using her herbal *pharmaka*. Odysseus survives due to divine help, his inborn cleverness, and the miraculous herb *moly*. The fairy-tale theme of the spells of Circe, clearly showing its folk provenance, got entrenched in ancient literature: featured most often in poems of playful content, Circe symbolized the power to subjugate male souls and bodies. From the Hellenistic era to the Byzantine times, however, Circe is mentioned in scholarly works – in the context of the history of Roman Italy. The aim of the present article is, first of all, to analyse the Greek-language source texts and show the ways in which ancient authors managed to connect a character from a folk fairy tale – intrinsically different in form and not identifiable with any heroic myth – with the prehistory of Roman Italy, and even place her among the ancestors of Rome. The considerations also allow us to identify some of the mechanisms of the creation and functioning of the legend as a cultural phenomenon of the ancient world.

**Keywords:** Circe, myth, history of Roman Italy, ancient and Byzantine scholarly works

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