

## References

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- [3] Virgilius, Aeneides 6595–6597.
- [4] Homer, *Odyssey* 11, 576.
- [5] Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 55.
- [6] Strabo, *Geography* 9. 3. 12.
- [7] Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, VI, 370.
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## Reply to “Liver in mythology: A different version of Tityos’ myth”

## Liver, snakes and myths

## To the Editor:

I greatly appreciate the letter written by Luigi Roffi, providing us with further information on the less-known myth of the Giant Tityus, cited in our manuscript [1] and in the paper by Tiniakos *et al.* [2]. As mentioned by Roffi, in ancient populations snakes played an important role in the divination practice since they were supposed to be able to predict the future [3]. The relationship between the liver and snakes seems to be well clarified. These animals were believed to regenerate themselves when they shed skin, revealing a shiny new skin underneath. So, as suggested in the letter, snakes appear to be involved in myths of “regeneration”, as the liver of Prometheus and Tityus. This is one of the reasons why these animals were looked upon as sacred to Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, who carried a serpent-entwined rod. This symbol, named as “the rod of Asclepius” has continued to be used in modern times, being universally associated with medicine and healthcare [3].

Actually more precise information is needed on the Laconic bowl shown in Fig. 1 of the letter. Contrary to what stated in the legend, it does not reproduce the Giant Tityus, but the punishments of Prometheus (on the right) and of his brother Atlas (on the left), bearing the sky on his shoulders [4]. In particular, this picture seems to refer to the “Theogony” by Hesiod: “And Atlas through hard constraint upholds the wide heaven with unwearied head and arms, standing at the borders of the Earth before the clear-voiced Hesperides; for this lot wise Zeus assigned to him. And ready-witted Prometheus he [Zeus] bound with inextricable bonds, cruel chains, and drove a shaft through his middle, and set on him a long-winged eagle, which used to eat his immortal liver; but by night the liver grew as much again everyway as the long-winged bird devoured in the whole day” (*Theogony*, 517–525). According to the myth, Atlas lived near

the “Garden of the Hesperides” in the Western Mediterranean [4] and, so, the snake reproduced beside him should represent Ladon, the serpent-like dragon which guarded the golden apples in the garden. In addition, since Prometheus was chained to the Caucasus Mountains situated between the Black and the Caspian Sea, this picture reproduces the geographic limits (mount Atlas and Caucasus) of the world of the ancient Greeks and Etruscans.

## Conflict of interest

The author declared that he does not have anything to disclose regarding funding or conflict of interest with respect to this manuscript.

## References

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