

The Muses' Playground: Augustanism in the *Aeneid*

A) Was Vergil under pressure to write praise of Augustus?

i) external evidence (patronage by Maecenas; Augustus' interest)

1) "[Augustus] sent letters imploring and even using jocular threats, to be sent- in his own words- 'the first sketch of the *Aeneid*, or any section of the poem'." (Donatus, *Life of Vergil*, 102ff.)

ii) internal evidence: high praise

2) "From this noble stock there will be born a Trojan Caesar to bound his empire by Oceanus at the limits of the world, and his fame by the stars. He will be called Julius.... In time to come... you will receive him in the sky, laden with the spoils of the East... Then wars will be laid aside The dread Gates of War with their tight fastenings of steel will then be closed" (Verg. *Aen.* 1.286-94)

3) "The gates of the Temple of Janus on the Quirinal..., he [Augustus] closed three times during a far shorter period, as a sign that the Empire was at peace on land and at sea." (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 22; tr. Graves)

4) "Here is ... Augustus Caesar, son of a god, the man who will bring back the golden years to the fields of Latium once ruled over by Saturn, and extend Rome's empire beyond the Indians and Garamentes to a land beyond the stars, beyond the yearly path of the sun ... Hercules himself did not make his way to so many lands ... though he gave peace to the woods of Erymanthus and made Lerna tremble at his bow." (Verg. *Aen.* 6.791-803)

5) "On one side was Augustus Caesar, leading the men of Italy into battle alongside the Senate and the People of Rome, its gods of home and its great gods. High he stood on the poop of his ship while from his radiant forehead there streamed a double flame and his father's star shone above his head." (Verg. *Aen.* 8.678-81; shield: cf. shield presented senate 27 BC? CLIPEUS VIRTUTIS CLEMENTIAE IUSTITIAE PIETATIS ERGA DEOS PATRIAMQUE)

6) "The whole of Italy of its own free will swore allegiance to me and demanded me as the leader in the war in which I was victorious at Actium." (*Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 25; tr. P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore)

7) "the grim Furies swooped from the sky and jubilant *Discord* (*Discordia*) strode along in her torn cloak" (Verg. *Aen.* 8.702; tr. D. West)

● Propaganda? Not an *Augusteid*. Panegyric historical epics common at time

8) "We are told that Alexander the Great took around with him a great number of authors engaged in writing about his achievements. And yet, as he stood beside the tomb of Achilles at Sigeum, he uttered these words: 'Fortunate youth, who found Homer to proclaim your valour!'" (Cicero, *Pro Archias*, 10.24; tr. M. Grant)

● expectation of panegyric concerning Augustus from *Georgics* (pub. 29 BC): allegorical temple

9) "In the midst I will have Caesar, and he shall possess the shrine. In his honour I, a victor resplendent in Tyrian purple, will drive a hundred four-horse chariots beside the stream." (Vergil, *Georgics* 3.16-8)

10) “On the doors I will fashion, in gold and solid ivory, the battle of the Ganges’ tribe, and the arms of conquering Quirinus; there, too, the Nile, surging with war and flowing full; and columns soaring high with prows of bronze. I will add Asia’s vanquished cities, the routed Niphates, the Parthian...” (Vergil, *Georgics* 3.26-31)

- References to Augustus frequently indirect:

e.g. Aeneas comes to Pallanteum: *Aeneid* 8.95-369 as site of future Rome. Evander's humble hut (*Aen.* 8.362-8): cf. Augustus' personal simplicity

11) “The fiery sun had climbed to the middle of the vault of heaven when they saw in the distance walls and a citadel and the roofs of scattered houses. What Roman power has now raised to the heights of the sky, in those days was a poor land ruled by Evander.” (*Aen.* 8.97-100: future Palatine home to Apollo and Augustus)

12) “warriors and senators, poor men as they were” (*Aen.* 8.105, of Arcadians)

e.g. dating: rites 12th August; 13th August 29 BC= celebration of triple triumph

13) “The “next day”, after Aeneas has passed the night in Evander's hut, is 13 August, the first of the three days of Octavian's triple triumph; on this day Aeneas will receive from his mother the shield of Vulcan, whose description will culminate in Octavian's triumph, likewise taking place on the “same” day” (Feeney, *Caesar's calendar* (2007), p162)

e.g. underworld scene: Camillus bringing back standards (*Aen.* 6.825): evoking Augustus' negotiation of return of standards which had been lost to Parthians at Carrhae in 53 BC?

e.g. town nr Actium (Nicomopolis?); games at Actium; shield dedication at Actium, Verg. *Aen.* 3.286-8

e.g. games in Sicily; archery contest (comet)

e.g. gods such as Apollo and Cybele (exploited in Augustan propaganda)

- succession issue: Marcellus (*A.* 6.863-885; d. 23BC aged 20); cf. vulnerability of Ascanius

14) “Oh the pity of it! If only you could break the harsh laws of Fate! You will be Marcellus” (*Aen.* 6.882-3, Anchises in the underworld)

15) “What a cortège will Tiber see as he glides past the new Mausoleum on his shore” (*Aen.* 6.873-4)

- Nb loose connections between Aeneas/Augustus; troubling links? capture of youths to sacrifice (*Aen.* 10.517-20 and 11.81f.) following Achilles, *Il.* 21: cf. Augustus' alleged human sacrifice of 300 to JC at capture of Perugia, 41 BC?

B) general difficulties of contemporary historical panegyric

i) bad poet (e.g. Choerilus of Iasus for Alexander the Great)

ii) OTT ridiculous praise (e.g. Cicero's *On his consulship*)

16) "Oh Rome, born fortunate when I was consul"

iii) possible incongruity in applying divine machinery and heroic attitudes to the present

C) Vergil: problem avoidance

i) OTT ridiculous praise

ii) possible incongruity in applying divine machinery and heroic attitudes to the present

iii) problems of evoking Hellenistic motifs and ideas

iv) the at best ambiguous nature of some of Augustus' actions (e.g. civil war battles: Mutina, 43 BC; Philippi, 42 BC; war with Sextus Pompeius, 38-36 BC; the Perusine war)

17) "... of Mutina or Rome's graveyard Philippi

Or the war at sea with Sicilian refugees

And the overthrow of the hearths of the old Etruscan race" (Prop. 2.1.27-9; tr. Lee)

v) Actium: unsatisfactory as a battle

vi) obligation to take an unambiguous attitude to all events: Augustus' opponents always wrong

• advantages of using Trojan myth

i) Aeneas, Homeric character, is at ease in the Homeric world and can excel in single combat, interact with the gods etc. He is the son of a goddess

ii) Homeric style and framework become natural to the poem

iii) Augustus, kept out of centre stage, can be shown in selected poses only, and with less risk of adulation

iv) a valuable obliquity is given to the view of Roman history and politics; the enemy can be seen with sympathy and pathos (ancestral Italians not modern enemies)

v) a love interest becomes possible

Bibliography

- Camps, W. A., *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid* (1969), ch. X, pp. 95-104; Appendix 5, 137-143
- Boyle, A. J., 'Reading Vergil's Rome' in Perkell, C. *An Interpretative guide*
- Boyle, A. J., 'Introduction: The Roman Song' (in *Roman Epic*, ed. A. J. Boyle, 1993), 1-18
- Clausen, W., *Virgil's Aeneid and Hellenistic Poetry* (1987), Ch. V
- Clausen, W., *Virgil's Aeneid. Decorum, allusion, and ideology* (2002)
- Feeney, D., *Caesar's Calendar* (2006)
- Frantuono, L. *Madness unchained: A Reading of Virgil's Aeneid*
- Gransden, K.W., *Virgil. The Aeneid* (1990).
- Harrison, S., 'The Epic and the Monuments' in *Epic Interactions* ed. B. Currie et al (Oxford: 2006))
- Lyne, R. O. A. M., *Further Voices in Vergil's Aeneid*, (1987)
- Miller, J. F., *Apollo, Augustus, and the poets*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2009)
- Wiseman T.P., 'Cybele, Virgil and Augustus', in *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus* edd. A Woodman and D. West (Cambridge, 1984), 117-28