

Vergil *Aeneid* shield description (8.626-731)

There the story of Italy and the triumphs of Rome had the Lord of Fire fashioned, not unversed in prophecy or unknowing of the age to come; there, every generation of the stock to spring from Ascanius, and the wars they fought in their sequence. He had fashioned, too, the mother wolf lying stretched out in the green cave of Mars; around her teats the twin boys hung playing, and suckled their dam without fear; with shapely neck bent back, she fondled them by turns, and moulded their limbs with her tongue. Not far from here he had set Rome and the Sabine maidens, lawlessly carried off, when the great Circus games were held, from the theatre's seated throng; then the sudden uprising of a fresh war between the sons of Romulus and aged Tatius and his stern Cures. Next, the same kings, their strife laid at rest, stood armed before Jove's altar, cup in hand, and made covenant with each other over sacrifice of swine, and the palace was rough, fresh with the thatch of Romulus. Not far from there, four-horse chariots, driven apart, had torn Mettus asunder (but you, Alban, should have stood by your words!), and Tullus dragged the liar's body through the woods, and the brambles dripped with dew of blood. There, too, was Porsenna, bidding them admit the banished Tarquin, and oppressing the city with mighty siege: the sons of Aeneas rushing on the sword for freedom's sake. You could see him shown as angry, as threatening, because Cocles dared to tear down the bridge, and Cloelia broke her bonds and swam the river.

At the top of the shield Manlius, warder of the Tarpeian fort, stood before the temple and held the lofty Capitol. And here the silver goose, fluttering through gilded colonnades, cried that the Gauls were on the threshold. The Gauls were close by in the thickets, laying hold of the fort, shielded by darkness, and the boon of shadowy night. Golden are their locks and golden their raiment; they glitter in striped cloaks, and their milk-white necks are entwined with gold; two Alpine pikes each brandishes in hand, and long shields guard their limbs. Here he had wrought the dancing Salii and naked Luperci, the crests bound with wool, and the shields that fell from heaven; and in cushioned carriages chaste matrons moved through the city in solemn progress. At a distance from these he adds also the abodes of Hell, the high gates of Dis, the penalties of sin, and you, Catiline, hanging on a frowning cliff, and trembling at the sight of the Furies; and far apart, the good, with Cato giving them laws.

Among these scenes flowed wide the likeness of the swelling sea, all gold, but the blue water foamed with white billows, and round about dolphins, shining in silver, swept the seas with their tails in circles, and cleft the tide. In the centre could be seen bronze ships—the battle of Actium; you could see all Leucate aglow with War's array, and the waves ablaze with gold. On the one side Augustus Caesar stands on the lofty stern, leading Italians to strife, with Senate and People, the Penates of the state, and all the mighty gods; his auspicious brows shoot forth a double flame, and on his head dawns his father's star. Elsewhere, favored by winds and gods, high-towering Agrippa leads his column; his brows gleam with the beaks of the naval crown, proud token won in war. On the other side comes Antony with barbaric might and motley arms, victorious over the nations of the dawn and the ruddy sea, bringing in his train Egypt and the strength of the East and farthest Bactra; and there follows him (oh the shame of it!) his Egyptian wife. All rush on at once, and the whole sea foams, torn up by the sweeping oars and triple-pointed beaks. To the deep they race; you would think that the Cyclades, uprooted, were floating on the main, or that high mountains were clashing with mountains: in such huge ships the seamen attack the towered sterns. Flaming tow and shafts of

winged steel are showered from their hands; Neptune's fields redden with strange slaughter. In the midst the queen calls upon her hosts with their native sistrum; not yet does she cast back a glance at the twin snakes behind. Monstrous gods of every form and barking Anubis wield weapons against Neptune and Venus and against Minerva. In the middle of the fray storms Mavors, embossed in steel, with the grim Furies from on high; and in rent robe Discord strides exultant, while Bellona follows her with bloody scourge. Actian Apollo saw the sight, and from above was bending his bow; in terror at this all Egypt and India, all Arabians, all Sabaeans, turned to flee. The queen herself was seen to woo the winds, spread sail, and now, even now, fling loose the slackened sheets. Amid the carnage, the Lord of Fire had fashioned her pale at the coming of death, borne on by waves and the wind of Iapyx; while over against her was the mourning Nile, of massive body, opening wide his folds and with all his raiment welcoming the vanquished to his azure lap and sheltering streams.

But Caesar, entering the walls of Rome in triple triumph, was dedicating to Italy's gods his immortal votive gift—three hundred mighty shrines throughout the city. The streets were ringing with gladness and games and shouting; in all the temples was a band of matrons, in all were altars, and before the altars slain steers covered the ground. He himself, seated at the snowy threshold of shining Phoebus, reviews the gifts of nations and hangs them on the proud portals. The conquered peoples move in long array, as diverse in fashion of dress and arms as in tongues. Here Mulciber had portrayed the Nomad race and the un-girt Africans, here the Leleges and Carians and quivered Gelonians. Euphrates moved now with humbler waves, and the Morini were there, furthest of mankind, and the Rhine of double horn, the untamed Dahae, and Araxes chafing at his bridge.

Such sights he admires on the shield of Vulcan, his mother's gift, and, though he knows not the events, he rejoices in their representation, raising up on his shoulder the fame and fortunes of his children's children.