

Bibliography

- W. A. Camps, An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid (Oxford 1969), especially chap. IX.  
W. A. Camps, "The Role of the Sixth Book in the Aeneid", Proceedings of the Virgil Society 1967-8, 22-30.  
R. D. Williams, "The Sixth Book of the Aeneid", Greece and Rome N.S.11, 1964, 48-63.  
R. G. Austin, "Virgil, Aeneid VI. 384-476", Proceedings of the Virgil Society 1968-69, 51-60.

For contemporary historical background to the Aeneid see, for example, H. H. Scullard, From the Gracchi to Nero (4th ed. London, 1976), pp.109-127; 138-177; 215-250.

1. Introductory

In Aen.III.441ff. the seer Helenus had told Aeneas to visit the Sibyl of Cumae who would reveal his future to him (although in Book VI the detailed exposition of his prospects is left to Anchises: lines 890-2). In V.731ff. Anchises, appearing to Aeneas in a dream, instructed his son to visit him. But why did Vergil choose to include an episode of this type in his epic - and at this point?

(A) Vergil was writing a Latin epic to match those of Homer: his epic is set in the Homeric world and makes wide use of Homeric ideas which Vergil then re-works creatively. As Odysseus' visit to the Underworld (Od.XI - perhaps a relatively late addition to the poem) was one of the most famous episodes in Homer, a Vergilian counterpart was natural.

(B) Previous versions of the Aeneas story brought him to Cumae - and perhaps made him consult the Sibyl or even the oracle of the dead at L.Avernus. The latter had long been regarded as an entrance to the Underworld - and as the setting of Od.XI.

(C) Cumae had close connections with Augustus through the cult of Augustus' patron deity Apollo. This cult was supposed to have come to Rome from Cumae. When Aeneas promises to build Apollo a marble temple (VI.69f.), this is a clear reflection of the temple to Apollo built by Augustus on the Palatine.

Moreover, the Sibyl was the author of the Sibylline books, a set of ritual instructions and oracles kept and consulted at Rome (reputedly since the sixth century B.C.). Cf. Aeneas' promise here to collect the Sibyl's prophecies and put them in the charge of a special board (i.e. the later Quindecimviri sacris faciundis).

(D) There was a good deal of educated interest in the nature of the soul and the possibility of an after-life in the first century B.C. (although how far there was serious belief in survival after death is doubtful - there was no coherent Roman doctrine of an after-life and Cicero's correspondents seem to assume that death is the end of everything). Both Varro and Cicero wrote about the possibility of the soul's survival and also visions of an after-life: Cicero's is the Dream of Scipio. In his original plan for an epic, Vergil seems already to have envisaged including some material relating to the Underworld: Georgics III.37ff.

(E) This is an appropriate place in the Aeneid for Aeneas to be given a more precise idea of his own future in the Italy he has now reached and of the future glories that will result from his work. An Underworld scene provided Vergil with an admirable means of providing this and of bringing the past, present and future of Troy and Rome together and thus creating a sense of national history and tradition.

Some scholars (e.g. Otis) see the Underworld as a regenerative experience that transforms Aeneas from a hesitant and frail follower of destiny (Books I-V) into a courageous and resolute hero (Books VII-XII). But (i) Aeneas' irresolution in the early books should not be exaggerated; (ii) Aeneas shows considerable resolution before he enters the Underworld: see especially VI.103ff.; (iii) Aeneas occasionally shows irresolution later: see VIII.18ff.

It is true that Aeneas shows more self-assurance in VII-XII, but this is explicable in terms of the following facts: (a) Aeneas has now reached his destined stopping-place: much of the irresolution in Books I-V was due to his lack of 'roots'; (b) much of Books VII-XII is concerned with war, which is Aeneas' element (cf. Book II); (c) Aeneas is fortified by a series of signs and prophecies of his future victory: Anchises' narrative in VI is an important element in this series, but it is only one element.

## 2. The Preliminaries (1 - 263)

There are four principal motifs here:

(A) The Sibyl and her oracle (perhaps already in the Aeneas story)

(B) Misenus. Already connected with Aeneas in some earlier versions. His story is an aetiological legend to explain the place-name Misenum (so too the story of Palinurus later): cf. esp. 232ff. (cf. 378ff. for Palinurus). The literary model for the description of Misenus' funeral is the description of Patroklos' funeral in Homer, Iliad 23.109ff.

(C) The sacrifices before the descent. These have a literary model in Od. X.516ff.; XI.24ff.; their form here may be based on sacrifices actually performed at the oracle of the dead at Avernus.

(D) The Golden Bough. For various explanations of its significance, see Camps, Introduction to Vergil's Aeneid p. 93f. It may be connected with the wand carried by those being initiated into the mysteries at Eleusis in Attica: these mysteries seem to have incorporated some of the Orphic ideas found in Aeneid VI.

The combination of these four motifs into a causally progressive narrative is Vergil's own work. Note in particular the way the finding of the Bough is worked into the episode of the burial of Misenus: these two episodes introduce a dominant theme of the book - the contrast between human happiness and human tragedy (often reinforced by the visual imagery of light and shade).

## 3. The Descent

In contrast to Homer, Vergil depicts Aeneas journeying through the Underworld in which the dead are clearly categorised and assigned their appropriate places. In this description of Aeneas' descent (katabasis), Vergil probably owes a good deal to descriptions in Greek of the similar journeys of Heracles and Orpheus.

(I) The fullest version of Heracles' fetching of Cerberus is in Apollodorus but the narratives in Bacchylides, Pindar and Aristophanes suggest much earlier versions of the story: modern scholars have guessed that all depend on one original description of Heracles' katabasis and that Vergil took from this, e.g., the famous leaves simile in VI.309ff.

The new Pindar(?) fragment suggests that Heracles' initiation at Eleusis was included in the story early on (cf. the talk of the initiates in Aristophanes' Frogs).

(II) There was at least one poem describing Orpheus' descent to recover Eurydice. It and/or other poems described the Underworld according to the Orphic conception of rewards for the initiated and virtuous, punishment for the wicked. Similar views were held by the Pythagoreans, who regarded the soul as imprisoned in the body, condemned to a series of reincarnations, but able to escape by a life of purity. Our knowledge of Orphic and Pythagorean doctrines is, however, severely limited by the fact that much of our information derives from other authors who took up their ideas (notably Pindar and Plato) - and it is likely that there was in any case no uniform Orphic or Pythagorean viewpoint.

#### 4. The Early Part of the Underworld (268-547)

Initially we appear to meet an Underworld very like that of Homer: (i) the dead are insubstantial shades living a sort of half-life; (ii) the dead essentially live in the past - they still have the same physical appearance as at death (cf. Deiphobus) and can think only of the past; (iii) there is a general atmosphere of gloom and despondency - and no hint of future release for these souls. Note too that there is no differentiation of merit among many of these shades: in the lugentes campi we meet the innocent (Phaedra and Laodamia) as well as notorious sinners (e.g., Eripyles).

Yet Vergil has used here a basis of organisation that is perhaps taken ultimately from Pythagorean sources. The basic principle is that the unburied and those who in some sense die prematurely have to wait in a special place in Hades until their proper life-span (artificially reckoned at 100 years) is completed: they then pass on to the next stage. The groups we meet here are:

- (i) infants (426ff.)
- (ii) the falsely condemned and executed (430ff.)
- (iii) suicides (434ff.)
- (iv) those killed by durus amor (440ff.)
- (v) those killed in war (477ff.)

For the doctrine of a special place for such souls cf. Plato, Republic 615; Tertullian, De Anima 56.4:

"They (the "magicians") say too that those overtaken by a premature death wander continually about there until they have completed the rest of the time that they would have lived if they had not died prematurely .... also kept outside the number of the shades will be those whom they consider to have been snatched away by violence, especially through barbaric methods of punishment (crucifixion, beheading with the axe or sword, or being thrown to the beasts)."

Note, however, that the theological aspect of this categorisation is concealed: there is no hint of future release for the souls here. Vergil's principal objective is literary. (Hence too "illogicalities" here and elsewhere in Book VI (e.g., Sychaeus' appearance among those killed by amor or Minos as the judge simply of the unjustly condemned rather than all the dead.) Vergil is confronting Aeneas with figures that reflect crucial experiences in his own past: Palinurus (the wanderings), Dido, and Deiphobus (the fall of Troy).

Only in the case of Deiphobus do the previous books offer justification for the suggestion that these three figures represent experiences which Aeneas still needs to put behind him if he is to carry out his mission in Italy. And the confrontation with Dido was hardly likely to reassure him. On the contrary: none of these three had merited their dismal and (apparently) eternal fate and for Aeneas to forget them totally would be unthinkable. Rather, these encounters remind him of the tragic side of human experience - the other side of the coin from the brilliant future

## 5. Tartarus (548-627)

This traditional feature was incorporated into Orphic/Pythagorean doctrine as the place of eternal punishment for the incurably wicked (some seem to have held that wicked but curable sinners were sent there for a period): cf. Plato's myths and the Bologna papyrus.

Vergil's Tartarus has a strongly moral aspect: cf. esp. 620. Some of the damned are those of traditional mythology (580-603; 616-620), but there are also more general categories of crimes (604-615; 621-4). Such catalogues also were to be found in earlier katabasis literature (cf. Aristophanes' Frogs and the Bologna papyrus), but Vergil gives them a distinctly Roman character: thus pulsatus parens and fraus innexa clienti (609) reflect Roman legal language.

Moreover, these catalogues of sins are directly relevant to Augustan Rome: (i) there is a direct reference in lines 612-4 to Sex. Pompeius' recruitment of run-away slaves for his 'pirate' fleet; and lines 621-2 refer to Antony's activities after Caesar's death in promulgating legislation supposedly planned by Caesar (these lines are also a quotation from the De Morte of Vergil's friend Varius); (ii) Vergil's assertion of traditional Roman values here reflects the feeling in contemporary Rome that the troubles of the late republic were due to moral decay and that there was an urgent need to return to the ancestral morality: this view was assiduously encouraged by Augustus (for whom it was extremely convenient) and he was probably already planning legislation to reinforce marriage and take more effective measures against adultery.

## 6. Elysium (637-751)

Elysium, in contrast to the earlier part of the Underworld, is a region of light, illumination and sound, and Orphic and Pythagorean ideas of the after-life now come much more clearly to the fore: so, alongside the great warriors of the past (note here the stress of the Trojan past), we find also Orpheus himself and his close associate Musaeus: the Bologna papyrus offers a particularly close parallel to the men "who have adorned life by their skills".

The philosophical aspect of the Underworld becomes explicit in Anchises' speech (724ff.). At the basis of this is the idea (held by Orphics and Pythagoreans among others) that the essence or soul of the individual is a divine spark which becomes corrupted through contact with the body and has to undergo a series of purifications before it can return to the primeval state of absolute purity. This doctrine is given Stoic overtones by Vergil through the adoption of the Stoic view that the individual spark/soul is part of the divine Spirit or Mind that pervades and rules the universe. According to Anchises, at death the souls are judged and punished/purified. Of those thus purified a few remain in Elysium until eventually returning to their primeval state (pauci: 744 - Anchises himself is evidently among these); the rest are assembled after 1000 years and are assigned new lives: they then drink of the waters of Forgetfulness (Lethe) and are reborn. It was generally held that after 10 such cycles (10,000 years) the souls would be completely purified and would return to their primeval state. It was sometimes held also that after the completion of the process the soul returned to the heavens (cf. esp. Cicero's Dream of Scipio): this is probably why Elysium has such a light airy character and is perhaps the explanation for Vergil's mysterious talk of aeris campi in 887 (although strictly the whole of his Underworld seems to be set underground).

Note here that Vergil is fairly eclectic in the doctrine he gives to Anchises and that he avoids all mention of initiation as a pre-requisite for entering Elysium (in contrast to Orphics and adherents of the Eleusinian mysteries): the criteria on which souls are judged are, apparently, purely moral criteria. Note too that Vergil's focus of interest is on this world, not the next: Anchises' exposition is designed to explain how Aeneas can see the future heroes of Rome and the traditions that they represent: it acts as a door to the great national and moral finale which centres on Rome. This focus is quite different from that of Orphics etc. who saw this world as at best a preparation for the next. It is also quite different from the emphasis in the Dream of Scipio on the rewards in the after-life as an inducement to public service in this world.

## 7. The Pageant (756-886)

The major part of Anchises' description of the future heroes of Rome takes the form of an exhortatory address in which the speaker argues a moral viewpoint by adducing a number of examples which culminate in a statement of the lesson to be drawn. The speech can be divided as follows:

(A) The Kings of Alba Longa, Romulus, Caesar and Augustus (all direct descendants of Aeneas) with the concluding exhortation to Aeneas in lines 806f.

(B) The other heroes of Rome's past. This contains an exhortation to Caesar and Pompey not to engage in civil war (632-5) but really culminates in the exhortation to the Romanus in 847-853.

(C) Marcellus (855-886).

The pageant is again of direct contemporary relevance. It reflects the common Roman idea (cf. Livy in particular) that Rome's achievement was the result of heroic self-sacrifice by a whole series of generations. It also reflects the desire (again evident in Livy) to look beyond the civil strife of the immediate past to the great traditions of Rome and to recapture a sense of national identity and purpose. And it stresses above all the military tradition and the military achievement of Rome - emphasised also in Iuppiter's prophecy in Aen. I. 257ff. and in the description of Aeneas' shield in VIII. 626ff. That too was an important contemporary theme - particularly in the form that Rome should turn from internal war to fighting her real external enemies.

The pageant, however, ends on a note of tragedy (possibly a later addition to the book but closely related to its principal themes). Aeneas sees first the elder Marcellus, a great military figure of the late third century B.C.; but with him is a younger Marcellus, destined to die young. This is Augustus' nephew, whom Augustus had marked out as his heir but who died in 23 B.C. at the age of 19. Marcellus' death is not a sort of sacrifice or price that has to be paid for Roman success: rather, his appearance here stresses again the darker side of human experience and the theme of youth cut off in its prime which is prominent elsewhere in Vergil's epic (above all in the deaths of Pallas and Lausus in Book X).