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Pater Aeneas, errans et oboediens

“Arma virumque cano” are the words with which Virgil opens his epic poem suggesting at the same time that *The Aeneid* in some way relates to Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Virgil sings to Aeneas, a valiant man (virum), and his battles (arma). Aeneas incorporates the images of Achilles and Odysseus. His destiny and character, however, distinguish him from both heroes. Achilles is a brave warrior of incomparable power fighting for honor; the purpose of his perilous voyage is to return home. Aeneas is a hero who is entrusted with a special mission and who leaves Burning Troy by the gods’ will in order to “return” to his new homeland.

So, how does the shaping of Aeneas’s character take place after leaving Troy and how does this courageous warrior from a defender of his land turn into a hero implementing the gods’ will?

Let us have a look at Aeneas at the fall of Troy. He is a fearless warrior ready to greet death with a sword in his hand and perish together with the burning city (II 317, 354). The mischief that came crushing down on him put him into confusion and deprived him of reason; his fight is impulsive. He is desperate and knows not how to revenge the enemy. Subsequently, he decides to take out his anger on Helen, albeit knowing that raising a hand over a woman is an unmanly conduct (II 575-586). He comes to senses only after hearing his mother Venus’s counsel thereof. The goddess assures her son that people are not to blame for the fall of Troy, that everything was the gods’ making (II 603). This is a hint on the fact that human destiny is governed by the gods and that one should only try to win their disposition. Venus advises Aeneas

to flee the burning Troy and promises him to bring him to his home place (*patrio limine* II 620). Aeneas gets convinced that Gods have forsaken Trojans and turned their back on it (II 623). Prior to speaking to Venus, he had an apparition of Hector who also advised him to flee Troy and found a new city together with the Penates and his fellow fighters (II 293-295). When his father, Anchises, refuses to leave Troy, Aeneas does not abandon him and decides to reenter the battle and fight the enemy (II 668-670). Only the divine sign – a tongue of flame on Ascanius's forehead and a way indicated by a bright falling star – starts Anchises thinking (II 694-697). Both Aeneas and Anchises are persuaded that it is the divine will to have them flee Troy. Therefore, the decision did not come from Aeneas, nor was it taken instantaneously. The warning of the fallen Hector and Goddess Venus's advice went but a little way to this decision of his. Only the miraculous sign from the heaven made him flee the city. Aeneas takes Anchises on his back, puts Ascanius in the lead, and orders Creusa, his wife, to follow him. All this has a symbolic meaning: Anchises represents Troy's past that Aeneas is destined to bear on his shoulders, his child is the future of Troy which Aeneas should always have before his eyes, and his wife, i. e. personal or human happiness, should always accompany him. After a sudden disappearance of Creusa, Aeneas returns to the besieged city to look for his wife. He continues the search until Creusa's ghost appears to him and instructs him to take the road to Hesperia. Aeneas leaves Troy only after he no longer hopes to find his wife among the living. However, Aeneas is inattentive to his wife's advice. Later on, he does not even remember Creusa naming Hesperia as the final destination point for his journey. Aeneas asks his father to carry the images of the Penates as he cannot touch the saints with his bloody hands (II 718-720). This detail is quite significant: Aeneas does not dare touch the Penates since his hands are covered with the blood of the enemy who has devastated his home.

Before fleeing Troy, the following traits single out in Aeneas's character: courage, self-sacrifice for his homeland and family, and awe towards deities coupled with confusion and neglect of the advice given by the spirits of the deceased. Aeneas flees the burning city together with the human happiness (Creusa) and hurries to the unknown but native land accompanied by the past (Anchises) and future (Ascanius). Here Aeneas's character is supplemented by a new feature – caution. Aeneas avoids figh-

ting when he turns back to Troy for the third time. He is looking for his wife fearing the confrontation with the enemy. His fear and cautiousness have to do with the care about his companions; rescuing them is equal to salvaging Troy. Aeneas gradually begins to display the properties of a *pater*, even though he is not yet aware of being entrusted with a special divine mission.

To accomplish this mission, Aeneas will have to acquire a lot of skills: patience, the ability to identify divine signs, remember them, and take them into account. He is unconscious of where he is heading for or where he is supposed to halt (he does not remember Creusa's words). He does not know what relationship he will establish with the people he will have to share his life with. Aeneas is unaware of the struggle he will have to go through for self-assertion in the new homeland. But Venus knows about Jupiter's decision (I 262-263).

Although Aeneas is a pious man, he cannot easily identify divine signs and often errs. Arriving in Thrace, the Trojan hero finds a new settlement, but the bloodstained soil indicates to him that it is not the Promised Land (III 14-68). Setting his foot on the island of Delos, Aeneas is informed by Apollo's priest that they are being expected at the ancestors' land to which they should go (91-99). Everyone is curious about which land Apollo's prophecy refers to. Anchises tries to solve this mystery by deciding it is the island of Crete, which had been home to Teucus, one of the great Trojan forefathers. Happy Trojans sail to Crete and start building a city. But once hunger strikes the place, it makes them think back suspecting they might have mistook the place. Meantime, Aeneas has a vision while sleeping: the Penates announce to him that they have to go to Hesperia, which at that time was known by the name of Italy. That is where Dardanus and Iasius, the ancestors of Trojans were born. Anchises admits he has made a mistake and remembers Cassandra's prophecy who named exactly that place as their new home (III 183-187). Anchises forgot Cassandra's words as easily as Aeneas neglected Creusa's message. So, both Aeneas and Anchises take little heed of the prophecies of the mortals. Three times was Hesperia named (by Creusa, Cassandra, and the Penates) as the new home for the Trojans. Many mistakes that Aeneas makes stem from his forgetfulness and poor knowledge of their own history (Trojans being scattered around different territories) as well as disregard of the

traditions of the foreign people and disrespect towards their deities, also mostly caused by the lack of knowledge.

Having arrived at the islands of the Harpies, Aeneas's companions slaughter bullocks provoking an attack from the Harpies. The Harpy Celaeno points out the mistake to them. She too confirms the prophecy according to which the Trojans should settle in Italy. Celaeno provides Aeneas with one more important information: the wandering of the Trojans will come to an end after they have gone through extreme sufferings culminating in hunger forcing them to gnaw out their own table (III 255-256).

In Buthrotum, the Trojans are greeted by their close people: Helenus, one of king Priam's sons, and Andromache. Here Aeneas gets another hint by Apollo's priest: the place where they find a white pig with thirty piglets will be their home. Besides, Aeneas has to listen to Sibylla's prophecy telling about the future struggles (III 458). This is the first indication that their settlement on the new land will not be painless.

Aeneas already knows that he has battles ahead. Arriving on the island of Ortigia, the Trojans make offerings to the local Gods (III 697). However, it is not Aeneas who comes to this understanding but the gods that order him to do so. On this island, the Trojans bid their final farewell to Anchises thereby cutting their link with the ancient Troy, i. e. their past.

Finding himself on the island of Dido, Aeneas yields to human weakness: he marries the Queen of Carthage and eagerly participates in the construction of the city. He has been obviously longing for peaceful life. It was some kind of dope that made Aeneas forget the mission imposed on him by the gods: the human foible woke in him at a time when he knew exactly where, in which country, he was to seek the new home. As a result, he was on the verge of losing the function of a hero executing the Gods' will.

Mercurius sent by Jupiter conveys the God's rebukes to the Trojan hero because he forgot his mission to build cities to revive the Trojan race from Teucers' blood. If such fame is no longer appealing to him, why is he barring his son from future happiness (IV 225-234)? The words pronounced by the gods' messenger shock Aeneas and sober him up from drowsiness. He has made a gross mistake that was not due to ignorance but forgetfulness. I think Aeneas' love for Dido was not so deep as to cause him forget his duty. Aeneas immediately starts to prepare, as Virgil says, "to leave the blissful land" (IV 281). The only thing that troubles him is how to tell Dido of his departure. Finally, he decides to leave in secret.

He is agitated and worried, but not hesitant. Aeneas renounces the human weakness at once, albeit it is not easy for him because of his virtue, the sense of duty to Dido. He offers excuses to Dido saying that his desire does not coincide with the gods' will. He would rather stay in the destroyed Troy and restore it but the gods chose another mission for him. There is a tone of reproach heard in Aeneas's self-justification. If you like Carthage, - he addresses Dido, - why are you preventing me from settling in Italy, as willed by Gods, where I will find love and homeland, besides I cannot deprive my son the future (IV 340, 355). Consequently, I think that the major motive for Aeneas to stop at Dido's was his longing for peaceful life. Aeneas tries to persuade Dido to succumb to her destiny. And although Aeneas is ready to depart, Mercurius appears before him again and hastens him, maybe in order to prevent him from seeing Dido committing suicide, which could detain the Trojan hero on the island for some time. Aeneas takes out his sword and cuts the ship rope, which must symbolically mean that Aeneas is finally cutting his dangerous link with Dido and that the Trojan hero will have to establish himself in a new country sword in hand.

Arriving in Sicily, Aeneas is cordially greeted by the Trojan Acestes. After performing a rite in Anchises' memory, a huge athletic competition is held. This must symbolically mean preparation for the future war and might also be considered as an exoneration of the defeated Trojans. The competition reveals the strength, severity, and mercilessness of the heroes - a common thing at war. Sport is an innocuous form of war.¹ Another ordeal is awaiting Aeneas on this island. Tired of prolonged wandering and persuaded by Goddess Iris, his companions set fire to Aeneas's fleet in order to stay on Acestes' island. Aeneas is at a total loss and for the first time faces a dilemma whether to continue his route to Italy or to stay on the Island (V 702-709). Aeneas has never before shown such hesitation as to whether he should transgress the will of the gods. The hero needs encouragement, and old Nautes advises him to take with him only those fit for heroic fight; the same is communicated to him by Anchises's spirit. Aeneas heeds to this advice. He gradually gets used to the idea that fight is inevitable. He founds another city on this island. This is the only

¹ Gleis R. F., *Der Vater der Dinge*, BAC, B.7, Trier 1991, 287.

instance when Aeneas builds a city not by mistake but as a shelter for the Trojans remaining on the Island.

Aeneas relinquishes his mistakes that he has committed consciously or unknowingly and understands that his desire to help people should not impede him to carry out the divine will. Subsequently, the Trojan hero takes the right course and arriving in Cumae he is equipped with the properties characteristic of the gods' elects: he is no longer allured by personal happiness. Aeneas asks the Sibyl, a priestess, to give Trojans shelter in Latium not wanting any kingdom for himself.

Anchises's ghost tells Aeneas about Rome's glorious future and heroic struggles. This is, in fact, Aeneas' psychological preparation for the upcoming battle. Virtuous Aeneas, a fugitive overcome by enemy, seeks a new home, assigned to him by the gods and finally reaches it. He is no longer an *errans*, or a wanderer, nor does he make any more mistakes; he is not hesitant and absentminded. Instead, he becomes the executor of the divine will, an *oboediens*. However, a new stage begins for him. He has to implement the second divine order – gain a foothold in the new homeland, which he tries to achieve peacefully. He makes offerings to the deity of the new land (VII 136-139) and sends one hundred select orators bearing olive branches and gifts to King Latinus (VII 245-250) to conclude peace (*pacem*). Aeneas is unpretentious. He asks for a modest place for the Penates and in exchange promises the King to never shame his kingdom and bring strength and glory to it and its people (VII 229-233). Latinus is ready to accept the foreign guest as an ally (VII 264) and marry his daughter off to him since such is the will of the gods. Aeneas seems not to remember the prophecy that he would have to fight on the foreign land. He tries not to resort to force and reach agreement with the locals. However, Turnus, emboldened by the goddesses Juno and Juturna, violates the agreement concluded between Aeneas and Latinus. He incites the Rutulians to revolt not only against the Trojans but also against the Latins and defend Italy from the invader (VII 469). Turnus perceives Aeneas as an aggressor who rivals with him for his bride and kingdom. Therefore, he counters Aeneas' proposal to live in peace with arms and war. Aeneas is not preparing for war. He is troubled and concerned about the fact that he will have to oppose Turnus (VII 29). The river God comforts him and advises not to renounce warfare (VIII 40), seek allies, and turn to King Evander for help. Thus, Aeneas has to reconcile with the

idea that he will have to fight. He has been forced to fight and, as a result, he is compelled to accept the challenge. This is extremely important for ascertaining if Aeneas's fight against Turnus is just. Aeneas is in no rush. He finds allies among peoples annoyed with Turnus. Evander, the King of Arcadia, sees the chance to save his people threatened by Turnus and tyrant King Mezentius in the union with Aeneas. Accordingly, Aeneas is fighting not only for his companions; he appears as a defender of certain other tribes. However, he does not enter fight until the divine sign is received. The appearance of claps of thunder and weapons glistening in the sky was the sign for Aeneas indicating that the time to enter the fight had arrived (VIII 527-530). Mother Venus had God Vulcan forge arms for him. The leader of the Trojans needed new weapons for the important fight, the armor and weaponry of the defeated warrior taken along from Troy or arms seized from enemy would not secure him victory. Aeneas is not hesitant any more. Psychologically, he is already prepared. This is clear from the menace he makes to Turnus (VIII 537-538).

So, what does Aeneas look like in the new war? What personal qualities does he depict? And what martial arts does he employ? The war in Italy was for Aeneas a totally new war. In Troy, he was defending his homeland from the invaders, whereas in Italy he fights the locals being an invader himself. His fight, however, is just as he is fighting against Turnus, who broke the peace agreement, and is defending King Evander oppressed by the tyrant King. He does not start war first; he is waiting for the enemy to launch an assault. This abstention of his was even taken for cowardice by the enemy (X 55).

Aeneas's image as a warrior is clearly outlined in his confrontation with Turnus. He is as strong as Turnus, as ruthless and at times as cruel; he too can mercilessly kill the enemy (X 565-602). Nevertheless, Virgil refers to him as *pious* (pious). Here a question arises: can this be sarcasm, or criticism of the hero? But alas, this is the ruthless law of war. Aeneas is fighting for the good cause, which he sometimes has to do ruthlessly and mercilessly. This is exactly how he brings about peace. At the same time, this is the crude logic of war², from which even the noble hero cannot deviate. But even cruelty requires practicing restraint. Turnus's fury towards the enemy, cutting heads off the defeated warriors, putting them

² Glei R.F., 1991, 219-220.

on stakes, and parading them feeling ecstatic with that, in Virgil's conviction, is unacceptable even under the rules of warfare. Virgil's position can be construed from his parenthesis: "an astounding sight" (*visu mirabile* IX 466). Such cruel cynicism towards the defeated enemy is a demonstration of brute force. Turnus derives pleasure from seeing dead Pallas; he is thrilled to imagine the young man's father seeing his son's dead body (X 443, 490). Blood adds to Turnus' conceit. Being obsessed by the spite to kill he makes a mistake: had he opened the tower gate for his people, he might have finally attained decisive victory (IX 758-760).³ Turnus lacks in wisdom and sharp-wittedness; he can only demonstrate power. He is the embodiment of power and arrogance.⁴ The chimera worn by Turnus upon his armor is an indication of this.⁵ Turnus hates peace (XI 460-461), while Aeneas is fighting for peace. Aeneas willingly agrees on a single combat with Turnus, demanding from him the truce with Latinus in advance, which means that his ultimate goal is a union between the Trojans and the Latins. Aeneas enters the fight with the intention to keep the peace treaty from breaking even in the event of his death. This is what makes him a noble hero.

Another interesting aspect of 'The Aeneid' is the attitude of its heroes towards the spoil, and especially towards the enemy armor. It is the law of war to seize the treasury, and especially arms, from the defeated enemy and share it out. Spoil signifies glory. However, there is a rule that should be followed: it is unethical to show greed and boast about plundering the killed enemy. Turnus cannot conceal his joy at seizing the spoil (X 500). Virgil's parenthesis pertaining to this episode is a good illustration of the author's position who believes everything to be transient and changeable and that the pride and haughtiness of the warrior who thirsts for spoil is ephemeral (X 501-505). According to 'The Aeneid', the arms seized from the enemy always bring mischief to the warriors. It seems they bear the destiny of their former owner (II 410-413; X 700-710). I.e. the winner should not appropriate the enemy's weaponry but rather should sacrifice it to the God of war. Aeneas adheres to this lore (X 542), Pallas also

³ Heinze R., *Vergils epische Technik*, Druck und Verlag B. G. Teubner, Leipzig-berlin 1915, 211.

⁴ Wilsthire S. F., *Public and Privat in Vergil's Aeneid*, The University of Massachusets press, Amherst 1989, 96.

⁵ Buchheit V., *Vergil über die Sendung Roms*, Heidelberg 1963, 92-93.

promises to offer the enemy's armor to the God of war (X 424). Aeneas sees a multitude of weaponry taken from the enemy in Latinus's palace (VII 183-186). He does not remove arms from the defeated enemy himself; this is done by his warriors who sacrifice the armor to Mars, the God of war (X 540-543). Lausus' episode is the only instance when the winner neither seizes the enemy's arms nor sacrifices it to the god of war. Aeneas is so appealed by the bravery of the youth who fell from his hand that decides to leave the arms on him as a token of respect and make sure that his people bury him with honors (X 825-830).

Aeneas is not a wily hero to offer truce to the people of Italy and simultaneously get armed for war, something the enraged Goddess Juno blames him for (X 80). He is a righteous warrior. Aeneas does not conquer, but is fighting for the welfare of his people. Turnus, on the other hand, enters war to secure his own wellbeing (XI 359, 371). Aeneas does not want war (XI 110-114), he is compelled to fight. Aeneas's victory results in peaceful union and coexistence between two nations (XII 185).

Aeneas has completed his mission: he has afforded the fugitive Trojans homeland. However, this does not seem to make him happy.⁶ In this context, the assumption to compare Aeneas's lot with that of the mythological Atlas sounds quite reasonable: both characters have been charged with an important mission for humankind – to carry a huge burden.⁷ Aeneas, who implements the divine will, yields to human desires prior to arriving in Latium although he understands that it is impossible to follow the will of the gods being preoccupied with human pleasures. He gradually disposes himself of the human weaknesses, forsaking his love in Carthage, relinquishing the desire to relish peaceful life (expressed in the construction of cities) on different islands, and parting with his intimate link with the past together with Anchises's death. Thus, deprived of human weaknesses, he arrives in Italy. "The just, pious, and militarily skilled Aeneas" (I 544-545; VIII 235) becomes vigilant, perceptive of and obedient

⁶ The unusual and sad ending of *The Aeneid* has been actively discussed yielding such questions as why Aeneas is not satisfied with his mission as well as suppositions that his triumph is not joy but fury and ruthlessness towards Turnus. Perhaps the epic's end lies in the "melancholic optimism?" cf. Jenkyns R., Pathos, Tragedy and Hope in the *Aeneid*, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 1985, LXXV, 50-60.

⁷ cf. Morwood J. H.W., Aeneas and Mount Atlas, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, LXXV, 1985, 60-77.

to the will of the gods. He is convinced that being the chosen man of the gods is an honorable but cumbersome task that requires forgoing personal pleasures. This realization must explain the absence of Aeneas's joy for his victory at the end of the poem when he gives his son instructions to take lessons of gallantry and valor from his father but learn how to be happy from others (XII 435 -436).

Abstract

Aeneas incorporates the images of Achilles and Odysseus. His destiny and character, however, distinguish him from both heroes. Achilles is a brave warrior of incomparable power fighting for honor; the purpose of his perilous voyage is to return home. Aeneas is a hero who is entrusted with a special mission and who leaves Burning Troy by the gods' will in order to "return" to his new homeland.

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