

Exploring Dido's Depth: The Impact of Dido's Multifaceted Character on Vergil's *Aeneid*.  
Laura A. Provance (University of Arizona)

This paper builds upon the work of previous scholars and employs it to address the significance of the multifaceted nature with which Vergil endows the character Dido in his *Aeneid*, in order to explain why reading Dido against a wide spectrum of female heroines enhances both Dido's character and our understanding of the *Aeneid*. Over the past century scholars have compared Vergil's Dido to a wide spectrum of historical, mythical, and epic heroines. Myra L. Uhlfelder, 1955, demonstrates that Dido is reminiscent of the literary figures of Apollonius' Medea and Catullus' Ariadne. Patricia Johnston, 1987, shows that Vergil's Dido calls to mind two recent historical women: both Cleopatra, regarded by the Romans as a contemporary foreign "seductress," and her less provocative ancestor Arsinoe. Clifford Weber, 1999, notes that Dido and Circe are exclusively described by Vergil as *aurea*, a term used most frequently by Augustan elegists to describe sensual individuals, while Grace Starry-West, 1983, points out that Dido's behavior before she commits suicide parallels the behavior of the pious and modest Andromache in *Aeneid* book 4. While each of these scholars examine one or two possible female antecedents for Vergil's portrayal of Dido, none considers the effect of these multi-layered comparisons. Hence, scholarship has yet to address satisfactorily why Vergil would mold Dido into a character that calls to mind so many female figures, particularly women from such a wide spectrum of backgrounds and behaviors, and from this range of historical, mythical and literary traditions.

The rich variety of women with whom Dido can be compared gives her character fullness; arguably she is the most complicated and the most rounded character in the *Aeneid*. Dido's multifaceted character and gender work together to heighten the reader's pity for her. This, in turn, makes the question of Aeneas' destiny more complicated. Consequently, Aeneas' sacrifice of Dido invites the reader to assess the benefits of empire and to question/consider the costs of empire.