

## Coaching strategies for horses and sailors and their political implications in the *Aeneid*

Recent scholarship has moved ever closer to identifying the ship race in *Aeneid* 5 (Feldherr 1995), as well as Aeneas' voyage from Buthrotum to Italy (Dunkle 2005) as virtual chariot races. While there is an undeniable blurring of distinctions between ship and chariot in both cases (as is true of the history of the combined use of charioteer and helmsman going back to Homer), the result of this emphasis on the Roman circus is a devaluation of the completely unprecedented nature of the ship race and a disregard for its possible significance as such. As has been noted (Briggs 1975), the only recorded contemporary ship race was that put on by Augustus at the games in Nikopolis decreed in 30 b.c.e. to commemorate his victory at Actium. Vergil's distinctive reading of the Homeric chariot race suggests the political nature of his use of the ship in book 5.

This paper will focus on Mnestheus' speech to his crew, located at the very center of the narrative of the race, and its Homeric intertext, Antilochus' speech to his horses in the chariot race during the funeral games for Patroclus in *Iliad* 23. Both men are urging their respective teams on to avoid the ignominy of being last and they both finish only in second place. Nevertheless, Vergil has given special prominence to Menelaus' speech and it has received insightful analysis. Yet the degree of correspondence between the two speeches and Vergil's pointed divergence from and implicit comment upon Antilochus' speech deserves further comment. While Antilochus uses tyrannical techniques and manifests domineering self-importance, Menelaus builds confidence in his crew and a feeling of shared purpose based on their past travails in Troy and on their voyage and their future goals in Italy. The implications of Antilochus' speech are further broadened when seen in the context of the argument that develops at the end of the race between Antilochus and Menelaus over prizes, which has been seen since the Homeric scholiasts as a replay of the argument between Agamemnon and Achilles (Richardson 1993). Antilochus is excessively concerned with the awarding of almost all the prizes and refuses to address Menelaus' charge that he cheated, in forcing his way in front of Menelaus. On the other hand, Mnestheus never jeopardizes the well-being of his fellow competitors and his speech closely recalls Aeneas' speech of encouragement to his men on the shores of Africa (Feldherr 1995).

The unexpected importance Vergil awards to the speech and actions of the second place finisher, the response of his crew, and the result of their efforts, tangibly demonstrates the collective *ethos* of the epic. The pointed association of most of the ship's captains with Roman *gentes*, the comparison of one ship to a city, and Mnestheus' addressing his crew as *cives* also suggest that these ships represent political entities in more than the casual "ship of state" reference they have occasionally received. The attention that has been given to the shadow presence of the chariot race behind the ship race is excessive. Vergil has employed the charioteer in a specifically political manner at the end of book 1 of the *Georgics*, where Octavian's concern for triumphs is criticized and his control of affairs is likened to a charioteer with a runaway team (Nappa 2005). Charioteers with excessive proclivities populate the Latin forces in the *Aeneid*. Aeneas, the model for all the ship captains in book 5 (Feldherr 1995), guides the flagship of the Trojans to the shores of Italy and leads the allied ships, as Augustus does on the shield, to their initial engagement in the war in the only catalogue of Aeneas' forces. The episode of Mnestheus and his crew, like book 5 as a whole, demonstrates *in parvum* the

distinctive values of the *Aeneid* (Galinsky 1968), a fact which becomes most evident with attention to Vergil's reading of Homer's chariot race.

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