

Death *Ante Ora Patrum*: ‘Trojan’ *Pietas* in Aeneas’ First Speech

1. *Aeneid* 1.8-11 (Mynors 1969)

Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso  
quidve dolens regina deum tot volvere casus  
**insignem pietate virum**, tot adire labores  
impulerit [...]

Tell me, Muse, the reasons: for what affront to her  
divinity or for what grievance did the queen of the  
gods drive **a man of remarkable *pietas*** to  
continuously endure so many misfortunes, to face  
so many toils?

2. *Aeneid* 1.94-101

[...] o terque quaterque beati,  
quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis  
contigit oppetere! o Danaum fortissime gentis  
Tydide! mene Iliacis occumbere campis  
non potuisse tuaque animam hanc effundere dextra,  
saevus ubi Aeacidae telo iacet Hector, ubi ingens  
Sarpedon, ubi tot Simois correpta sub undis  
scuta virum galeasque et fortia corpora volvit!

[...] O three and four times blessed, who before the  
faces of their fathers under the high walls of Troy  
happened to die! O bravest one of the Danaan race,  
Tydeus’ son! Why on the Trojan battlefields could I  
have not met my death and this soul of mine  
poured forth at your right hand, where savage  
Hector lies because of Achilles’ javelin, where  
massive Sarpedon lies, and where the Simois rolls  
so many men’s shields and helmets and brave  
bodies swept-up under its waves!

3. Servius *ad* 1.92 (Thilo and Hagen 1881)

quis ad caelum manum tendens non aliud precatur  
potius, quam dicit ‘o terque quaterque beati’?

Who, raising his hand to the sky, does not offer  
some other prayer rather than say ‘O three and four  
times blessed’?

4. de Grummond 1977: 231

“Virgil, on the other hand, intent upon portraying a good, serious man who successfully overcomes  
human obstacles **in his struggle to achieve *pietas***, has seen the possibilities offered by the exploration  
of the tendency to despair and helplessness within the context of, and in the person of, a truly worthy  
epic hero.”

5. Gossage 1963: 131

“[...] Vergil himself has consequently been blamed for portraying **a hero whose *pietas* fails to cover  
certain weaknesses of character** in other respects.”

6. *Odyssey* 5.306-12 (West 2017)

τρὶς μάκαρες Δαναοὶ καὶ τετράκις, οἳ τότε ὄλοντο  
Τροίῃ ἐν εὐρείῃ χάριν Ἀτρεΐδῃσι φέροντες.  
ὡς δὴ ἐγὼ γ’ ὄφελον θανέειν καὶ πότμον ἐπισπεῖν  
ἦματι τῷ ὅτε μοι πλεῖστοι χαλκῆρεα δοῦρα  
Τρῶες ἐπέρριψαν περὶ Πηλεΐωνι θανόντι.  
τῷ κ’ ἔλαχον κτερέων, καὶ μευ κλέος ἦγον Ἀχαιοί·  
νῦν δέ με λευγαλέω θανάτῳ εἵμαρτο ἄλῶναι.

Three and four times blessed, the Danaans who at  
that time perished in broad Troy, bringing favor to  
the sons of Atreus. O would that I had died and met  
my destiny on that day when the greatest number  
of Trojans launched their bronze tipped spears at  
me over dead Achilles. Then I would have  
**obtained my funeral rites**, and the Achaeans  
would have spread my *kleos*; but it was my fate to  
be seized by miserable death at this time.

7. *Aeneid* 2.538-39

[...] qui nati coram me cernere letum  
fecisti et **patrios foedasti funere vultus.**

[...] you who made me watch my own son's  
murder right in front of my eyes and **defiled a  
father's face with death.**

## 8. Stahl 1981: 161

“[...] Aeneas' desire goes for **the proudest, most glorious death, since 'before the eyes of the fathers' he could achieve paternal recognition of his heroism**—as opposed to the present threat of drowning in inglorious anonymity.”

## 9. O'Sullivan 2009: 456

“**Death ante ora parentum carries no such glorious overtones elsewhere in the poem**, and even if we accept the positive reading of these lines, the later emphasis on the tragedy of such deaths causes us to reconsider the tenor of Aeneas's opening cry, even if we did not question it the first time.”

10. *Georgics* 4.477; *Aeneid* 6.308

matres atque viri, defunctaque corpora vita  
magnanimum heroum, pueri inuuptaeque puellae  
impositique rogis iuvenes **ante ora parentum**

Mothers and men, and the lifeless bodies of great-  
hearted heroes; boys and girls, unmarried, and  
youths placed on pyres **before their parents' faces**

11. Six (6) instances of (*ante*)\* *ora parentum* in the *Aeneid*: **2.531, 681\***; **5.553, 576\***; **6.308; 11.887**

12. Horsfall 2008: *ad* 2.579

“But it is no great surprise to discover that *patres* for *parentes* may well be attested a good deal earlier, and even in V. himself: **so *Aen.1.95 ante ora patrum*, where the parallel passages *G.4.477, Aen.6.308* read *parentum*... That is rather what we would expect to find, for the general stylistic phenomenon is widespread: cf. *fratres* for *sorores et fratres*, *nurus* for *filiae et nurus*, *fili* for *fili filiaeque*.”**

13. Twenty-two (22) instances of a plural of *pater* in the *Aeneid*, including *Aeneid* 1.95:

One (1) instance where plural of *pater* definitively refers to *parentes*:

***Aeneid* 2.579**

Nine (9) instances where plural of *pater* seems to refer to *maiores*: cf. OLD sv. *pater* 3: “(pl.) Fathers, forefathers”; cf. OLD sv. *maior* 3b: “~ores (as noun), ancestors, forebears”

***Aeneid* 1.7, 641; 2.715; 7.372; 8.132, 598; 10.282** (Harrison 1991: *ad loc.*); **11.186, 688.**

Eleven (11) instances where plural of *pater* seems to refer to (proto-Roman) senators: cf. OLD sv. *pater* 7a, b: “(pl.) Patricians, the patriciate; senators, the Senate”, “~tres *conscripti*”

***Aeneid* 4.682** (Fratantuono and Smith 2022: *ad loc.*); **5.341, 758** (Williams 1965: *ad loc.*); **7.176, 611, 727** (Horsfall 2000: *ad loc.*); **8.697; 9.192; 11.379, 454; 12.211** (Tarrant 2012: *ad loc.*)

14. *Aeneid* 5.340-42

hic totum caveae consessum ingentis et **ora  
prima patrum** magnis Salius clamoribus implet,  
ereptumque dolo reddi sibi poscit honorem.

At this point Salius fills the entire audience of the massive theater and **the *patres* looking on in the front** with loud shouting, and he demands that the prize that was fraudulently snatched away be returned to him.

15. Williams 1965: *ad* 5.340-41

“The phrase *ora prima patrum* is no doubt influenced by the thought of the Roman senators sitting in their allocated front seats at the theatre or the circus.”

16. Farrell 2014: *ad* 5.340-41; cf. Fratantuono and Smith 2015: *ad loc.*

“[...] a projection into the heroic past of a contemporary custom by which special seats in the front tiers of the circus were reserved for members of the Senate.”

17. *Aeneid* 1.94-101

[...] o terque quaterque beati,  
 quis **ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis**  
 contigit oppetere! o Danaum fortissime gentis  
 Tydide! mene **Iliacis** occumbere **campis**  
 non potuisse tuaque animam hanc effundere dextra,  
 saevus **ubi** Aeacidae telo iacet Hector, **ubi** ingens  
 Sarpedon, **ubi** tot Simois correpta sub undis  
 scuta virum galeasque et fortia corpora volvit!

18. Perkell 1999: 40

“Therefore, Aeneas’ allusion to these particular figures suggests that it is melancholy attachment to persons of worth and sensitivity, to family and place, that inspires Aeneas’ first speech.”

19. Pöschl 1977: 420

Die ersten Worte des Äneas [lassen] vor allem die Gesinnung der ‚pietas‘ sichtbar werden.

20. SPQT: *Senatus Populusque Troianus*

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