

Mapping the Afterlife: The Reception of Cicero in *Aeneid* 6

Seminal recent scholarship like Feeney (1998) and Bendlin (2000) has called attention to the instrumental roles that literary texts play in the dynamic cultural processes that characterize Roman religion. While the works of Vergil and Cicero have distinct literary dimensions, they also framed and affected debates about religion in phases of cultural reordering. This paper examines how Vergil adapts and transforms Ciceronian texts in the visions of the afterlife in *Aeneid* 6, setting these formative interventions in dialogue during decades when new and consequential concepts of death, afterlife, and apotheosis were taking shape in Roman religious culture.

The *Aeneid*'s engagement with emergent concepts of immortality and apotheosis has been productively discussed by Bosworth (1999), who finds Hellenistic theories of apotheosis (via Ennius' *Euhemerus*) operative in Anchises' representation of Augustus at *Aeneid* 6.791-807. This paper builds on Bosworth to consider how Vergil's densely allusive *Aeneid* 6 also engages more immediate and pervasive Roman soundings on divinity and immortality won through conquest and civic benefaction: Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* and conceptually cognate speeches like *Pro Sestio* (Rep. 6.13; Sest. 143). Cicero's pioneering role in shaping Roman discourses of apotheosis has been studied in depth by Cole (2013), and the range of approaches to apotheosis and afterlife in *Aeneid* 6 have vital points of engagement with Cicero, making *Aeneid* 6 an early and influential response to Cicero's late-republican explorations of apotheosis and immortality. Vergil's conceptual sampling and synthesis in *Aeneid* 6 includes pronounced Stoic, Euhemerist, Platonic, and Pythagorean dimensions—an evocative epic reprocessing of the conceptual composition in Cicero's inventive Roman vision of the afterlife, the *Somnium Scipionis*. This creative heterogeneity in both Cicero and Vergil intimates the experimental nature of their work.

This talk will focus on Vergil and Cicero as innovators and early adopters of incipient ideas with major impact: the notion of an individuated posthumous immortality and the principle of immortality attained through earthly excellence. The Roman *Manes* were traditionally conceived of as an undifferentiated whole, but in the late republic and early empire evidence from Cicero, Vergil, and funerary monuments suggests that the idea of an individuated posthumous existence was gaining currency. Cicero provides the earliest textual evidence for this fundamental change (*Pis.* 16), and Anchises makes a similar innovative distinction at 6.743. This novel claim of a surviving self connects to another pivotal part of the inventive formulations of Cicero and Vergil: the idea that earthly accomplishments pave the path to a blessed afterlife. Core concepts from the *Somnium Scipionis* are channeled by Anchises at *Aeneid* 6.660-5, when poets and civic benefactors are said to achieve an exclusive afterlife, a pointed Roman departure from Homer's *Odyssey* (4.561-9), where divine lineage—not individual merit—determines admission to a privileged posthumous existence in Elysium.

Material evidence will be drawn into this analysis to explore how the texts of Cicero and Vergil are enmeshed in contemporary cultural dialogues. D.M. dedications to individuals start to appear in the early Augustan period on funeral inscriptions that detailed individuals' earthly achievements. The texts of Cicero and Vergil do not just reflect these major religious developments, they helped effect and sustain them.

Works Cited

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