

Discussion of Augustan Marital Law Within the *Aeneid*

The Augustan age is defined by two things – poetics and politics. Of the numerous reforms Augustus enacted, those concerning marital obligations, namely the *de maritandis ordinibus* and *de adulteriis coercendis*, were the most notable. Once the legislative measures were passed the success was celebrated the following year in the *ludi saeculares* (17 BCE). The *Carmen Saeculare* provides a clear example of the Augustan poets “enlisting support for the moral and social revival” (Griffin 2005). There Horace addresses the fourth stanza to Illythia, the goddess of childbirth, and then in the next writes, “*diva, producas subolem patrumque / prosperes dextra super iugandis / feminis prolisque novae feraci / lege marita*” (17-20). The two laws on marriage are clearly the *lege marita* which Horace qualifies as being a *Patrum dextra super iugandis*. Such a blatant appearance signals the importance Augustus placed on the marital laws. Likewise, in the *Aeneid*, published the year before the laws were passed, Vergil offers many representations of the *de maritandis ordinibus* and *de adulteriis coercendis* in his work as well. While it is possible to assert that Vergil's presentation of the marital laws had some causative effect on their passage, this presentation will be limited simply to how those measures were expressed in the *Aeneid*.

The Vergilian representation of the two marital laws present themselves through the various relationships in the *Aeneid*. Vergil's commentary on the *lex de adulteriis coercendis* is found in the central affair of the plot—Aeneas' relationship with Dido. Vergil presents their union as an adulterous affair against the duty of both leaders. Dido and Vergil both refer to the affair as a *culpa* thereby indicating the legal blame bound to the act (4.19, 172). Furthermore the suicide of Dido corresponds to the potential penalty for marital infidelity under the *adulteriis coercendis* (*Institutes* 4.18.4). The poet justifies the *lex* and its punishment by showing that the effects of such excursions adversely effect the state. He describes that once the affair hits full stride, “*Non coeptae adsurgunt turre, non arma juventus / exercet portusve aut propugnacula bello / tuta parant*” (6.86-88). The consequences of unfaithfulness upon the state are catastrophic. For Carthage it jeopardizes what little progress they had

thereunto achieved by both decreasing the respect which other cultures had for them and then leaving the city vulnerable to attack. The subsequent corruption of the youth is of particular interest here. For Rome it endangers the very creation of the state at all.

Additionally, we see the *lex de maritandis ordinibus* throughout the entirety of the *Aeneid* by means of the anticipated marriage to Lavinia. When Creusa tells her morose husband that he must “*lacrimas dilectae pelle Creusae*” (2.784) because a “*regia conjunx*” now awaits him in Hesperia, an imperative is placed upon him to accomplish that union for the benefit of the state. From the lurid apparition of Creusa during the fall of Troy to the very end of the poem Aeneas is obliged to remarry and begin a new progeny if he is to fulfill his role as a Roman. The eventual marriage of Aeneas and Lavinia fulfills the of the *de maritandis ordinibus* because the Roman is marrying an appropriate partner whose heir will have good standing.

From this foundation, it will be submitted that Vergil offers a discussion of the marital leges *Juliae* through the various marriage plots in the *Aeneid* by looking at the purposes behind the laws and the effects they have upon the state.

Bibliography:

Griffin, Jasper. “Augustan Poetry and Augustanism.” In *The Age of Augustus*, edited by Karl Galinsky, 306-320. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.