

Vergil: Poet of Rome Not Sycophant of Augustus

In this paper, I will argue that Vergil's positive depiction of Aeneas should be seen primarily as a method to ennoble Rome not merely tool to ennoble Augustus. Scholars such as G. Karl Galinsky argue that Virgil primarily intends for the virtues and successes of Aeneas to directly reflect onto Augustus. For example, while discussing the tradition of Aeneas and innovations by Vergil, G. Karl Galinsky says, "Aeneas' *pietas* is distinctly secondary to that of the *pius* emperor for it serves only as a means to ennoble the latter" (Galinsky 1969). To Galinsky, revival of a literary Aeneas is secondary to Aeneas' use as a political tool. Such an interpretation ignores the fact that Vergil's project is larger than ennobling a single king; Vergil writes to ennoble a civilization.

Vergil chooses to ennoble Rome by appealing to the Iliadic tradition of Aeneas in order to correct later tradition. Between the *Iliad* and *The Aeneid*, the tradition of Aeneas changes. Initially the character of Aeneas in the *Iliad* is a courageous and fearsome warrior that was meant to mirror Achilles (Fenno 2008). However, later Greek authors portrayed Aeneas as a traitor to the city of Troy (Scafoglio 2013). Thus, the Aeneas of Homer began as a noteworthy warrior and a pious man, but by the time of Vergil he was considered a cowardly traitor. In order to unify the stories of Rome while maintaining a man worthy of Rome, Vergil had to redeem Aeneas as both a courageous warrior, and a pious man who was loyal to the gods, his city, and his family. He does this by spending the first two books giving Aeneas iron-clad reasons for apparent cowardice. Were Vergil primarily worried about pleasing Augustus, he would have continued the story from the *Iliad* and ignored his literary peers because he would have only wanted to draw on the best of literary tradition.

In unifying the poetic tradition of Aeneas, Vergil takes care to set himself up as a successor of Homer. Moseley shows how Vergil has Aeneas fulfill the heroic custom, and mirror Aeneas from the *Iliad* but improves upon Homer's version (Moseley 1925). Hadas additionally shows how Vergil's Aeneas, while a product of the Augustan age, is still in line with the tradition of the hero (Hadas 1948). Additionally, Hadas argues that Aeneas is a representation of the Roman ideals, and a reflection of Augustus, but he is also a more dominant hero in comparison to Apollonius' Jason and Homer's Odysseus. Vergil appeals to the Aeneas of Homer; preserving his virtues and his literary themes, while on the other hand surpassing the intermediary epics and correcting the contemporaneous stories. In drawing on Homer, while reacting against lesser authors, Vergil chooses to be the poet of Rome and not the poet of Augustus.

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