VERGIL’S AENEID VIII AND THE SHIELD OF AENEAS: 
RECURRENT TOPICS AND CYCLIC STRUCTURES

Horatio Caesar Roger Vella

Abstract

Book VIII of the Aeneid can be said to be the turning point in Aeneas’ fulfilment of his mission indicated to him in Troy. In it Vergil formed two separate artistic structural patterns making up the length of the whole book while, at the same time, elaborating on the significance of the most symbolic object mentioned in the whole of the Aeneid, the Shield of Aeneas. This ecphrasis is characterized by literary embellishments, which compare well with those found in Homer’s and Hesiod’s poems. Both sections of this book are interrelated, since Hercules, in the site of the future Rome, foreshadows Aeneas, who then receives and lifts the shield representing, at its boss, Augustus’ victory over Mark Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium. The book ends as it starts, the preparations being underway for the war against Mezentius.

Introduction

In the Aeneid, Vergil’s subject matter is mythological, at least it appears to be. This mythological setting frequently refers indirectly to the author’s contemporaneous history, by means of allegory; at times even directly through symbolism, visions, prophecies and descriptions, including ecphrases.

In writing his Aeneid, Vergil kept in mind some techniques he had previously employed in both his Bucolics and his Georgics. These techniques included not only allegory, but also structure. The use of allegory employed in the various poems that form the Bucolics was sustained through that of the bees in Georgics IV, and here in the Aeneid.

Similarly, one can talk about the technique of parallel structures that appear in an inward analysis of the first nine poems of the Bucolics, starting from 1 and 9, and moving to 2 and 8, etc. The Georgics, however, produce a tiered structure from the life of plants to the life of human beings, allegorised by the bees. The Aeneid’s complex structure is evident not only in a comparison between various books of the epic, but also in an
analysis of each particular book Vergil was composing. Of particular note is the climactic position VIII has in the second of three triads of books (V–VIII), IV and XII being the climaxes of the other two triads (I–IV and IX–XII). This triadic aspect also appears, according to some views, in the structure of Book VIII and even in the ecphrasis of the Shield within that book.

*Aeneid* VIII

Book VIII of the *Aeneid* can be said to be the turning point in Aeneas’ fulfilment of his mission indicated to him in Troy. Here, in the site of future Rome, Aeneas secures his alliances with both Evander and, through him, with the Etruscans. He also secures the backing of the gods, including gods formerly enemies to each other, Hercules and Juno. To establish peace, the forerunner of Augustus’ *Pax Romana*, differences are forgotten. The Arcadians, relatives of former enemies, the Achaens, are reconciled, while a people, whether Etruscan or Roman, will suppress a renegade leader, Mezentius or Antony.

To help achieve a significant connection of peoples, events and institutions, Vergil formed two separate artistic structural patterns making up the length of the whole book while, at the same time, elaborating on the significance of the most symbolic object mentioned in the whole of the *Aeneid*, the Shield of Aeneas. Both parts, including the digression of the Shield, are interrelated.

**Analysis of Aeneid VIII**

An analysis of Book VIII of Vergil’s *Aeneid* will result in the observation that this book forms a cyclos in the way that it ends as it starts, the preparations being underway for the war against Mezentius. Inside this frame, two units, the first larger than the second, concentrate on the topics of Hercules’ connection with Rome and the shield of Aeneas. The first schematic presentation forms an inner parallel structure (ABXBA), the second a chained one (ABAB). Both sections are interrelated, since Hercules, in the site of the future Rome, foreshadows Aeneas, who then receives and lifts the shield representing, at its boss, Augustus’ victory over Mark Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium.

---


10 See Ch. P. Jones, 1995, 233–241, which discusses mythical kinships between Greeks and Romans portrayed in the *Aeneid*.
The following is an analysis of the eighth book of the *Aeneid*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>ll.</th>
<th>Lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Preparations</td>
<td>I.1–17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi</td>
<td>Divine Aid</td>
<td>II.18–101</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ci</td>
<td>Evander and Rome</td>
<td>II.102–183</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Hercules</td>
<td>II.184–305</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cii</td>
<td>Evander and Rome</td>
<td>II.306–369</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bii</td>
<td>Divine Aid</td>
<td>II.370–453</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ei</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>II.454–519</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fi</td>
<td>Shield</td>
<td>II.520–540</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eii</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>II.541–607</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fii</td>
<td>Shield</td>
<td>II.608–728</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Assumption of the Shield</td>
<td>II.729–731</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commentary on Aeneid VIII**

We note first that war is prepared not just against Aeneas at the very beginning of the book in lines 1–17 (A), but also, towards the end of the book in lines 454–519, against the Etruscans (Ei). Through Aeneas’ coming to Evander at the site of the future Rome, two wars, one against the Trojans, the other against the Etruscans, and two enemies, Turnus and Mezentius, are fused together, with the result that Aeneas, the promised foreign hero, becomes the link in the two issues. With heaven’s confirmation, he can now uplift the shield of the future Rome to stamp down resistance and arrogance addressed not only towards himself and his people, but also towards his new allies. This point will remind us of Rome’s foreign policy towards her neighbours and clients, as she fought against third parties. Vergil himself anticipated such mission assumed here by Aeneas by reiterating the message given to Aeneas and his descendants:

Verg. A. 6.853: *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*.

Next we encounter divine interventions, met with again both towards the beginning of the book in lines 18–101, and towards the end in lines 454–519, for not only does the River God Tiber predict the alliance of Aeneas with Evander (Bi), but also King Evander himself reveals the prophecy to Aeneas that the latter was to form an alliance with the Etruscans (Ei). Each of these predictions is followed by a miraculous sight, that of the sow with its litter (Bi)\(^{11}\) and that of the heavenly sight of the promised arms (Fi).

Sacrifices are repeatedly mentioned. Towards the central part of the book, Aeneas first sacrifices to Juno (Bi), and then to Hercules (Ci and D). Thus, sacrifice in Book VIII involves two gods who were enemies to each other, Juno and Hercules, who here become the recipients satisfying different obligations: Juno, to allay her anger against the Trojans,

Hercules, to thank him for his past services to the Arcadians. In this way, enemies are either pacified (Juno), or eradicated (Cacus).

At Pallanteum itself, sacrifice with banquet is resumed twice: once in the woodlands after the arrival of Aeneas (D), and once at Pallanteum itself before Aeneas leaves the Arcadians (Eii). In the shield too we encounter a sacrifice, significantly that of another sow, by Romulus and Tatius (Fii).

The first meeting of Aeneas with the Arcadians in lines 102–183 (Ci) foreshadows the other meeting of Aeneas with the Etruscans in lines 541–607 (Eii). Both encounters take place by a river (Tiber and Caere), and in a woodland (the one dedicated to Hercules and the other to Silvanus). The first encounter not only foreshadowed the second, but also served as a necessary introduction to it, with Evander serving as the link.

The story of Hercules and Cacus12 features also in Prop. 4.9.1–22, Ov. F. 1.543–586 and Liv. 1.7.3–12. Vergil’s 184–305 (D) is an allegory of Aeneas and Mezentius within the same book, and of Augustus and Cleopatra in Roman history13. Just as Mezentius14 allied himself with Turnus, who in the second half of the Aeneid is an allegory of Mark Antony, so also Cleopatra allied herself with Antony, and Aeneas-Augustus will fight against their joined forces. To confirm this allegory, Cacus’ cave is situated on the future Aventine Hill, and the Salii, who also appear on the shield of Aeneas, celebrate the labours of Hercules. This last point can throw some light on the religious function of the Salii in Vergil’s Rome15.

Aeneas’ return from the woodlands in lines 306–369 (Cii) serves as Vergil’s description, in the words of Evander,

- of the earliest inhabitants of Rome, with reference to
- some Roman quarters, still recognizable to Vergil’s readers.16

---


13 On a different interpretation of Mezentius by Ovid in his Fasti, see D. Briquel, 1998, 3/4, 401–416. For a different view of Hercules in his allegory of Aeneas, see A. Ferenczi, 1998–1999, 327–334. Ferenczi, 332, further comments on the irony that Hercules had already shown the same brutality of Cacus when he had stolen the same cattle from Geryon (Pind. Fr. 169). More on the importance to history given by Vergil, see H. F. Bauzá, 1993, 205–213.


15 P. T. Eden, 1973, 83, quotes Plutarch Camillus 30.1 referring to the return of the Romans under Camillus after the invasion of the Gauls around the 13th February. In this context, he considers the feast of the Lupercalia (15th February) and that of the Salii taking down the ancilia, sacred shields being tokens of divine protection traditionally modelled on a bronze original supposed to have dropped from heaven at Rome (Plut. Numa 13), in the Regia (24th March) as important. Vergil reminds us of these incidents twice through the Shield of Aeneas: Fii (above). Again Eden, 1975, comments on how the Salii bring together Evander and Augustus, the former the institutor, the latter the preserver of this priestly college. In his comment on Aen. 8.285 (p. 97–98), Eden refers to Vergil’s association of the Salii with Hercules, and to how Hercules came to be venerated at this earliest trading settlement of the future Rome, the Forum Boarium, directly through the Greeks of the south, indirectly through the Etruscans, who we now perpetrated his cult and its connection with the Salii at Tibur. See also S. J. Harrison, 1997, 73, who emphasizes on the association of the Salii and the Luperci with the ancient site of Rome. Indeed, Ovid (F. 2.381–424) alludes to both cults, including reference to the ancilia of the Salii, when he refers to the foundation of Rome.

This picture of primitive Rome is then balanced by

a. Vulcan’s artistic representation of the future Rome on the shield of Aeneas in lines 608–728 (Fii), with reference to
b. heroes,
c. religious institutions
d. and the battle of Actium.

The site of the future Rome is thus not only visited personally by Aeneas, but is assumed by him on his shoulders when he lifts the shield (A. 8.731):

\textit{attollens umero famamque et fata nepotum.}

Incidentally, this last line of Vergil’s eighth book echoes the last line of his second book (A. 2.804):

\textit{cessi et sublato montis genitore petivi},

when Aeneas here too lifts on his shoulders the future Rome, but through the person of his father Anchises\(^\text{17}\) who, in Vergil’s projection of the concept of the \textit{pater} as serving an important link between the ancestors and the future generations, will reveal the future Rome to his son in Book VI, in the Underworld.\(^\text{18}\)

At Pallanteum, Aeneas’ connection is not just with Hercules who, like him, is a hero and a demi-god\(^\text{19}\); who, like him, had lost a wife through folly (see \textit{Aeneid II}),\(^\text{20}\) and who will shortly sleep in the same house\(^\text{21}\), but also with Evander, who, like him, had been banished from his country and who now shares a common enemy, Turnus.

The digression of Venus and Vulcan in lines 370–453 (Bii) is outflanked by lines 306–369 (Cii) and lines 454–519 (Ei).

a. In the former, Evander describes the earlier inhabitants of the district;
b. in the latter he describes his present neighbours, the Etruscans.

The shield, commissioned to Vulcan, is being prepared to protect the Etruscans, about to be introduced, and to install the descendants of Aeneas as the new inhabitants on the site of the future Rome just described.

The relationship of Evander with Pallas, his son (Eii), must remind us of a similar relationship of Aeneas with his son Ascanius throughout the \textit{Aeneid}. The heart-rending separation of Pallas from Evander reminds us of Aeneas who leaves behind Ascanius by the river Tiber\(^\text{22}\). The ironic words of Evander, that he would not probably see his son again, are fulfilled in \textit{Aeneid} 10.489, when Pallas was killed by Turnus.

---


\(^{18}\) D. N. Levin, 1970, 35, comments that while in \textit{Aen. VI} Anchises explained to Aeneas what he saw, in VIII Aeneas does not comprehend Vulcan’s work.

\(^{19}\) See further in M. Wigodsky, 1965 [1967], 218, where he mentions the \textit{errores} and \textit{labores} of the two heroes, their descent to the Underworld and their apotheosis.

\(^{20}\) Both deaths were tragic. Aeneas in \textit{Aeneid II} was at first on his way out of the burning Troy, in obedience to divine instructions, when he paused and turned back to offer further resistance, losing, in the process, his wife Creusa (738). In a different type of folly, Heracles killed his wife Megara after he was sent a fit of homicidal madness, ironically through another divine intervention, this time from Hera.

\(^{21}\) P. McGushin, 1964, 233, 238–9. In this article, McGushin further compares Aeneas and Hercules to Atlas, related both to Aeneas and to Evander. The Latin word which Vergil uses here is \textit{regia} (l.363). R. Rees, 1996, 583–586, supports Servius’ view that this was so called to refer to the future Regia of Rome.

The Shield of Aeneas

The Shield of Aeneas\(^{23}\) appears in the last part of the book. Following the description of the upstream journey of Aeneas to Pallanteum, the sacrifice of Potitius, the story of Hercules\(^{24}\) and Cacus, the description of the early inhabitants of Rome and the quarters of the future city, and the account of King Evander about the dispute which the Lydian people of Agylla in Etruria had with their king Mezentius, who fled to the Rutulians, Goddess Venus indicates her sign of approval by the sight of the promised arms\(^{25}\) in heaven, which are described.

Ecphrasis, or topos, is a sub-genre whereby an author brings the narrative of events to a halt in order to offer pause for a detailed act of description.\(^{26}\) In Greek and

---


See J. W. Zarker, 1972, 34–48, and K. Gilmartin, 1968, 41–47. Zarker here quoted Seneca’s *De clementia* 1.11 referring to *arsit ira* in Octavian’s youth, and his later quality of mercy. It may be that the negative qualities of Hercules and his imitator Aeneas did not pass unnoticed by Augustus, of whom the two heroes were an allegory (46). Gilmartin, on the other hand, reveals various points which show dissimilarities between the two heroes.

\(^{25}\) The *peripeteia* of the book in the sense that Aeneas, from being desperate and friendless, becomes, after this scene, the leader of several soldiers from other nations (P. T. Eden, 1975, xxii).

\(^{26}\) M. C. J. Putnam, 1995, 107–108, who also enumerates six of these ecphrases, all with direct bearing on the meaning of the poem as a whole, and others centred on landscape. He notes that the one in VII referring to the stag is special in that no other refers to an animal, and has no Homeric precedent. On ecphrasis in general, see D. P. Fowler, 1991, 25–35. He refers to a common misconception that ecphrasis is simply a pause, to which nothing in the narrative corresponds at the level of story (25–26). One finds it difficult, however, to understand how narrative is about people and ecphrasis about things (26). See also N. Austin, 1966, 307. On ecphrasis in classical criticism, see A. S. Becker, 1992, 5, where he says that it is rarely mentioned. There we learn of two virtues of ecphrasis: *σαφήνεια* (clarity) and *ἐνάργεια* (vividness) (9). On ecphrasis in Greek and Latin literatures, see D. Pralon, 1988, 45, who refers to the Shields of Agamemnon and Aphrodite in the *Iliad*, noting that Zenodotus proposed to delete the ecphrasis of the Shield of Achilles because it was too long. See also F. I. Zeitlin, 1982, D. N. Levin, 1970, 31–35, J. Palm, 1967, esp. 108–211, J. L. Myers, 1930, esp. 517–523, and P. Friedländer ed., 1912, esp. 11–12. On shields in Greek art, see G. H. Chase, 1902, 61–127, who concludes that these shields, found in Greek art, refer to
Roman epics, one encounters occasional pauses in the narrative which are employed by
descriptions either of a military topic (e.g. shield) or of another topic (e.g. garden, palace, mantle). These descriptions cover several lines, and are often decorated with literary embellishments. They are often symbolic and refer to the general concepts of society the poet has in mind. The writer encourages the reader to enter the world described but, at the same time, to remain aware of his relationship to the describer and the language of the description.

Analysis of the Shield of Aeneas

The Shield of Aeneas consists of five parts covering 96 lines (608–728), that is, 13.13% of Book VIII, which are analysed as follows:

I 626–662 (37 lines) The Legendary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The descendants of Ascanius</td>
<td>626–629 4 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romulus and Remus suckling at the she-wolf</td>
<td>630–634 5 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rape of the Sabine women</td>
<td>635–638 4 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The alliance of Romulus and Tatius</td>
<td>639–641 3 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tullus and Mettus</td>
<td>642–645 4 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porsenna and Tarquin</td>
<td>646–648 3 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porsenna, and Cocles and Cloelia</td>
<td>649–651 3 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manlius and the Gauls</td>
<td>652–662 11 lines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II 663–670 (8 lines) The Institutional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Salii and the Luperci</td>
<td>663 1 line</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the deed of the bearer, to the cult of some god, to the family of the bearer and to the country of the bearer (73).

30 P. T. Eden, 1973, 80, quotes Vergil’s introductory statement (res Italas Romanorumque triumphos ... pugnataque in ordine bella) to show that the list of encounters Rome had with its enemies is chronological. Emphasis is made not so much on the warfare, but on the triumphs of Rome culminating in Augustus’ triumph after the battle of Actium.
32 D. S. Wiesen, 1973, 760, refers to the inclusion of the Sabine incident as jarring the quality of pietas visible in the whole tableau.
33 On discussion on Mettus, see S. J. Harrison, 1997, 71.
34 S. J. Harrison, 1997, 70–76, considers this list as a negative illustration of the defeats or near-defeats of Rome at the hands of her enemies.
35 For a different view to taking this section as separate from its preceding one, see R. D. Williams, 1981, 11.
36 See R. D. Williams, 1981, 9, P. T. Eden, 1973, 82–83, and G. Wissowa, 1912, esp. 555–561. S. Lonsdale, 1990, 26–27, shows how the Salii represent through song and mimesis the labours of Hercules. R. D. Williams, 1981, 9, says that the Salii safeguarded the sacred shields; the Luperci were associated
| The bonnets and the shields | l.664 | 1 line |
| The procession of the mothers | ll.665–666 | 2 lines |
| Tartarus and Catiline | ll.667–669 | 3 lines |
| Elysium and Cato³⁷ | l.670 | 1 line |

III 671–674 (4 lines)  The Descriptive

IV 675–723 (49 lines)  The Historical³⁸

| Augustus with the Julian Star on his head³⁹ | ll.678–681 | 4 lines |
| Agrippa with the Naval Crown on his forehead | ll.682–684 | 3 lines |
| Antony and Eastern allies | ll.685–686 | 2 lines |
| Cleopatra⁴⁰ and her Egyptian allies | ll.687–688 | 2 lines |
| The ships compared to the Cyclades and high mountains in motion | ll.689–695 | 7 lines |
| The queen rallies her forces | ll.696–697 | 2 lines |
| Egyptian gods against Roman gods | ll.698–699 | 2 lines |
| The rage of Mars | ll.700–701 | 2 lines |
| Strife and Bellona | ll.702–703 | 2 lines |
| Apollo and his bow | l.704 | 1 line |
| The retreat of the Egyptians⁴¹ | ll.705–713 | 9 lines |
| The triumph of Augustus⁴² | ll.714–716 | 3 lines |

with Evander, who saved the Trojans in Italy, while the matrons saved Rome during the Gallic invasion through the ransom of their gold. D. E. Eichholz, 1966–1967, 45, repeats Ward Fowler’s idea that the scene of the Salii does not fit in this section, but was probably put there at the request of Augustus. However, in our division of sections separating the Institutional from those Legendary, this problem does not arise.

³⁷ See summary of discussion on which Cato is referred to here in S. Lewuillon, 1972, 1282. I think that I am right to point out that this section is to be separated from the preceding one; for Cato and Catiline do not belong to the legendary history of Rome. This last point is also admitted by R. D. Williams, 1981, 9.

³⁸ See A. Navara, 1986, esp. 89 ff. Vergil intended this part, the battle of Actium, to start from where the middle of the ecphrasis occurs (in medio) echoing ἐν µέσσοις of Pseudo-Hesiod and Apollonius (R. F. Thomas, 1983, 176–179).

³⁹ W. R. Nethercut, 1971–1972, 127, shows how the twin lights shining from Augustus’ temples remind us of the two snakes in the Laocoon incident in Book II, the two snakes which Hercules kills in Book VIII, as well as of Iulus in II and Lavinia in VII. The twin beams signify the triumph of good over evil, the latter represented here by the twin snakes of Cleopatra further down.

⁴⁰ For a comparison of the treatment of Cleopatra by Vergil and Horace, see M. Encinas Martinez, 1997, 49–59.

⁴¹ See A. Tronson, 1998, 31–50, M. Encinas Martinez, 1997, 49–59, and W. R. Nethercut, 1974, 20–23. Nethercut here says that although historically there was only one snake which was offered to Cleopatra, Vergil applied the metaphor of the two snakes to relate to both the Laocoon’s incident in Aen. II, Turnus’ in VII and Hercules in VIII (20–22). On Vergil and the battle of Actium, see J. Thomas, 1991, 303–308, who comments on the relationship of the two snakes and twin lights in the passage, and the two doves mentioned at the beginning of Aen. VI (305), and on how the battle of Actium is a cosmic confrontation between disorder (East) and order (West) (308), and M. L. Paladini, 1958, who refers to the dominant position of Apollo during the battle, the importance of Agrippa, the opposition of Egyptian gods to Roman gods and the two snakes of Cleopatra. He also refers to Hor. Ep. 9 and C. 1.37, and Prop. 3.11.53.

The celebration of Roman mothers 43
Augustus before the temple of Apollo

V 724–728 (5 lines) The Geographical

Numidians, Africans, Lelegeians,
Carians and Gelonians
The river Euphrates
The Morini and
the river Rhine
The Scythians and
the river Araxes 44

Commentary on the Shield of Aeneas

It will appear from the above analysis that in terms of lines dedicated to each of these five parts, Vergil meant to alternate I (37 lines) and IV (49 lines) with III (4 lines) and V (5 lines).

I and IV talk about the Roman people, first in their encounter with foreign powers, the Sabines, the Etruscans and the Gauls (I), and then with Egypt and her eastern allies (IV) 45. Each conflict is described as crucial for the survival of Rome: 46 increase in

43 The presence of the mothers at the triumph of Augustus echoes that of the chaste mothers in their pilenta depicted in the Shield celebrating rites together with the Salii and the Luperci, for which comment see S. J Harrison, 1997, 73.
45 More on Roman society from Cicero, Vergil and Livy, see M. D. Dopico Caínzos, 1999, 139–161. A. G. McKay, 1998, 207, summarizes the contents of this part of the description as Rome’s miraculous deliverances and heroic exploits, punishment, defeat and triumph. He quotes Gurval in the observation that the scenes here proceed in a swift and uneven movement (209). In the words of D. S. Wiesen, 1973, 737, the struggles pictured on the Shield have as their aim the rescuing of Italian independence and Italian ways from foreigners. But the grand conclusion of these efforts is the internationalisation of the Roman State. On a comparison of Vergil with Livy referring to the early history of Rome, see S. J. Harrison, 1997, 71–74.
46 S. J. Harrison, 1997, 70–76. The moral qualities which helped Rome survive are fides, religio, pietas and iustitia (R. D. Williams, 1981, 10). D. E. Eichholz, 1966–1967, 45, quotes Ward Fowler in interpreting these scenes as escapes from terrible perils, ending with Actium. Eichholz (46) interprets the four virtues as virtus, clementia, iustitia and pietas.
population, invasions, and treason. Three incidents in I match one in IV, and by this imbalance Vergil wants to show how important the Battle of Actium was for Augustus.

Section II is the Institutional part. This short passage, serving as a link between the Legendary part and the Battle of Actium, echoes Aeneid VI, which talks of ritual, religion, philosophy, Tartarus and Elysium. Both the Salii and the Luperci celebrated Roman rituals, while the procession of the mothers at the triumph of Augustus (665–666), another important Roman institution, stands in contrast to the procession of the fathers, that is, the ancestors of Elysium in the Underworld (6.760–886).

Section V, the Geographical part, matching section III, is intended to show the length and breath of the Roman Empire culminated in the rule of Augustus. A similar passage appears in 6.791–800, where the soul of Anchises in the Underworld predicts it to his son Aeneas. These two passages echo the passage in Catullus (11.1–11) where he sarcastically talks about his end of his affair with Lesbia, but wishes to announce this message to the length and breath of the empire.

References to other Shields

In the shield of Aeneas, reference is made to the shields which fell from heaven. The shield itself is a replica of those shields, which also were miraculously sent from heaven. In Aeneid III, Aeneas dedicates Abas’ miraculous shield to that city’s temple’s god, Apollo, which he affixes to its door-post, and to which he attaches a poem (carmine) celebrating the event of the coming to Actium (rem ... signo). Already here Vergil introduces us to his concept of the miraculous shield, which he will develop further here in Book VIII. Both shields are miraculous; and both are related to Actium: one left there by Aeneas as a dedication to Apollo, the other itself representing the battle which was to be fought also there. Both shields are related to Hercules.

Abas was the twelfth king of Argos, son of Lyncaeus and Hypermnestra, grandson of Danaus, and father of Acrisius and Proetus. When he informed his father of the death of Danaus, he was rewarded with the shield of his grandfather, which was sacred to Juno. This shield performed various marvels, and the mere sight of it could reduce a revolted people to submission. Acrisius was the father of Danaë, who from Zeus bore Perseus. Perseus too carried with him the head of the Gorgon Medusa which turned into stone all who looked at it. Also, this head had a connection with a shield, that of Athena, into which it found its place as a gift from Perseus. Perseus and his wife Andromeda bore Alcaeus and Electryon, fathers of Amphitryon and Alcmene respectively. Once more from Zeus, Alcmene, wife of her cousin Amphitryon, bore Hercules, who in the shield of Aeneas is given the great prominence we described above.

---

48 On the relationship of Aeneid VIII with other books of the epic, see W. A. Camps, 1954, 214.
50 W. Smith, 1876, s.v. “Abas”.
51 W. Smith, 1876, s.v. “Perseus”.

Thus, Perseus, Heracles and Aeneas share in the following aspects: they are all demi-gods; they are all connected with Juno (both Hercules and Aeneas suffer directly through her interventions), and they are all connected with a shield.

The Reaction on seeing the Shield

On seeing the Shield, Aeneas first admires it before he observes the details,

619: \textit{miraturque inter manus et brachia versat}
625: \textit{... et clipei non enarrabile textum}\textsuperscript{52},

and then, in three lines, which end the book, Vergil tells us that Aeneas again admires the shield (\textit{miratur}) and lifts it with what future responsibilities it carries:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Talia per clipeum Volcani, dona parentis,}
\item 730: \textit{Miratur \ldots}
\end{itemize}

On two occasions in just seven lines each (655–661 and 671–677), Vergil accumulates the colours and minerals\textsuperscript{53} with which he describes the Shield by mentioning them seven times, sometimes twice in a verse (655, 659, 673) or a run-on verse (660–661), or three times (672), sometimes repeating them (659) or contrasting them (655). I quote the two passages which treat of the invasion of the Gauls and the battle of Actium, two most important incidences and dangers for Rome:

\begin{itemize}
\item 655: \textit{atque hic auratis volitans argenteus anser porticibus Gallos in limine adesse canebat; Galli per dumos aderant arcemque tenebant defensi tenebris et dono noctis opacae; aurea caesaries ollis atque aurea vestis,}
\item 660: \textit{virgatis lucent sagulis, tum lactea colla auro innectuntur, ...}
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{haec inter tumidi late maris ibat imago aurea, sed fluctu spumabant caerula cano, et circum argento clari delphines in orbem aequora verrebant caudis aestumque secabant.}
\item 675: \textit{in medio classis aeratas, Actia bella, cernere erat, totumque instructo Marte videres fervere Leucaten auroque effulgere fluctus.}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{52} See U. Eigler, 1994, 147–163.

\textsuperscript{53} About colours, perspectives, authorship, reactions, and positions in this ecphrasis, see also R. D. Williams, 1981, 10.
Conclusion

Vergil, therefore, does not tell a plain story, but a highly symbolic one, a story with different layers of interpretation, though consistent in ultimately, but subtly, referring to the same person and message: Augustus and his triumph over his enemy. Some events recur through others, and so the effect is achieved in drilling into the reader’s mind the message through repetition by parallelism. The *Aeneid* is, however, a spiritual book that Vergil composes: the triumph of good over evil, the reconciliation of the gods, and faith in divine promises.\(^{54}\) Furthermore, it is an artistic book, and in it Vergil succeeds to combine power of message, both political and spiritual, with artistic balances of passages and literary embellishments, such as those used in the ecphrasis.\(^ {55}\)

---


\(^{55}\) See W. S. Anderson, 1969.
References


Bartsch, S. 1998. “*Ars* and the man: the politics of art in Virgil’s *Aeneid*”, *CPh* 93, 4, 322–342


Boyancé, P. 1954. “Le sens cosmique de Virgile”, *REL* 32, 220–249


Dopico Caínzos, M. D. 1999. “Aeternitas o desaparición de Roma? Dos visiones de la sociedad romana”, *QUCC* N.S. 63, 139–161
Gargiulo, C. 1950. *La religiosità di Virgilio nella figura di Enea* (Messina, D’Anna)
Hauck, E. W. 1985. *Vergil’s contribution to ekphrasis* (Dissertation, Ohio State University)
Heinze, R. 1914. *Virgil’s epische Technik* (Leipzig, Teubner)
Jones, Ch. P. 1995. “*Gratia pandetur ab urbe*, *HSPh* 97, 233–241
McCusky, P. 1964. “Virgil and the spirit of endurance”, *AJPh* 85, 225–253
Myers, J. L. 1930. *Who were the Greeks?* (Berkeley, University of California Press)


Pluss, H. T. 1884. *Vergil und die epische Kunst* (Leipzig, Teubner)


Putnam, M. C. J. 1995. “Silvia’s stag and Virgilian ekphrasis”, *MD* 34, 107–133


Sanz Ramos, J. 1968. *La leyende de Hércules y Caco en Virgilio y en Livio*. In *Actas III. Congreso español de Estudios clásicos* II (Madrid), 389–400


Sforza, F. 1952. *Il più prezioso tesoro spirituale d’Italia, l’Èneide* (Milan, Gastaldi)

Smith, W. 1876. *A smaller classical dictionary of biography, mythology and geography* (London, Murray)


Sullivan, F. A. 1959. “The spiritual itinerary of Virgil’s Aeneas”, *AJPh* 80, 150–161


Tronson, A. 1998. “Vergil, the Augustans, and the invention of Cleopatra’s suicide: one asp or two?”, Vergilius 44, 31–50
Walter, Ph. ed. 1999. Études mythologies du porc: actes du colloque de Saint-Antoine l’Abbaye (Isère) (Grenoble, Millon)
Zeitlin, F. I. 1982. Under the sign of the shield: semiotics and Aeschylus’ “Seven against Thebes” (Rome, Ateneo)