

The ekphrastic History of Rome: complementarity of geographical description and Aeneas's shield in Book 8 of the *Aeneid*

Abstract

Book 8 of the *Aeneid* offers a broad account of Roman history from the protohistoric origins of Janus and Saturnus to the battle of Actium. The historical narrative develops over two long descriptive passages: one related to Evander and Aeneas's walk around Pallanteum and a second passage that is the description of Vulcan's shield. The present author's hypothesis is then framed with the premise that these passages are both *ekphrasis* that can be read and interpreted as complements. This approach allows us to understand the Virgilian view of history as a series of foundations based on the development of Roman urban geography, from meaningful natural geography, in association with chronological accounts of important leaders and their actions. Additionally, both passages are woven around the theme of order and complementarity: a geographical order and a chronological one. Both representations depend on each other to express their full meaning; that is, the consideration of urban geography as a reservoir of memory and Aeneas's shield as organized narrative history.

Introduction

Book 8 of the *Aeneid* tells a long version of Roman history from the protohistoric origins of Janus and Saturnus to the battle of Actium. The historical narrative develops over two extensive passages: one narrating Evander and Aeneas's walk around Pallanteum and a second one describing Vulcan's shield. For the purpose of this article, each passage is considered to be an *ekphrasis*. With this in mind, the proposed hypothesis of this article is that the reading and interpretation of the aforementioned passages as complements supports the Virgilian view of history which it relates to a series of foundations based on the development and transformation of Roman urban geography from meaningful natural geography, in contrast, for example, to Livy's historical work based on Roman leaders'

actions. Additionally, both passages are woven around the theme of order: a geographical one and a chronological one. The text entails different meanings of *ordo* as representation, but shares the same principle of placing events in an order, one in space, the other in time. This interpretation of the passages allows for viewing the relationship between history and geography in a different manner, since the understanding of history as proposed by the shield is not possible without taking into consideration the geographical and topographical description that complements it, thus providing the Roman reader, most of all, with a sense of historical meaning and coherence.

In book 8, Virgil unfolds the history of Rome from the arrival of Saturnus in Latium to Augustus's Rome during Virgil's times. This book, in which description prevails over narrative progress, is set between the battle books 7 and 9. Along with book 6, it offers the most poignant prolepsis any Roman reader would recognize as fulfilled in his or her own Augustan context. Moreover, this book is particularly interesting because it establishes a close relationship between epic and history as determined by the striking combination of the generic resources of epic poetry and the historiographic genre, such as temporal inversion and prolepsis about times excluded from the internal narrative, along with history-writing strategies such as *ab initio* and *ex ordine*, chronological organization and selection of mythical versions that fit with an order of events described by a historian. This approach has given rise to different studies focusing on parallelism, relation and comparison between the history of Rome told by Virgil and that of other historians, specially Livy.

With regard to the relationship between literature, specifically epic poetry, and history, there is a large number of contrastive studies. On the one hand, with the aim of reconstructing the history of Rome and Latium, a series of comparisons of factual data cited both texts as historical sources. On the other hand, first with the development of the analyses driven by Russian formalism that attempted to explain how literary mechanisms produce aesthetic effects and how literature differs from and relates to what is external to it, and secondly with the contributions of structuralism, the Annales School and discourse

analysis, research emerged that emphasized the relationship between narrative strategies and historical description, described at length especially by Woodman¹, Harrison² and Renaud³.

By reviewing the writing practices of both genres, epic poetry and historiography, most recent research has focused on the relationship between the Virgilian description of Aeneas's shield – the famous *ekphrasis* in book 8 – and the initial books of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*. Studies of both accounts have interpreted many of these works' differences from the general opinion that Livy rationalizes history while Virgil mythologizes it, a judgment that appears to be overly generalized and fails to comprehend the complexity of writing (and describing) processes. With regard to the *ekphrasis* or actual description of Aeneas's shield, researchers have formally restricted themselves to a specific, fixed or limited notion of *ekphrasis*, distinguishing it from other descriptions in a reading that isolates its interpretation from its immediate context. From this point view, the *ekphrasis* in book 8 narrates the history of Rome from the she-wolf to the battle of Actium and it is this narrative that is compared to Livy's work.

Unlike these analyses, the present article will focus on the analysis of a previous narrative with descriptive instances in Virgil's work that could condition the reading and interpretation of the shield-*ekphrasis*. This narration relates to the episode of Evander and Aeneas's walk through Pallanteum, a proto-history of Latium not accounted for by Livy that is not always viewed as *ekphrasis*. Therefore it can be said that Rome's prehistory and history are provided by Virgil in two consecutive descriptions of a different nature, namely, Evander's tour of the city and Aeneas's shield.

In this previous account of Evander and Aeneas's walk, the geographical description of the city of Pallanteum appears as a semiotic text that is as apt for representing history as in the

1 WOODMAN, 1989, pp 132-141.

2 HARRISON 1997, pp. 71-76.

3 RENAUD 1990, pp. 80-98.

case of the description of the shield.⁴ This description, without being an actual *ekphrasis*, contains formal elements belonging to the *ekphrasis* and prepares the reader to read (and “see”) and to decode the *ekphrasis* of the shield as the narration of the history of a Rome that a contemporary reader could identify with. Consequently, an analysis of the texts emphasizing the similarities and the differences between these two descriptions will allow for a clear understanding of the Virgilian proposition regarding the history of Rome. The earlier geographical description therefore adopts a new dimension, since not only does the shield retell history, but the geography is also able to narrate. It becomes an essential element when the reader starts to recognize and then decode the events. In summary, this work’s initial purpose is to show the relationship and interdependence between the two descriptive instances: the shield-*ekphrasis* as a manifestation of the Virgilian version of the history of Rome and the earlier geographical version, based on the hypothesis that the walk through Pallanteum constitutes an earlier narrative feature that conditions and guides the reading and interpretation of the shield-*ekphrasis*. For a contemporary reader, recognizing this process is essential to his understanding of how Roman history is represented on the shield, beginning with the distinction between Aeneas’s perceptions and those of the reader.

The present approach leads to the topic of the construction of historical memory through the recognition of the value of urban geography and its monuments as a reservoir of memory not only within the text but also outside it, as is the case when geographic description creates an actual external reference not only through the *monumenta* but especially through the reader’s memory. In this geographical description it is possible to identify the organization of space surrounding an idea of urban space as a tangible memory enacted through the narration.⁵ The text thus offers a double means of transmitting information. First, the description of Aeneas’s shield with the complete history of Rome

⁴ We use the term “urban geography” to avoid the use of “topography”. Traditionally speaking, topography designates specific places in urban or natural geography, but generally refers to physical places, while the broader term geography, unrestricted by this semantic burden, allows us to talk not of an actual physical place but of a place full of memories.

⁵ On the relationship between memory, space and narration cf. *Rhet. Her* 3. 16-40, *Cic. Orat.* 2.86.351-87.360 and *Quint. Inst.* 11. 2.1-52. See JAEGER, 1997, p. 19 and KONSTAN *forthcoming*. *Forum* of Augustus is a clear example of urban space as “reservoir of memory” and “tangible memory”. For whole discussion see SPANNAGEL, 1999.

represents the traditional route and has been used to narrate history ever since Homer. In this sense the Virgilian description of the shield is key to the construction of readers' historical memory and, as a traditional resource, is a clear reading indicator and filter. What is new in the Aeneid is the introduction of another description in an earlier section that relates to the geographical description of the city. It is focused on a topography that is the place and the spatial support of *monumenta* and as such are tangible and visible signs both for the everyday passerby who walks through the Forum and for the reader who recognizes them and incorporates them to bring significance and order to the reading. This is the second, non-traditional way, which resorts to the city and its monuments as an "intertext", that is, to the places and buildings every citizen can recognize and actualize.⁶ The prestige of the history of Rome and the wars won, as presented on the shield, finds its correlate in a prestigious urban geography which makes the city a reservoir of historical memory.

In addition, two types of memory may also be identified: the citizen's individual memory, that of every reader who constructs it and in turn evokes it, and the city's memory in which a city treasures the memories of its history in its buildings. This is the starting point of the present author's hypothesis of the relationship between geography and history. Geography is doubtless the substratum, but an annotated substratum since monuments in turn leave marks on geography. Another aim of this work is to elucidate the elements displayed by the poet for the construction of memory at these different levels.

Taking into consideration all the above and after reviewing some general aspects of book 8, the present work will focus first on Aeneas and Evander's walk through Pallanteum and then on the description of Aeneas's shield in order to conclude with the characterization of the relationship between geography and history, and its place in the construction of memory based on the analysis of the convergences and divergences in the selected passages.

Book 8

⁶ See JAEGER, 1997, pp. 1-29

The history of Rome unfolds in book 8 from its prehistoric origins with the arrival of Saturnus to Virgil's times with Augustus as the victor at Actium. As pointed out above, this book is set between the battle books 7 and 9 and is characterized by the prevalence of description over narrative progress. Along with book 6, it shows the most complex prolepsis in the Aeneid the reader would self-identify with in his own Augustan context.

This is the only book in which the action takes place at the current site of Rome. The book begins with Aeneas' arrival in Latium where he meets Evander.⁷ They start strolling around Rome, with Evander becoming the guide and spokesman of a series of etiological dissertations on customs and places.

The initial 101 lines mark Tiberinus's order and Aeneas's actual march to Pallanteum. From line 102 and up to line 305, Virgil narrates Aeneas's arrival in Pallanteum at the exact moment in which the rite recalling Hercules and Cacus's death is performed, this being the first of Latium's historical facts that Aeneas learns. This initial contact with history occurs at a moment in which an act of memory is performed by means of a rite. This means it is a historical event that has already become a memory. The meeting with Evander is a meeting with the live memory of this event, since Evander witnessed the combat between Hercules and Cacus, so that the Arcadian becomes the link between Aeneas and the incident between Hercules and Cacus.

What stands out here is Aeneas's double contact, on the one hand with the live memory – Evander – and on the other, with the memory of the place – the *ara* – since the place where the rite is performed, the forthcoming *Ara Maxima*, is where the battle between Hercules and Cacus occurred. This event is programmatic of what is to come, because the fact that Evander has witnessed this event gives him authority; it is he who is in a position to determine how this geography has become a memory and how it should be recalled in an organized and fixed manner to set in motion the reader's own memory. Doubtless, Evander

⁷ On the myth of Evander, cf. CORNELL 1999, p. 94.

did not live at the same time as Saturnus, but he can be a link for Aeneas between the place and the memory it transmits.

The walk through Pallanteum

The Trojans arrive in the Italic Pallanteum, the colony founded by Evander when he was obliged to leave his home town in Arcadia and had to emigrate to Italy. Once the celebrations for Hercules have been completed, Aeneas and Evander walk from the Ara Maxima to Evander's house on the Palatine, that is, they proceed *ad urbem*.

The walk has two clearly outlined sections:

1. Lines 306-336: **The early history of Latium.** As they walk from the Ara to the Carmental Gate, Evander describes the settlements in Latium from the earliest times to his own arrival. In line 313 Virgil introduces Evander as the “founder of the Roman citadel”, *Romanae conditor arcis*, so Evander's settlement is the core of Romulus's and Augustus's Palatine. Later Evander tells Aeneas that the aboriginal inhabitants, contemporaries of Faunus and the Nymphs, were altogether uncivilized, *neque mos neque cultus* (8. 316). Upon Saturnus's arrival, they settled in cities and received laws and from then on their lands were named Latium. A golden age began under his reign⁸, which later degenerated into war and scavenging. Then a number of invasions of peoples such as the Ausonian and Siconian tribes followed, ending with Evander himself with his Arcadians (8. 328 ff.).

Three elements are immediately evident:

- The novelty regarding Roman historical tradition is the introduction of a Greek founder, prior to Romulus and Aeneas.
- Aeneas's arrival is but the last link in a series of foreign migrations, all Greek in origin (Arcadians, Ausones, Sicani). Virgil's sources preserve the complex, blurred

⁸ Evander's ethnography is a combination of two accounts of the history of civilization. Cf. ZETZEL 1997, p. 191 and GRANSDEN, 1976, pp. 37-41.

tradition of the Trojan and Greek migrations to Italy and in this the poet follows the historical tradition as read in Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

- As for the theme of exile, Evander was exiled, Saturnus was exiled and Aeneas was exiled.

2. Lines 337-368: **The walk.** As they walk from the Carmental Gate to his house, Evander points out the most outstanding spots within the city: the “monuments of earlier men”, *virum monumenta priorum* (l. 312). The following places are mentioned:

- *Porta Carmentalis*, an ancient monument in honor of the Nymph Carmenta, the fateful prophetess who first sang of the future greatness of Aeneas’s descendants and the glory of Pallanteum. This place commemorates prehistoric Rome and alludes to the cult of Carmenta, which lasted until Augustus’s period.

- The great woodland where Romulus opened an asylum that linked the Palatine to the Capitoline. It was the location of the *Asylum*, a shelter where foreigners were received without being questioned on their origin or their past. This was the location Romulus institutionalized and that made the melting pot possible.

- The Lupercal, named thus after Lycaean Pan by Virgil, was an open cave at the foot of the Palatine which could bring to mind a double meaning to the Romans: on one hand, the initial worshiping of Faunus, a deity assimilated into Lupercus and Pan; on the other hand, the legendary place where the she-wolf suckled Romulus and Remus and where Augustus restored the grotto (Suet. *Aug.* 31). This contrasts with Livy and Varro who only associate Lupercal with the cave where the she-wolf suckled the twins.

- The “Argiletum sacred forest”. The Argiletum was a Roman neighborhood between the Quirinal and the Forum. A positive reading which seeks a parallel with places in Augustan Rome associates the Argiletum with the Temple of Janus, whose doors were

closed three times by Augustus as a peacemaker of the Republic.⁹ A reading of the urban geography as a memory in Evander's words leads us in another direction and evokes a disrespected *hospitium*, a homicide and its atonement. This reading is comparable to some inglorious incidents and places in Roman history "recalled" on the shield.

- The Tarpeian rock was a cliff from which traitors were hurled. It owes its name to Tarpeia, the maiden who betrayed the citadel to the Sabine king Titus Tatius in Romulus's time. This recalls the conflict with an Italian people whose resolution – a *foedus* – appears on the shield (l. 641). This place and the one mentioned in the previous paragraph serve as a double warning to traitors.

- The two citadels indicated as founded by Janus and Saturnus, the Janiculum and the Saturnia. The Italian deity Janus recalls that the first city, which would later become Rome, was founded by him before the arrival of Greeks and Trojans, even before Saturnus. This principle of autochthony in the founding of Rome shows that Rome was not founded only by exiles (as Evander or Aeneas); it also agrees with Janus's characteristics as the god of beginnings and transitions. With regard to Janus's relationship with Saturnus, we must remember that in book 7, 107 ff. both gods were together in the vestibule of Latinus's Palace, a clear reference to an Italic past and to the succession of foundations: Janus as the local divinity and Saturnus as a foundational instance in bringing in the law.

- Evander's humble home which was on the Palatine just as Augustus's House of Livia would be. The size and modesty of this dwelling (Suet. *Aug.* 72) follows Evander's recommendation of *frugalitas*: *Aude, hospes, contemnere opes* (8. 364: "My guest, dare to scorn wealth"). Here Aeneas and Evander see the site to be occupied by the Forum and the *Carinae*. The *Carinae* is a clear reference to the most luxurious Roman neighborhood in Augustus's times. There is a clear contrast between Augustus's house, which evokes the modesty of Evander's and Romulus's, and the wealthy Roman residences. This distinction establishes the *Princeps* in the founders' lineage through the urban geography recognizing

⁹ See GRIMAL, 1945. Cf. RENAUD, 1990, p. 81.

Augustus's understanding of *frugalitas* as a foundational virtue in Rome.

The walk then begins and ends in the two oldest areas of Romulus's city (the *pomerium*), and Virgil intends to link Pallanteum and Rome, granting them an etiology anterior to Romulus.¹⁰ On account of the intentional use of anachronism, aimed no doubt at linking Rome's past and present and at emphasizing the age and continuity of its site, Pallanteum becomes the *Urbs* in Virgil's times.¹¹

The walk through Pallanteum as a geographical description

Evander and Aeneas's walk around Pallanteum can be described as an *ekphrasis*, that is, as the description of an object, place or situation in order to produce a visual representation for the reader. *Ekphrasis* is a common form of narrative *excursus*, but this does not mean that such a digression amounts to a complete departure from the storyline.¹² Traditionally, this passage of the Aeneid has not been recognized as an *ekphrasis* for three reasons: first it is not a specific object, as are the six objects analyzed by Putnam¹³, second the focus shifts spatially and appears not to have a prop, and third it is not a digression from the storyline – quite the contrary, the walk through Pallanteum is one of book 8's narrative threads.¹⁴ Of all these reasons, only the last one appears to us to be impossible to sidestep, since *ekphrasis* certainly take on relevance from their non-diegetic position. Nonetheless, there are elements in Evander and Aeneas's walk that make it possible to relate it to an *ekphrasis*, especially the alternating position and movement markers with which a balance is achieved between defining and shifting the observer's focus. This leads us to establish a relationship

10 For details of the topography, see GRANSDEN, 1976, p. 31.

11 The date of Aeneas's arrival coincides not only with the annual festival of Hercules but also with Augustus's triumphal journey to Rome on August 12, 29 BC. See FORDYCE, 1977, *ad loc.*

12 Ever since HOLLANDER 1988, p. 209-218 posed his theory regarding the importance of *ekphrasis* in literature and coined the concept of *notional ekphrasis*, all critics only reread these descriptive passages in search not structural relationships between description and the storyline, but also circumscribe the descriptions as semiotic field whose decoding rests on the understanding of the work as a whole. On account of its theoretical value with regard to Latin literature, see FOWLER 1991, p. 25-35 and LAIRD 1993, p. 18-30. The bibliography is vast, cf. "Bibliographies" by MARTINDALE 1987 and PUTNAM, 1998.

13 PUTNAM, 1998.

14 Note that there are no considerations on this matter in PUTNAM, 1998 or in the excellent chapter by BARCHIESI 1997, pp. 271-281.

between the strategy of describing a location and the importance of the geographical location for the construction of a historic memory.¹⁵

This has been pointed out by Renaud¹⁶ in his work on the importance of geographical location in book 8. Throughout an analysis of the places visited and referenced by Virgil, Renaud claims there is interplay between position and movement markers which allows the reader to fix his or her attention on the observers - Evander and Aeneas - on places of great importance for Rome and particular interest for Augustus. Renaud attempts to show that the places visited talk of history, exile and victory in a clearly Augustan ideological line. She never loses sight of extremely important issues: the places mentioned are not a random set but rather a coherent set the reader is able to put back together, grouped in pairs that complement each other in their historical significance albeit not in their spatial location.

On the basis of these considerations, we must face a complex issue: if on one the hand the walk through Pallanteum is a description of proto-Rome, on the other hand, the places mentioned are, for different reasons, important to the Roman reader of the Aeneid in such a way that an ideologically connoted “literary reproduction” of the geographical space might be expected. Horsfall says that when we read geographic descriptions in different kinds of Latin texts, we should not think so much about accuracy as about the operations of thought and language that mediate between the described space and the description; also, the uncertainty or imprecision tends to guide the reader to think about alternative ways of associating geographical references.¹⁷ In this sense, we can say that beyond the cultural and political significance of the places listed, Evander need not make an *aemulatio locorum* to provide a description of the geography of Pallanteum. Instead, there must be consistency of space organization and its components that the reader can understand and follow in his reading. It is possible to postulate the same about the images of the history of Rome on Aeneas’s shield and, to that extent, the present author believes that Aeneas is learning to see the most important signs in a complex space and, despite the fact that he would be

15 On this *ekphrasis*' components, see DE SANTIS, 2009.

16 RENAUD 1990, pp. 80-98.

17 HORSFALL, 1985, pp. 197-208.

declared to be *ignarus* (8. 730) of the complete meanings of the images he is admiring (*miratur*, 8. 730) and enjoying (*gaudet*, 8. 730), he is able to highlight the most important details in the scenes.

In this sense, the logic of the places, the buildings and their depiction throughout the tour of Pallanteum has been variously understood. Gransden¹⁸ (1976), for example, states that the places described are directly related to Aeneas's shield; for Zanker¹⁹ the places are ideologically related to Augustus; Renaud (1990) states that foundational stages are shown in pairs of names and places, Janus, Saturnus, Evander, Romulus and Augustus, while for Papaioannou the places flow together in Evander to show his nature as a great civilizer and as a bridge between Greece, Troy and Latium.²⁰ But beyond these attempts to understand the selection of the places mentioned in Evander and Aeneas's walk, it is clear that they all recognize a logic in the organization, though only Renaud attempts to find a relationship between the "organization" and the description of the space covered and the places indicated.

Virgil clearly wants the reader to imagine a movement through space in a manner similar to that which we have in the *ekphrasis* of the shield. The walk begins in the Ara Maxima and continues "towards the city": *exim se cuncti diuinis rebus ad urbem* (v. 306).

Exim is the marker that inaugurates the movement from the Ara Maxima towards the city. And it marks the continuity of two extremely important facts: the rite that celebrates Hercules's killing of Cacus and the advance towards the city (*ad urbem*, l. 306) and so establishes a clear idea of historical continuity between the death of the monster and the foundation of Pallanteum by Evander the civilizer. This narrative continuity seems to make it impossible for us to consider the walk through the city as an meaningful *ekphrasis*, but does not prevent us from recognizing in it constituent elements of this descriptive literary typology which will then be taken up again in the *ekphrasis* of Aeneas's shield, as previously said.

18 GRANSDEN, 1976, pp. 126-133.

19 ZANKER, 1992, pp. 239-254.

20 PAPPAIOANOU, 2003, pp. 680-702.

As Evander goes along (*ingrediens*, l. 309) with Aeneas and his son, the Trojan leader is awed by what he sees and hears from Evander; he is moved, captivated by the sites: *miratur* (l. 310), *capitur locis* (l. 311), *laetus / exquirique auditque* (lines 311-312). Aeneas is seized with admiration and there is a dual relationship with the place since on the one hand, the site captivates him and, on the other, it is Evander's tale that evokes admiration. The phrase *Aeneas capitur locis* anticipates the effect the description of the place must have on the reader. Aeneas is captivated by Evander's tale of the *virum monumenta priorum* (v. 312). Rome's geography is connoted with a force that drew Saturnus, Hercules and Evander, and the tale of its proto-history is one way of putting this power into words - a beauty to be seen and to be recounted - and captivating the reader as well.

This walk is complementary to the description of Aeneas's shield in more than one sense and shows why Aeneas would marvel at scenes he does not comprehend: Evander's words complete Aeneas's admiration, but more so that of the reader who has made a mental representation of Roman geography and has seen it fill with historical significance. Aeneas will view the shield in the same way and Vulcan's art will amaze him while Virgil's words fill the vignettes with historical significance. The Roman reader of the shield also hears of the *virum monumenta priorum* which, rather than places, are feats narrated by the poet that are fundamental to the accounts of *Annales* (of Ennius) and the history work of Livy.²¹ The geographic space fills with significance from the historical account and the space of the shield then includes a text explaining the historical weight of what has been described by the poet through Aeneas's eyes, with his well-known limitations, and, especially, at the reader who is able to put together the succession of facts and recognize ideological connotations just as he does with Livy's work.

If it is possible to claim that this walk of Evander and Aeneas through Pallanteum is not an

21 On *monumenta* see *OLD* s.v. *monumentum*, 1: "building erected to commemorate a person or event" and 5 b: "historical account, history".

ekphrasis on account of the narrative nature of the passage and of its not being in any way a simple, large and informative digression or *excursus*, it is nevertheless legitimate for us to say that many of the components expected of an *ekphrasis* are present both at the linguistic level and at the visual and ideological-evocative level. The vividness of Evander's words is characteristic of ekphrastic *evidentia*. Nor can the programmatic sense of his words be denied, that is, his words create (for Aeneas) and recreate (for the reader) a visual image and an impact on the mind.

This effect is, in turn, visual and ideological. One of the most noticeable ideological effects of the walk through Pallanteum and the projection of Augustus's Rome is historical diachrony that, without disregarding certain interruptions, allows one to trace a line from Janus to Augustus and to state that in the epic the latter's victory is also a theme that goes beyond its enunciation in the prologue in book 1, which simply says "until the city of Rome is founded" (1. 5)

Evidently Virgil attempts to report on a historical and diachronic continuity highlighted on the ideological plane. Since Cacus's death is a basis for an etiology related to the Ara Maxima and the rites of Hercules, at the same time it is also the starting point for arranging Turnus's death and Mark Antony's defeat according to an epic plane that speaks about the triumphs of civilizers over monsters, and Aeneas and Augustus over political enemies.²² Thus the walk through Rome's natural and urban geography leads us to history as represented in the *ekphrasis* of the shield.

The *ekphrasis* of Aeneas's shield as a historical description

The *ekphrasis* of Aeneas's shield, modeled on the description of Achilles's shield in *Iliad* 18. 483-608, is at once a historical chronicle and one of the most important prophetic

22 As GALINSKY, 1966, *passim* affirm and HARDIE, 1986, insist. But, as HARDIE says (1986, pp. 143-154) there is no stable Gigantomachic code beneath the actions of the poem. For example, see the battle of Thymbraeus (a Trojan assimilated to the side of Giants) and Osiris (the Italian defeated) as REDD, 1998, 409-410) points out.

passages in the *Aeneid*, along with Jupiter's prophecy to Venus in 1. 257-96, Anchises's revelation to Aeneas in 6. 756-886 and the final agreement between Jupiter and Juno in 12. 830-840. Virgil offers a structure and form that endow Roman history with a destiny which goes from Aeneas to Romulus and Augustus, not just in subject matter but also in form. In this sense, Woodman (1989) has noted that the formulation at the start of the *ekphrasis* of Aeneas's shield is written in the manner of a historical *praefatio* (lines 626-629)²³:

*illic res Italas Romanorumque triumphos
 haud uatum ignarus uenturique inscius aevi
 fecerat ignipotens, illic genus omne futurae
 stirpis ab Ascanio pugnataque in ordine bella.*²⁴

Aeneas's shield demarcates a historical theme which is as central to Augustus's times as the *res Italas Romanorumque triumphos*, and a starting point is established with *ab Ascanio pugnataque in ordine bella*. Thus Virgil wishes to give the "impression" that his work will address a historical theme just as historians do. Undoubtedly this type of formulation is typical of historians, as is evident in the examples collected by Woodman: Tacitus *Annales* 12. 40.5, *ad temporum ordinem redeo*; Sallust in *History* 1. 8, *a principio urbis*; Livy in the *Praefatio* 1, *primordio urbis* and likewise Florus in *Praefatio* 1 *a rege Romulo in Caesarem Augustum*, whose similarity to the Virgilian formula is evident. But at the same time, Horace in his *Ars Poetica* line 147 denies that an epic poem is able to narrate an account from the beginning: *nec gemino bellum Troianum orditur ab ouo*; to which we must add Cicero in *Oratore* 2. 63 who claims that the historian *ordinem temporum desiderat* and Macrobius (5. 14.11) claiming that the poet must shun the *historicum stilum...non per ordinem dirigendo quae gesta sunt*.²⁵

However, the present author believes that Virgil plays with different meanings of *ordo*, three of which we have identified: a "program" with narrative and poetic nature, a

23 HARDIE, 1986, p. 347 has also insisted on the Virgilian intention of offering an ordered chronology.

24 There the lord with the power of fire, not unversed in prophecy, and knowledge of the centuries to come, had fashioned the history of Italy, and Rome's triumphs: there was every future generation of Ascanius's stock, and the sequence of battles they were to fight.

25 All these quotations have been recorded by WOODMAN, 1989, pp. 132-133.

“connected sequence of a narration or discourse” and a “position in space and time”.²⁶ Thus *ordo* is far from being a simple term and has its place in Latin literary terminology and specifically in historical literature and epic narrative. With this line of thought, the present author accepts Woodman’s proposal in which lines 626-629 in book 8 are a kind of “Preface” - characteristic of works of history - to the alternative version of the history of Rome that Virgil intends.²⁷ Thus *ordo* indicates a succession of facts whose chronology does not reside in the layout of the images on the shield but rather in Aeneas’s focus on certain images.

The scenes painted on the shield are:

- Legends of early Rome from Romulus to the Republic:
 - Vignette 1 (lines 630-634): Romulus and Remus suckling the she-wolf²⁸ (cf. Livy I. 4);
 - Vignette 2 (lines 635-641): The rape of the Sabines²⁹ (cf. Livy I. 9) and subsequent pact between Romans and Sabines (cf. Livy I. 24.8), which denotes, after the rape and combat, the merging of the two communities through war;
 - Vignette 3 (lines 642-645): Execution of the Alban traitor Mettius Fufetius (cf. Livy I. 23-9), which marks the end of the defiance of Alba Longa and the transfer of its population to Rome;
 - Vignette 4 (lines 646-51): Porsenna besieges Rome (cf. Livy 2. 9-13) and the response to Horatius Cocles and Cloelia’s defiant heroism shows Etruscan Rome growing in liberty;
 - Vignette 5 (lines 652-66): The Gauls occupy Rome (cf. Livy 5. 46-7); new beginning of Rome after the disaster of Allia. Roman religious corporations: the scene stresses the importance of *religio* attending in the final painting of Anthony and the Egyptian gods;
 - Vignette 6 (lines 666-70) Catiline in Tartarus: the scene canonizes Cato, an apostle of the rational order proclaimed by Augustus.

²⁶ OLD s.v. *ordo* 9 b. 10 y 11.

²⁷ Such a version would be an alternative to Livy’s recent and rapidly spreading and accepted first pentad in a pro-Augustan key.

²⁸ The she-wolf suckles the twins “in the green cave of Mars” (l. 630), that is, the Lupercal. This is the first in the series of similarities between the wall and the shield.

²⁹ Traditionally, the abduction took place during the celebration of the *Consualia* instituted by Romulus, confounded here with the *ludi magni*, traditionally instituted in the kingdom of Ancus.

- The Battle of Actium (lines 671-713): not merely painted as a military victory but as a war between the peoples of East and West. It occupies the central part of the shield and is one of the most splendid passages of the *Aeneid*;
- Augustus's triple victory (lines 714-28): the description of his victory at Actium and of his subsequent victories is the most explicit version Virgil offers of the objective enunciated by Jupiter in Book 1: the introduction of order, peace and the Empire. Moreover, the subject matter and the organization of the images on the shield represent it as a victory of a cosmic order. Rome and divine justice are one and the same.

Richard Thomas emphasizes the technique in the *ekphrasis* of describing by means of vignettes and of placing the focus on a definite "center" as a *medium*.³⁰ In the shield's case, this "medium" is defined in line 675: *in medio classis aeratas, Actia bella*.³¹ The battle of Actium is represented in the center of the shield and it is the only vignette whose position is absolutely certain: in the center. The center is certainly an outstanding position in Greek descriptive tradition and Latin texts and catches Aeneas's eye. The present author believes there is no doubt that Aeneas, despite not knowing that the *Actia bella* are described there, acknowledges that this image has a semantic weight that is not only greater than that of the rest of the vignettes, but also the organizer of the rest of the vignettes. But Aeneas does not admire this central image more than the previous ones. The semantic weight of the central placement of the battle of Actium is a message to the reader and not to the character of Aeneas who at the end of book 8 is declared *ignarus* of what he sees (line 731).

As with the case of the geography of Pallanteum and of the heroes in book 6, the historical understanding of what has been seen requires a second observer to guide Aeneas's vision, as well as Anchises's and Evander's. Aeneas is alone here, not even a silent character such as Achates accompanies him as happens in Book 1 when seeing Carthage, and to whom

³⁰ 1983, pp. 175-184.

³¹ Of course, in the case of the walk through Pallanteum it is impossible to find this "medium" strategy, because there is no fixed focus of an observer.

Aeneas expresses his admiration and speaks his mind.

But Aeneas is not just an observer of the shield, he has actually progressed through Pallanteum, the account of Cacus's death, the presence of Saturnus and the passage from an *aurea aetas* to a *decolor aetas*. Besides, Evander has declared Aeneas a *dux* of young Italians (line 496) and they are requested to accept him as such (line 503) to confront Mezentius (line 501), *contemptor deum* (line 7). He grants Aeneas his son Pallas as guarantor of the continuity of the Arcadians in Latium. Evander is involved in a political action here, sustained by an oracle, and in consonance with history reflected in geography: an exiled man who arrives in Italy like Saturnus, to free the region from barbarians (like Mezentius and Turnus), such as Hercules did before with Cacus, and, as we have stated above, a founder like Evander himself. This indicates that the *ekphrasis* should not be analyzed as an independent text just because of its iconographic nature; it is a text completely linked to the central narrative of Book 8. Its meanings depend in various ways on the guidelines established in the walk through Pallanteum and their decoding process: the reader must organize in his mind, despite Aeneas' lack of understanding, the historical meaning of the places and images on the shield and the order of facts in a temporal manner.

All the images on the shield are the result of a foundational criterion of historical narrative that marks ways of being of *condere gentem* and *condere urbem*: avoid the disappearance of the people, avoid the movement of the Penates, vanquish the enemy, pass laws and develop the pacts needed for subsistence. Harrison³² and Barchiesi³³ maintain that Aeneas's shield shows a succession of facts that place Rome on the verge of disappearance. These dangerous events consequently strengthened Rome³⁴ and moreover, according to Pappaioanou³⁵ (2003), every leader who emerged unscathed in Roman history could be considered a founder.³⁶

32 HARRISON, 1997, pp. 72.

33 BARCHIESI, 1997, pp. 271-281.

34 As HARRISON, 1997 points out, this idea has already been put forward by WARDE FOWLER, 1918, pp. 103-105.

35 PAPPAIOANOU, 2003, 682.

36 In the current work we have not considered lines 369-453. CASALI, 2006, pp. 185-204 proposes that the passage should be understood as a show of the pressure Augustus exerts on artists and how this impacts on

Let us review the vignettes in the order they appear in the text and compare them to the historian's version.³⁷

Vignette 1 (lines 630-4) Romulus and Remus suckled by the she-wolf. In 1. 4. 1 Livy states that the she-wolf's saving of the twins was an act of fate in the emergence of de *urbs* and a work of the gods in favor of the *imperii principium*. Livy certainly considers that without the *lupa*'s protection, the *urbs* and its *imperium* would never have existed. Beyond the rationalization of the myth proposed by Livy in 1. 4. 7 where he says that the *lupa* was a prostitute, he coincides with Virgil in that the birth of Rome hinged on a decisive divine intervention since, had it not been so, Rome would not have been founded. Woodman in turn maintains that Virgil avoids such a rationalization of the myth by insisting on the she-wolf's maternal instinct, linking *matrem* (l. 632) with *pueros .../ inpauidos* (lines 632-633). It is very likely that Virgil's miraculous, mythical version is in agreement with the Augustan ideology of Augustus's assimilation to Romulus and his lineage originating in the god Mars (*viridi...Mauortis in antro*, v. 630). Nor must we forget that the god Mars's cave, as Gransden points out, is the Lupercal indicated earlier by Evander in lines 342-343. Thus Virgil consistently maintains a core aspect in the description of Pallanteum: the natural geography and the pastoral environment become essential components of Rome. Geography, foundation and ideological discourse thus coexist inseparably on the shield. Once again, Evander's account appears as an inescapable instance when it comes to analyzing the *ekphrasis*. The urban geography of Pallanteum, as a previous foundation of Rome, is a strong force for memory. On the one hand, geographic sites are the substrates of the historical discourse of images on the shield; on the other hand, history (as written in images) is arranged in chronologically prestigious spaces of the *Urbs*.

We have said before that we intend to recover the iconographic discourse that might have led Aeneas to lay his eyes on this scene. In lines 612-614 Venus tells Aeneas that the

Virgil. Cf. LYNE, 1987, pp. 35-44 and PUTNAM, 1965, pp. 136-141 and 169-180.
37 Here we follow HARRISON's, 1997, analysis.

weapons she is offering him must be used unhesitatingly against the arrogant Laurentines (*Laurentis...superbos*, l. 613) and the fierce Turnus (*acrem...Turnum*, l. 614). In a related previous instance Evander, when addressing Aeneas as *ductor* (l. 470), had characterized Mezentius's government as an "arrogant" tyranny. Now, cruelty and arrogance characterize Mezentius, unfolding in Venus's words *superbos* and *acrem*. Evander's words are still fresh in Aeneas's mind and his mother's words ring strongly in his ears. He is offered these weapons to battle against something more than a powerful foe. Furthermore, upon taking them, Aeneas observes them closely (lines 618-619): *...atque oculos per singula uoluit / miraturque ...*

The actual *ekphrasis* is a later step, consisting in the detailed look at the images that capture our attention after a general vision of the whole. Thus the iconographic code cannot be set aside in order to "read" only the historical sequence. Aeneas will focus his attention on the images that stand out on account of (1) their narrative content, (2) the artist's devices and (3) the stereotypes that make standardized decoding possible. The event of the she-wolf suckling the twins belongs to the first case. Aeneas does not understand the proleptic, ideological subject matter of the image but the fact that he sees a "narration" of a she-wolf licking and feeding two infants is enough to focus his attention on this.

Vignette 2 (lines 635-8) The rape of the Sabines. As Harrison (1997) points out, Livy states that the rape of the Sabine women was a strategy complementary to the *asylum*. While Rome was inhabited by expatriate men (Livy 1. 8. 5), no neighboring peoples allowed their women to wed these men. Rome needed to carry out this abduction on account of *peniuria mulierum* (Livy 1. 9. 1). Woodman maintains that there is a vast discursive difference between Livy's account and Virgil's³⁸: the historian concentrates on the war whereas the poet focuses on the peace treaty. The differences are evident in the text since the vignette is especially related to the previous one through *nec procul hinc* (l. 635) but in the inside of the image the footprint of war between the Romans and Tatius is marked by the "temporal" *post* (line 639), so the mention of war and the storyline of the

38 WOODMAN, 1989, pp. 135-139.

foedera (l. 641) by means of the ritual of *caesa...porca* (l. 641) appear to have been modeled concomitantly on Vulcan and by the narrative voice such that, within the same vignette, the scene shows a striking transition from war to peace.

Vignette 3 (lines 642-5) Execution of the Alban traitor Mettus ordered by Tullus Hostilius. This vignette tells of the betrayal by Mettus – the Alban who left Rome without military support in the war against Veii and Fidenae. Livy (1. 27-29) states that this was one of the most atrocious wars conducted by Rome. Harrison³⁹ claims that the cruelty of Mettus’s execution is one of the three exemplary individual punishments shown on the shield, along with those of Catiline and Cleopatra. In Roman history the Alban leader’s betrayal is no minor event since Rome and Alba disputed supremacy in Latium and in Italy, this being a central theme in the *Aeneid* and for Augustus’s political support during the civil wars assuring support from the Italics in general.⁴⁰ From the iconographic point of view, this vignette is impressive on account of the vividness and thoroughness of the description of the mutilated body and the bloodshed: *citae Mettum in diversa quadrigae / distulerant* (lines 642-643) report on Vulcan’s mastery to represent a swift movement, and the atrocious vividness of the *uiscera .../ per siluam* (lines 644-645) which finds lexical options only within a certain tragic register.⁴¹

Vignette 4 (lines 646-51) Porsenna besieges Rome. These verses deal with the Etruscan Porsenna’s siege of Rome to restore Tarquin’s monarchy. Livy states that Tarquin’s banishment ensured Rome’s independence and its supremacy in central Italy (1. 34): Rome was caught between freedom and Etruscan control. Continuity of the historical narrative regarding the previous vignette offers no difficulty. In turn, this representation may draw Aeneas’s attention on account of the scene depicting the “siege of the city”, *...urbem obsidione premebat* (l. 647), reminding the reader and Aeneas himself of his account in book 3 of when Priam looks desperately upon his besieged Troy: *...cingique urbem obsidione uideret*. Jogging the memory is one of the intended effects of the iconographic

39 HARRISON, 1997, p. 74.

40 Cf. MORGAN, 2005, pp. 190-203.

41 Virgil may be resuming *Andromeda*’s tragic lines in Ennius (117-119, Jocelyn 1967).

representation. This effect is wholly achieved here as a complement to the narrative in book 3. Moreover, we have to pay attention to Evander's words on the geopolitical situation of the humble *arx* of Pallanteum in 8. 473-474:

*hinc Tusco claudimur amni,
hinc Rutulus premit et murum circumsonat armis.*

After the day of the walk through Pallanteum, Evander explains to Aeneas the siege of his city recalling the description of the urban and natural geography as mentioned the day before. *hinc...hinc* is a sign that now Evander is thinking about geography as an image, as mental representation, and the boundaries referred to are the river Tiber (western and northern boundary) and the borderline with Rutulians.⁴² This event is an actual siege and a reminiscence for Aeneas of the siege of Troy. As previously said, to the reader this event is one of the many sieges that Rome has resisted as in the case of the Gauls' attack, and a historical fact of the early Rome when the river Tiber was the boundary between Rome and Etruria.⁴³ Aeneas could match the image of the shield with the current situation of the city as the king presented it. He is to be considered a founder of the city to release the pressure of the Italics' enemies.

Vignette 5 (lines 652-66) The Gauls occupy Rome. This refers to the Gauls' attack in 390. It is the most complex scene, in regard to both its composition and its historical significance. Woodman claims that while Virgil focuses on the Gauls' attack, Livy concentrates on the figure of Camillus as the leader and savior of the city, in particular when he persuaded the besieged people not to flee to Veii (Livy 5. 49. 8).⁴⁴ As stated before, the Gauls' attack can be considered as a parallel situation of Pallanteum. Virgil is not intending to emphasize Aeneas's actions over Camillus's defense of Rome; he is rather trying to establish a relationship of similarity and continuity between these two leaders, focusing on the besieged city instead of on their successful actions.

42 See AMES-DE SANTIS, 2011, pp. 18-25.

43 See EDEN, 1975, p. 138.

44 WOODMAN, 1989, pp. 138-139.

Particularly difficult are lines 663-666 which Harrison, in our view, explains adequately by placing them in relation to the geography of Pallanteum.⁴⁵ They are timeless scenes, no doubt a celebration of the victory over the Gauls on the shield and appropriate for representing victory over Roman enemies. However, the present author proposes that in Aeneas's mind this could be an image of the future celebration of the victory over Arcadian and Trojan enemies.

The geography of Pallanteum is strictly related to the modeled images on the shield. The Vestals are there as well as the sacred fire, the *ancilia*, the sacred shields of the Salii that fell from the heavens. Two ancient Roman priesthods, the Salii and the Luperci, were followed by Augustus as traditional cults. The Lupercalia relates to Evander's narration prior to the foundation of Rome (Livy 1.5). The school of the Salii was founded by Numa with a seat on the Palatine and the Quirinal Hill, so this is related to the topography traversed by Evander. This scene is a case in which the number of visual components may draw Aeneas's attention and the apparent disparity of related scenes involves a complex narrative that fits into the urban geography of Pallanteum and Rome.⁴⁶

Vignette 6 (lines 666-70) Catiline and Cato.⁴⁷ This is a brief presentation of the underworld with the Furies lying in wait for Catiline (lines 667-669) in contrast to Cato (line 670): *secretosque pios, his dantem iura Catonem*. With no knowledge of Roman history, the representation shows two men as opposites in action and fortune: one punished by the Furies and the other, a man who passes laws and becomes the "founder" of a city

45 HARRISON, 1997, pp. 72-74.

46 The same degree of importance must be granted to the variety of materials and the effects achieved by the craftsman in representing a scene of such diversity. In this sense, WOODMAN 1989, 139-141 is right in saying that Virgil rivals Livy's historiography in *enargeia* as a means of achieving a representation before the eyes of the reader, *sub oculos subiectio*. On the ancient theory of *enargeia* in historical narrative, see Quint. *Inst.* 9. 2. 40.1, *Rhet. Her.* 4. 68 and Plut. *Moralia* 347a where the intersection between painting and poetry is discussed by means of the theory of *sub oculos subiectio*. However, it should not be forgotten that Virgil is faced with a problem greater than that of Livy, since he must combine history and epic, *ekphrasis* with narrative and prestigious models with his own work. In this sense this "universal" scenes are far more meaningful than the present article says.

47 On the real danger of dissolution of the Roman Republic and the Sallustian model for Virgil see SYME, 1964, p. 286 WOODMAN, 1989, 139 and HARRISON, 1997, p. 74.

modeled on Remus and Quirinus, as anticipated by the first prophecy proclaimed by Jupiter in the *Aeneid* (...*Remo cum fratre Quirinus / iura dabunt*, l. 292-293). So Cato fulfilled what was a prediction for Romulus and is thus one of founders of Rome. But where this is understood only by the reader, for Aeneas the vision of the founding legislators is not new either since it refers back to the stunning *ekphrasis* of the mural in Juno's temple in Carthage. Then, in l. 426, along with the physical construction of the city, Aeneas saw that *iura magistratusque legunt* and immediately after the *ekphrasis* he sees Dido enter, who *iura dabat legesque* (l. 507), completing the foundational picture of Carthage. Thus the representation of the legislator is a key figure in the development of any city.

The last vignette is the one that carries the greatest historical and ideological weight, since it depicts Augustus's victory in the battle of Actium against Mark Antony and Cleopatra's forces (lines 671-728). Roman historians claimed that Mark Antony was planning to move the capital of the Empire to Alexandria and poets such as Horace (*Od.* l. 37) maintained that Cleopatra yearned for the destruction of Rome, so that in the historical revision undertaken during Augustus's rule the war against Mark Antony was assessed, by his followers at least, as a turning point in Rome's survival. Propertius (4.6.43-44) maintains that the victory at Actium gives meaning to Roman history - an extreme idea that brings together most of the ideological conceptions of Roman history surrounding the figure of Augustus, who thus becomes a "founder" along with Hercules, Evander, Romulus, Cato and Aeneas himself.

After this triple victory (l. 714) Augustus built and rebuilt temples (*maxima ter centum totam delubra per urbem*, l. 716), mainly the temple of Apollo (l. 720) in 28 BC.⁴⁸ In this sense the text justifies the importance granted to the etiologies that appear at the beginning of book 8 and in particular those linked with Pallanteum such as the Ara Maxima. Evander, in his humility, accomplishes the same as Augustus in his magnificence. The iconographic rhetoric Aeneas recognizes is clear in lines 678-679:

hinc Augustus agens Italos in proelia Caesar

48 Aug. *Res Gestae* 20. 4.

cum patribus populoque, penatibus et magnis dis,

A general leading a people to war and carrying Lares and Penates – no image could serve better as a double for Aeneas on the shield and in Roman history. This sequence stands out from the point of view of the organization of the images as can be observed in line 675 with the description of the battle of Actium as the central scene (*in medio*, l. 675) in contrast to the appearance of the adverb *hinc* in line 678 which does not point to the next image to focus on. Rather, as in the case of a circular or centralized design where several images would be equally close to the central one, this one is the first to draw Aeneas's attention on account of what it represents, his double, as with Agrippa (lines 682-684).

The images Aeneas focuses on are those of Antony and Cleopatra: Antony, followed by an army which is represented as barbarous (l. 685) and a queen whose sistrum in one hand (l. 696) denotes her oriental origins. She is also located in the center (*in mediis*, l. 696) which depicts her as Augustus's opposite, just as Catiline and Cato were presented.

The stereotyped representations might include the goddesses and gods Venus, Minerva, Mars and Apollo, whose relationship with Aeneas is undeniable.⁴⁹ If Aeneas was able to recognize them, as the present author believes he was, he could have organized the scene logically: while men confront each other (Romans versus barbarians), so also do the gods, those of the Roman pantheon versus the monstrous oriental divinities, *omnigenumque deum monstra et latrator Anubis* (l. 698). It should be noted that of all the oriental gods, the Egyptian Anubis is individualized with his image standing out as a zoomorphic monstrosity.⁵⁰ Perhaps Anubis's image could recall Cacus's description as *semihominis Caci facies* (8. 194) and *Caci mens effera* (8. 205), suggesting that Aeneas's reading was mediated by the story of Evander on Cacus. Thereby the death of these two monsters would mark the beginning and end of historical narrative descriptions integrated into the urban space and the hero's shield.

49 See GRANSDEN, 1976, p. 180.

50 On "monstrosity" and "zoomorphic" figures in the *Aeneid*, see HARDIE 1986, p. 346 ss.. On the "monstrous imagery", see GALINSKY, 1966, *passim*.

The narrative of the action has two moments, that of cosmic warfare, men and gods (lines 671-713) and the celebration of victory (lines 714-728) where Aeneas sees diverse people from far and wide arriving to bring offerings to the conqueror (lines 722-723): *incedunt victae longo ordine gentes / quam uariae linguis, habitu tam uestis et armis.*

The closure of this *ekphrasis* is also significant (lines 729-731):

*talia per clipeum Volcani, dona parentis,
miratur rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet
attollens umero famamque et fata nepotum.*

The last line summarizes everything viewed by the observer: the shield is a projection into the future of what the *Aeneid* constructs, from the protohistory of Rome to Augustus. The *fama* and the *fata nepotum* are not the only historical facts represented. Indeed, all of book 8 shows a cohesive account from the humble and fearful founding of the neighboring settlements to Augustus's proud victory and the conquest of the barbaric peoples, and from the Ara Maxima in the natural geography to Apollo's temple and all the temples known to the poet and the reader. It is a lineal, teleological account that seeks a *pax* achieved through war in the figure of Augustus, a synthesis supported by Lucretius's peaceful Venus and the *Aeneid's* Venus claiming weapons for Aeneas.⁵¹

As for iconographic reception, line 730 is also a synthesis: Aeneas admires what he sees (*miratur*) although he does not understand the historical deployment Vulcan and Virgil have displayed (*rerum ignarus*). Vulcan knows what the gods (*haud uatum ignarus*, l. 627) have proclaimed, and his double, Virgil, knows what the poets (*uatum*), such as Ennius and Lucretius, have sung. Aeneas has neither of these ways of comprehending what he carries on his shoulders but recognizes that there are foundations, celebrations, rites, miracles, laws and victories that in their own way are a manner of *condere urbem* and *condere gentem*. His gaze is ekphrastic in the sense that it focuses on what draws his attention and the

51 See Casali, 2006.

narrative guides the reader.⁵² The narrative voice will instead establish another code for the reader, the historical one. So that if *ordo* is for Aeneas to see the images one next to the other with a semantically prominent *medium*, for the narrative voice the *ordo* is a succession of facts in time which after Ennius, Lucretius and Livy cannot but be a historical narrative. It is a diachronic annalistic perspective.⁵³

Final reflections: complementarity of the geographical description and the historical narrative on the shield

Evander's account of Roman protohistory shows a history prior to Romulus and Remus. It is a geographical description that serves Virgil's historical conception, a version of history that distances itself from historical narratives such as that by Livy, since it traces Roman history back to Janus and Saturnus.

The walk through Pallanteum sets up a bridge between prehistoric Italy and historical Rome over centuries apart. The most illustrious places in the city that will become the centre of the world are foreshadowed. For Virgil, to describe the topography of the future *urbs* is an operation that is complementary to the writing of history in the traditional form of annals. While the annals focus on the succession of names and actions marking the becoming of Rome, Virgil's description focuses on a geographical space implying that the city and its monuments are indeed evidence of history in the same way as its political and military personages and actions. Beyond the relationships between the historical moments narrated in the *ekphrasis* and the sites mentioned in the walk through Pallanteum, this paper attempts to show that the geographical description of Rome is indispensable to the understanding of the importance of the historical facts that have left their mark on the city. These facts are narrated in the *ekphrasis* of the shield, hence the interdependence between both descriptive accounts, since all the images in the *ekphrasis* are related to the

52 We does not intend here to discuss ancient and modern notions of *ekphrasis*. He finds the more precise definition is offered by DUBEL, 1997 p. 255 ss.

53 This double reading depending on which code we go by is a further confirmation of PUTNAM 1998's idea that poses a mirrored authorship between Vulcan and Virgil. Also see CASALI, 2006.

geographical site of Rome, the setting they share. On the other hand, *reliquias veterumque...monimenta virorum* (*Aen.* 8. 356) are the external reference that Aeneas has to organize in order to make sense of a series of images of whose real meaning he is unaware. Evander's account of historical geography is the basis on which to organize possible meanings of the images pictured on the shield. Aeneas's gaze is ignorant but it is crucial to complement these descriptions.

Starting from the scene of Romulus and Remus with the she-wolf, the only event that does not occur in Rome is the battle of Actium. However, the conclusion of this vignette is the consequence of victory for the *urbs* through the effect on the *victi*, the booty acquired and the amount of construction, reaching the three hundred temples built in Augustus's age. All the images of the *ekphrasis* gradually elucidate the importance of the geographical site of the city of Rome. The fact that no battles or events appear in other places, except for the battle of Actium, is viewed by this author as a sign of change for the city.

From this perspective, the city as a geographical place is a criterion for the selection of the events represented on the shield. This is why the present author maintains that the geographical description conditions the historical description on the shield. Meanwhile, the last vignette shows us a redefinition of the *urbs* as a space, indicating how historical evolution modifies geographical space by means of the sites constituted by *monumenta*.

In short, the complementarity of the *ekphrasis* conveys the Virgilian interpretation of the history and fate of Rome. The geographical description of Pallanteum therefore acquires a new dimension. Not only does the shield retell history, but also the geography speaks to the reader and thus becomes an essential element for the recognition and decoding of events. Additionally, both passages are woven around the theme of order: a geographical order and a chronological one. They are different, but they share the same principle of placing things in an order, one in space, the other in time. The Virgilian description of the places with his particular organization of space also strengthens the memory of the *urbs*, a city which treasures the memories of its history in its buildings. Thus the relationship and

interdependence of both descriptive instances is the basis of the relationship and interdependence between geography and history.

If, as Gian Biagio Conte affirms, the epic code is a privileged medium by which a society defines the status of model values, the management of this code involves an effect on this society. Thus, the complementarity between geography and historical account in Virgil's *Aeneid* is a successful attempt to make the urban geography a reservoir of Roman historical memory.⁵⁴

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