

**CIVILIZATION SEQUENCE 201**  
**VIRGIL'S AENEID**

**January 09, 2012**  
**Prof. C. S. Nassar**

**THESIS:** The AENEID is the national poem of the Roman Empire, and was written mainly to re-instill Roman virtues into the Romans. These virtues are embodied in Aeneas, the legendary Trojan hero who planted the seeds of Roman civilization.

**I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

- A. Virgil was born at a time when Rome was a republic
  - 1. There was civil unrest, wars, social disorder
  - 2. A period of disintegration
- B. AUGUSTUS: lived between 63 B.C. and 14 A.D., reigned between 27 B.C. and 14 A.D.
  - 1. He ended the republican period, declared himself Caesar
  - 2. Augustus Caesar was a great emperor; he restored peace, imposed order, encouraged
  - 3. The Pax Augusta or Augustan peace; developed into the Pax Romana, which lasted a hundred years
- C. It was with the Roman Empire that early Christianity clashed

**II. VIRGIL (70-19 B.C.)**

- A. PUBLIUS VERGILIUS MARO was born on a farm near Mantua in northern Italy
- B. He received a good education, went to Rome to perfect it, then devoted his life to poetry
- C. He admired Homer, wanted to give Rome a national poem on the scale of the Iliad and the Odyssey
- D. In 30 B.C. he began the Aeneid and spent the rest of his life on it
- E. He died in 19 B.C., after a journey to Greece during which he became ill
- F. He was a protege of Augustus, whom Aeneas foreshadows

**III. THE AENEID**

- A. Highly influenced by the Iliad and the Odyssey
  - 1. Books 1-6: The wanderings of Aeneas (parallel the Odyssey)
  - 2. Books 7-12: The battles Aeneas fought in Latium (parallel the Iliad)
  - 3. Its content and values are Roman, however
- B. The gods
  - 1. The same gods of the Greeks, but often with different names
  - 2. Jupiter (Zeus), Juno (Hera), Venus (Aphrodite), Neptune (Poseidon), Mercury (Hermes), Apollo
- C. The main theme of the Aeneid is the history of Rome
  - 1. Rome's destiny was willed and shaped by the gods (fate)
  - 2. Aeneas occupies a moment of time in the history of Rome
  - 3. Rome's mission is to unite the world and to bring peace to the world
    - a) And yet, this can be achieved only through centuries of war
    - b) A tremendous price
  - 4. Virgil: in the process of becoming great, Rome lost the virtues which made it great

**IV. THE VIRTUES OF AENEAS**

- A. Piety: a sense of loyalty, of reverence, of respect
  - 1. Aeneas is pious to his family
  - 2. He is pious to his country
  - 3. He is pious to the gods
  
- B. Dignity: a strong sense of one's position
  - 1. Aeneas has a sense of responsibility
  - 2. He has a respect for tradition
  - 3. He knows his place in society and in history
  - 4. He has manly courage (VIRTUS)
  
- C. Sober-mindedness: a serious, intelligent attitude towards life
  - 1. Aeneas is not flippant
  - 2. he is not simpleminded
  
- D. Sympathy: a sense of sorrow, of kinship with all that suffers
  - 1. Aeneas sympathizes with human suffering
  - 2. He feels sorry for Dido, for instance
  
- E. Stoicism: a philosophy that stresses reason, public duty, the endurance of suffering, and rewards and punishments after death

**V. AENEAS AND DIDO**

- A. Epicurus: keep away from passionate sexual love because its pain outweighs its pleasure
- B. Dido and Aeneas fall in love, with tragic consequences
- C. Aeneas is saved by his stoicism, while Dido perishes
- D. The function of sexual love is to produce offspring (Creusa) and to cement relationships (Lavinia)

### SOME CENTRAL QUOTATIONS

1. "Then Romulus shall receive the people, wearing with joy the tawny hide of the wolf which nursed him. The walls he builds will be the walls of Mars and he shall give his own name to his people, the Romans. On them I impose no limits of time or place. I have given them an empire that knows no end. .... So it has been decreed." (pp. 10 - 11)
2. The noise of the fires was growing louder and louder through the city and the tide of flame was rolling nearer. "Come then, dear father, up on my back. I shall take you on my shoulders. Your weight will be nothing to me. Whatever may come, danger or safety, it will be the same for both of us. Young Iulus can walk by my side and my wife can follow in my footsteps at a distance.... You, father, take in your arms the sacraments and the ancestral gods of our home. I am fresh from all the fighting and killing and it is not right for me to touch them till I have washed in a running stream." (p. 45)
3. "If Victory grants the day to us... I shall not order Italians to obey Trojans, nor do I seek royal power for myself. Both nations shall move forward into an everlasting treaty, undefeated and equal before the law. I shall give the sacraments and the gods. Latinus, the father of my bride, will have the armies and solemn authority in the state." (p. 169)
4. With these words Aeneas, shedding tears, tried to comfort that burning spirit, but grim-faced she kept her eyes upon the ground and did not look at him.... Then at last she rushed away, hating him.... Aeneas was no less stricken by the injustice of her fate and long did he gaze after her, pitying her as she went. (p. 128)
5. His thoughts moved swiftly now here, now there, darting in every possible direction and turning to every possible event, and as he pondered, this seemed to him a better course of action: he called (his men) and ordered them to fit out the fleet and tell no one. (p. 77)
6. Her attendants caught her as she fainted and carried her to her bed in her marble chamber. But Aeneas was faithful to his duty. Much as he longed to soothe her and console her sorrow, to talk to her and take away her pain, with many a groan and with a heart shaken by his great love, he nevertheless carried out the commands of the gods and went back to his ships. (p. 80)
7. But the queen had long since been suffering from love's deadly wound, feeding it with her blood and being consumed by its hidden fire.... (Aeneas's) features and the words he had spoken had pierced her heart and love gave her body no peace or rest. (p. 69)
8. Dido was on fire with love and wandered all over the city in her misery and madness like a wounded deer which a shepherd hunting in the woods of Crete has caught off guard, striking her from long range with steel-tipped shaft; the arrow flies and is left in her body without his knowing it; she runs away over all the wooded slopes of Mount Dicte, and sticking in her side is the arrow that will bring her death. (p. 71).