

***Aeneid*: Historical Background**

Virgil or Vergil (Publius Vergilius Maro)

- Epicurean sympathies: “Fortunate the man who was able to discover the causes of things, and trampled beneath his feet all fears and implacable fate and the clamor of greedy Acheron.” – Virgil, *Georgics* 2.490–2 (trans. T.E. Kinsey)
- Promised (in proem to *Georgics* 3) to write an epic glorifying Augustus and his military victories

The *Aeneid* in its time

- Some books of the *Aeneid* possibly read aloud to Augustus, circulated among friends
- *Aeneid* unfinished at Virgil’s death (half-lines although the story may be complete); he wished it to be burned?
- *Aeneid* an instant classic; school text

But how is this an epic in praise of Augustus?

- Ancestry
- Jupiter’s prophecy to Venus: Aeneas: “rule of law”; Augustus: chaining “the Frenzy of civil strife”
- end of prophecy is not Aeneas or even Romulus but Augustus

Jupiter’s prophecy to Venus

(*Aeneid* 1.304-355 in the Fagles translation)

- Aeneas will survive and win in Italy
- Ascanius becomes Iulus
 - Ilus (from Ilium = Troy) → Iulus
- Alba Longa
- Ilia + Mars = twins Romulus and Remus (raised by a wolf)
- Romulus → Romans
- “No limit in space or time”, “lords of the earth”
- Descendants of Trojans will even rule the former lands of Greek Homeric heroes
- “Trojan Caesar”—Julius from Iulus
- Deification
- “the Frenzy of civil strife” will be bound
- Augustus and his Rome are there, behind the scenes.

Carthage and Rome

- Punic Wars against Carthage in 3rd and 2nd centuries BC
- Punic = “Phoenician”; Carthage is in North Africa
- Juno knows the fate of Carthage at the hands of Trojan descendants: *Aeneid* 1.23-30
(and Dido & Aeneas parallel recent African queen & “Roman” ruler: Cleopatra & Mark Antony)