THE AENEID

VERGIL

A New Translation by

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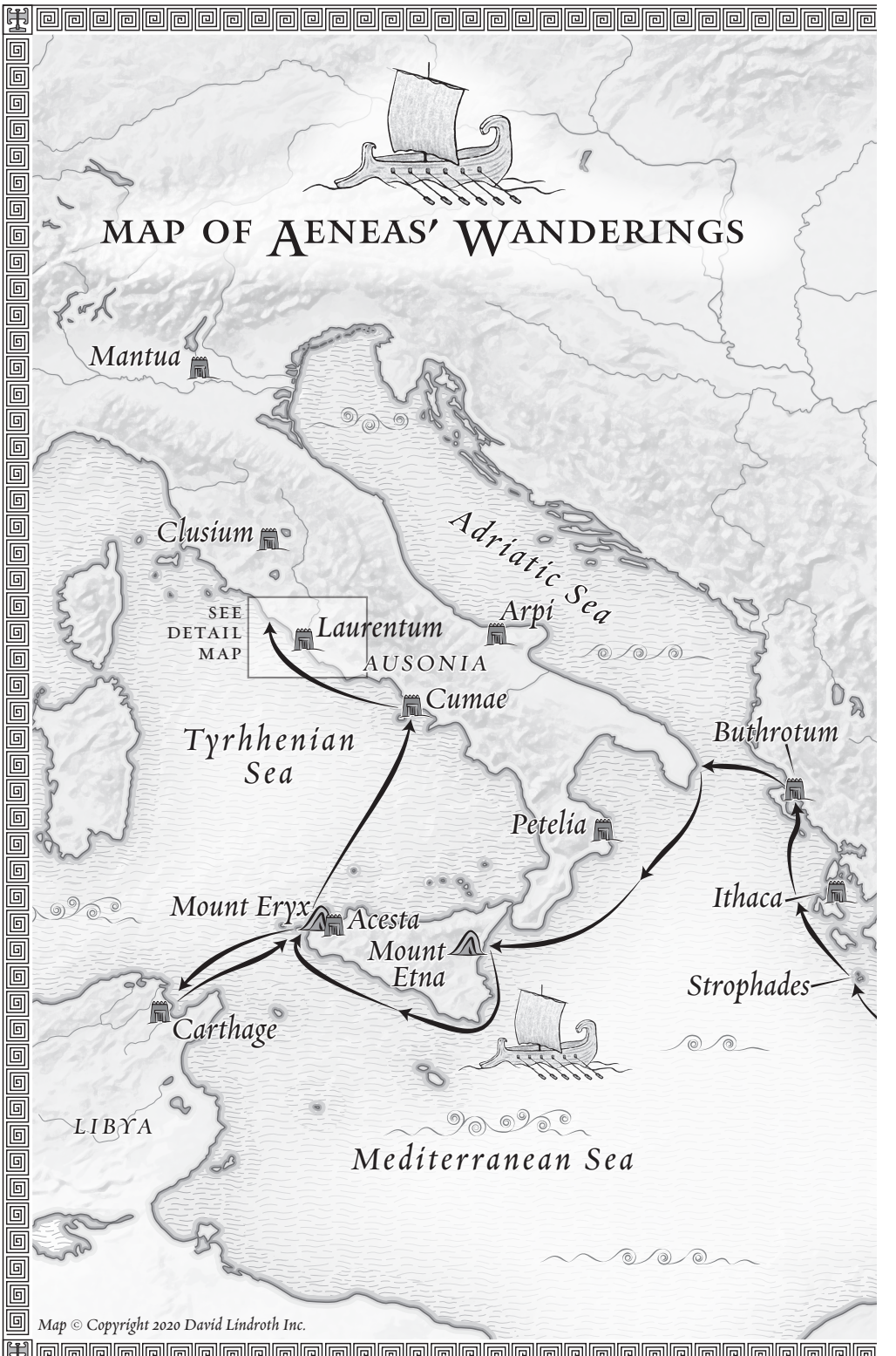
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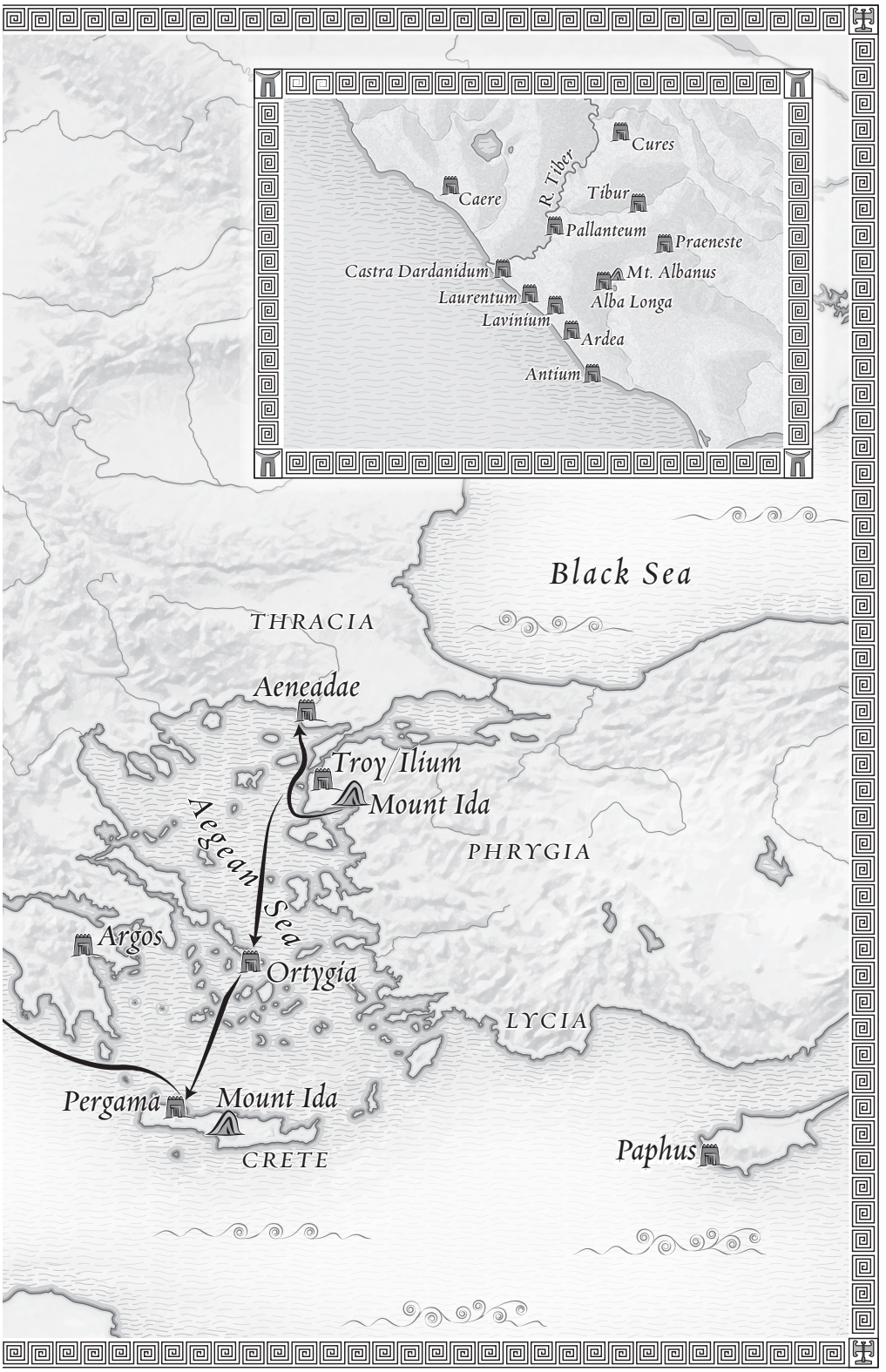
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INTRODUCTION TO THE POEM

Can Vergil's *Aeneid,* a two-thousand-year-old epic about the legendary ancestor of a Roman emperor, speak to us in the twenty-first century? The vast passage of time and the values of a different culture might suggest not. Yet in the West (and to some degree in the Byzantine East) we have never *not* been in conversation with the *Aeneid,* and the questions it asks have "no boundaries of time or space" (as Jupiter predicts of the Roman Empire itself at the epic's start). Through the ages it has served as an illuminating work to think *with* that reveals much about those who encounter its complex story. As successive centuries of scholars, teachers, and students interpreted the *Aeneid,* they exposed their own assumptions and beliefs about gender, politics, religion, morality, love, truth, nationalism, and destiny. For this reason, the history of the poem's reception has always had much to tell us about the values that those generations brought with them to the encounter. And it also invites us to look at ourselves, whether we count it as a classic in our own intellectual heritage or we come to it from outside the system of meanings and associations that undergird Western culture. In an age of refugees seeking to escape their war-torn homelands, an age of rising nationalism across the globe, an age in which many in Europe and the United States are suspicious of "the East" and its religious differences—in *our* age, that is—the *Aeneid* has more to say to us than ever, especially about the costs (and, to be fair, benefits) of national ideologies and the way that myths of origins and heroes are created. Make of this epic what we will, it insists on being a relevant conversational partner. And this is part of

its genius. The *Aeneid,* a deeply thoughtful poem by a man who'd lived through the horrors of war and the compromises of peace, has proven to be timeless.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE POEM'S RECEPTION

Some great works of art are only accepted as canonical with the passage of time. But Vergil's *Aeneid* was an essential part of the canon right from the start. It was praised by other Roman poets as a great national epic, taken as such by the imperial family, and adopted in the Roman school curriculum. Early commentators took it to be praising the emperor Augustus by depicting his putative ancestor Aeneas as a hero. In the fourth or early fifth century, M. Honoratus Servius claimed in the introductory note to his *In Vergilii Aeneidem commentarii* that "Virgil's intention is to imitate Homer and to praise Augustus by means of his ancestors." Likewise, Tiberius Claudius Donatus at the start of his *Interpretationes Vergilianae* opined that the poet "had to depict Aeneas as a worthy first ancestor of Augustus, in whose honor the poem was written." It seemed incontrovertible to them that a poem about a pious man who came, saw, and conquered could not be read otherwise, and there are still readers today who take the same meaning from it. This is not without reason: Vergil was part of the inner circle of Maecenas, a friend of Augustus and a patron of the arts. He had even read parts of the poem to the emperor himself.*

In the early Christian community, however, there were many who felt that pagan poetry should not be read at all. They argued that such poetry contained false values and baseless myths, and portrayed the gods (plural) as schemers and rapists. In the fourth century, figures such as the Church father Jerome argued that

* For the evidence that Vergil sent parts of the poem to Augustus as he composed, and even recited, Books 2, 4, and 6 in front of the royal family, see Donatus' *Life of Vergil* 32; Servius' Commentary on *Aeneid* 4.323, 6.861. Neither of these sources suggests that Augustus found anything questionable in the narrative.

Roman literature was deleterious to the Christian's relationship to God, and Augustine famously revealed in the first book of his *Confessions* that he wept over the suicide of the Carthaginian queen Dido in the *Aeneid* instead of his own benighted soul. But later Christian medievalists such as Fulgentius (sixth century CE) and Bernard Silvestris (twelfth century CE) swept aside such problems by reading the poem allegorically as a kind of bildungsroman of the good Christian everyman.* According to this interpretation, the storm off Carthage in Book 1 represented the moment of a man's birth into the "shore of light," while Aeneas' love affair with Dido (Book 4) stood for the lusty and tumultuous teenage years. (Unsurprisingly, the Christian allegorizers were at a loss for what to do with most of the second half, especially the rather unchristian denouement in which the Christian everyman slaughters his prostrate enemy.) Another Christian allegorizer, Dante Alighieri, famously made Vergil his guide through Hell in the *Inferno*. Even if he jettisoned Vergil soon after the tour, Dante was influenced by the widely shared belief that Vergil had sensed the coming of Christ ahead of his time, mostly because Vergil in his Fourth *Eclogue* hailed a mysterious child as the bringer of a new golden age. As late as 1957, T. S. Eliot, abandoning allegory, described Aeneas as the prototype of a "Christian hero" in his essay "Virgil and the Christian World," claiming that the Vergilian world was "approximate to a Christian world in the choice, order, and relationship of its values" and that "Virgil, among classical Latin poets or prose writers, is uniquely near to Christianity" because uniquely "civilized."†

The *Aeneid* was also pressed into political service when convenient, which was often. Until the last century, most readers accepted its explicit pro-imperial program as a praiseworthy one, and adapted it to different political situations and different mores.‡ As Philip Hardie has remarked in *The Last Trojan Hero,* the

* Naturally, such a reading involves ignoring many aspects of the poem as we have it.

† Eliot (1957), 147.

‡ On the earlier part of the reception tradition, see especially Ziolkowski and Putnam (2008).

many moments in which the *Aeneid* shows one regime yielding to another rendered it "a natural text for successive installments of the *translatio imperii* [the transfer of power] . . . and the *translatio studii,* the transfer of education and culture from Greece to Rome, and thence to other countries and other languages."* From the conqueror Charlemagne, crowned "King of the Romans" by Pope Leo III in the year 800, to the "Holy Roman Empire" that followed, from the French and British monarchies to the rise of Mussolini, the *Aeneid*'s vision of a triumphant and endless Roman Empire has underpinned any number of imperial visions. Benito Mussolini's twentieth-century appropriation of the epic was particularly straightforward, inasmuch as he portrayed himself as the inheritor of Augustus' rule and a destined leader. The 1937–38 exhibit *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* (The Augustan Demonstration of Romanness) celebrated the two thousandth birthday of the emperor Augustus by analogizing Mussolini's military ambitions to those of Augustus and to the content of the *Aeneid* itself. Maps of Aeneas' voyage and memorials to "Pater Aeneas" featured prominently in the first part of the exhibit, helping Mussolini to create a legendary past for his divinely ordained empire. Earlier, the New England settlers had invoked the Trojan conquest of native Italians to justify the events of King Philip's War (1675–78),† while in nineteenth-century America, the story of a Trojan's westward voyage and his fulfillment of divine command resonated (for some) with the dubious concept of manifest destiny.‡ Over the centuries, the *Aeneid* buoyed the belief of Western nations in their right to expand, pacify, and in some cases colonize the "uncivilized other"; in their schools, it was a canonical text for the same (male) readers who, as adults, would populate new generations of the elite.

Today, however, Classics has lost its status as the *sine qua non* edu-

* Hardie (2014), 103.

† See Shields (2001).

‡ The Founding Fathers had been a little more wary, admiring the Roman republic but not so much the empire that Julius Caesar was pivotal in bringing into existence.

cational matter of a liberal education and an ideal training for a life in politics. At the same time, and perhaps uncoincidentally, the *Aeneid* is now rarely treated as a positive endorsement of empire-mongering, or of autocracy. Instead, we modern readers often feel the epic invites us to reflect on the negative costs of empire, the way history belongs to the victors, and the discredited voices that fall out of memory. I have mentioned refugees, too, and they populate the epic, but not in any simple way. It is a fugitive's false claims that lead to Troy's fall; it is sympathy for an exile that brings down Carthage; Aeneas himself is a refugee smiled on (eventually) by fate, and his switch from victim to conqueror gives us a perspective from which to view his new victims.* Among these many, ongoing undulations in what the *Aeneid* seems to mean, the only thing that has not changed in all this time is the plot of the epic itself.

THE PLOT OF THE *AENEID*

The *Aeneid* is an account of how a refugee from Asia—Aeneas, a member of the royal family of Troy—led his followers west to establish a new empire in Italy. After his city is destroyed by the Greeks in the Trojan War, Aeneas sets sail with other survivors in the hope of finding a new land to settle. It's not an easy voyage, for although he is fated—so Jupiter reveals in Book 1—to found the Roman Empire in Italy, Jupiter's wife, Juno, cannot forget the wrongs done her by the Trojans, and she will persecute the refugee until the very end of the poem. The first time we see Aeneas, his ship battered by a storm sent by Juno, he is wishing that he had died on the fields of Troy at the hands of his enemy Diomedes. A

* David Quint (1993) suggests that Vergil intends the Odyssean wanderings of Books 1 through 6 to be superseded by the Iliadic war of the second half of the epic, thus mirroring a thematic and political transition: "The process by which the Trojans go from being losers to winners thus matches the movement in the poem from one narrative form to another, from romance to epic" (50).

startling sentiment for an epic hero, and certainly a hint that we are not dealing here with an Achilles or an Odysseus. At this point, Aeneas resembles neither a great warrior nor a wily liar; the adjective Vergil has chosen for him is "pious," a piety that entails loyalty to his father, his family, and his gods. It is this piety especially (it is announced to us already in line 10 of Book 1) that drives him onward in the search for a new homeland, one that he eventually understands will be on the far western coast of Italy.

The epic starts *in medias res*. Though we don't know the details of his past yet, Aeneas has already had many adventures since he left Troy, and there are many yet to come. Landing on the shores of North Africa, Aeneas meets his mother, Venus, who directs him to Queen Dido's city, Carthage. We learn that Dido, too, has suffered: she fled from her native Tyre after her brother, King Pygmalion, killed her wealthy husband, Sychaeus. Like Aeneas, she has been storm-tossed, and she, too, has sought—and founded—a new city for her followers. She is the perfect audience for his tale.

In the gripping account of tragedy, deceit, and suffering that makes up Books 2 and 3, Aeneas tells Dido and their dining companions his story from the moment Troy fell. Believing the account of a lying Greek named Sinon who claimed that the Greeks had left and that the Trojan Horse would bring the Trojans luck, the Trojans eagerly wheeled it up to the Acropolis. That night Sinon let the Greek soldiers out of its belly. They opened the gates of the city to their army and destroyed Troy, murdering its men, enslaving its women and children, and burning its buildings to the ground. After a valiant effort to defend the city, Aeneas says, he escaped with his father Anchises, his son, and his household gods.

Because the Trojans misinterpreted prophecies along their voyage, Aeneas' group had to abandon the colonies they started in Thrace, Crete, and the Strophades Islands, all of which met with misfortune or bad omens. Finally, in Buthrotum (a Greek city in Epirus), Aeneas learned his destiny from the seer Helenus: he must seek out Italy, from which base his descendants would rule the entire world. But first he would have to consult the Sibyl in Cumae

(on the western coast of Italy) for further guidance. On his way there, he and his crew were blown off course to Africa. Here Aeneas ends the story he tells the queen.

Thanks to the conniving of Venus and her son Amor, Dido has fallen desperately in love with the eloquent Trojan stranger by the time he finishes his speech. Juno is pleased: she wants Dido and Aeneas married so that he'll forget his mission to found a city in Italy. This city, fate has decreed, will defeat her beloved Carthage one day—better it should not exist! Aeneas and Dido consummate their relationship on a hunting trip, and Dido, we know, considers it marriage (as does Juno, the goddess of marriage). Aeneas contentedly helps Dido build up Carthage until Jupiter warns him it is time to leave. In response to his abandonment, Dido kills herself.

Book 5 describes the "Trojan Games" in Sicily, a series of athletic competitions set up by Aeneas in honor of his father. Next, in Book 6, Aeneas visits the Sibyl at Cumae. She prepares him for the famous *katabasis* (descent to the Underworld), where he will meet his recently deceased father. They find Anchises in the blessed fields of Elysium, where he describes the reincarnation or "metempsychosis" of the souls in the Underworld as Aeneas and his father watch a parade of future Roman heroes. Anchises warns Aeneas: as the Romans conquer the world, they must remember to "rule / the world with law, impose [their] ways on peace / grant the conquered clemency, and crush the proud in war" (6.851–53). Then the Sibyl leads Aeneas out of the Underworld through the ivory gates of false dreams rather than the alternative, the gate of horn through which true visions pass.

At this point, the "Odyssean" half of the poem is over, and Aeneas will be almost constantly at war from Book 7 through Book 12 of the epic. The Trojan ships voyage up the river Tiber to Latium, their final destination, where Aeneas persuades Latinus, king of the Latins, to give him his daughter Lavinia in marriage. Lavinia has already been promised to a local king, the Rutulian Turnus, and Juno steps in again, sending the Fury Allecto to madden both Lavinia's mother, Amata, and Turnus. Meanwhile, Aeneas' son Asca-

THE AENEID

BOOK I

LANDFALL AT CARTHAGE

My song is of war and a man: a refugee by fate,
the first from Troy to Italy's Lavinian shores,
battered much on land and sea by blows from gods
obliging brutal Juno's unforgetting rage;
he suffered much in war as well, all to plant
his town and gods in Latium. From here would rise
the Latin race, the Alban lords, and Rome's high walls.

Remember for me, Muse. Tell me the reasons. What pain,
what insult to her power, moved the queen of gods
to drive a man famous for piety* through misery
on misery? Can such anger grip gods' minds?

An ancient city built by colonists from Tyre
faced Italy and Tiber's mouth across the sea:
wealthy Carthage, fierce and fond of waging war.
They say that Juno loved her best; even Samos
came in second. Here the goddess kept her weapons
and her chariot; this land would rule the world
if fate allowed. This was her aim and hope.
But she'd heard that men of Trojan blood
would topple Carthage and her heights one day.
They'd be a people proud in war, an empire
fatal for her Libya. This was what the Fates had
spun, this was Juno's fear. She remembered
how she'd fought at Troy to help her cherished Greeks.

Still other reasons for her rage and bile
remained deep-rooted in her heart: Paris' scornful
verdict on her beauty, the honors paid by Jove
to kidnapped Ganymede, her hatred for that race.*
Enflamed by this, she barred from Latium
the sea-tossed Trojans, the few left by the Greeks
and cruel Achilles. They roamed for many years,
over many oceans, forced on by the Fates.
To found the Roman race required such great effort.

Sicily had slipped from sight. The Trojans gladly
sailed for open sea, their bronze prows churning foam.
But Juno, nursing her eternal wound, thought
to herself: "Am *I* to leave off from my plan
and fail to turn the Trojan king from Italy?
It seems that Fate forbids it. Then how could Pallas
burn the Argive fleet and drown its crew, just to
punish the mad crime of Ajax, son of Oïleus?*
On her own, she hurled Jove's* lightning from the clouds,
wrecked the ships, and whipped up waves with wind;
she grabbed up Ajax in a gust and spiked him on sharp
reefs—the man puffed fire from his punctured chest!
But *me,* the queen of all the gods, Jove's wife
and sister too, for years I've had to fight
against a single race! *Now* who'll worship me
or put gifts on my altars as a supplicant?"

Her hot heart fixed on these thoughts, Queen Juno reached
Aeolia, a land that teemed with storms and clouds.
In his colossal cave, King Aeolus
ruled the warring winds and howling gales
and locked them up inside. They roared around the latches
outraged. Over them, the mountain murmured
mightily. Aeolus, sitting in his stronghold,

scepter in his hand, soothed their angry spirits.
Otherwise, they'd seize the oceans, lands,
and deepest sky, and blast them all away.
It was this fear that made the mighty Father
hide them in a lightless cave and heap mountains
on top. He chose a king who swore he'd curb
the winds or free their reins as he was told.
Now Juno came to wheedle him: "Aeolus,
the father of the gods and king of men
chose you to calm the waves or whip them up with wind.
A race I hate travels the Tuscan sea:
they bring the beaten gods of Troy to Italy.
Rouse the winds to gale-force, sink the ships,
or scatter them and fling the crew into the sea.
In my retinue are fourteen gorgeous nymphs;
Deiopea is the loveliest of all. She's yours—
just do me this favor. I'll join you both
in lasting marriage, so she'll spend her years
with you and make you father to fair children."

Aeolus said: "Your task, O Queen, is to know
your wish and will; mine, to make it happen.
Thanks to you, I have this little kingdom
and Jupiter's goodwill, I dine with gods,
I'm master of the storms and wild weather."

Saying this, he struck the hollow mountain
with the butt-end of his spear. A battle-line
of winds rushed out the rift and swept over the lands.
Notus, Eurus, and Africus, full of storms,*
settled on the sea as one and churned it
from its bed; they rolled huge waves to shore.
Next came the shouts of men, the shriek of ropes.
At once, storm-clouds snatched the sky from sight.

Black night brooded on the sea. The heavens
thundered, frequent flashes tore the dark.
All signs warned the men that death had come.

At once Aeneas' knees buckled with chill.
He groaned and held up both hands to the stars:
"Three and four times fortunate, all you who died
by Troy's high walls under your fathers' gaze!
O Diomedes, bravest of the Greeks!
I wish I'd fallen on Troy's fields, my blood spilled
by your strong right hand, where fierce Hector perished
on Achilles' spear, and huge Sarpedon too;
where Simoïs rolls in its stream so many shields
and helmets, so many bodies of the brave."

As he spoke, the howling north wind hit the sails
head-on and pushed the sea up to the stars.
The oars snapped and the ship swung broadside
to the waves; a wall of water crashed on deck.
Some sailors hung on crests, some saw seabed
as each wave loomed up. The sea boiled with sand.
Notus snatched three ships and hurled them onto reefs
that lurked mid-sea, the ones Italians call Altars,
huge spines near the surface. Eurus drove
three boats into the shoals, a sorry sight, and smashed
them on the rocks. Sand built up around them.
Before Aeneas' eyes, a giant wave broke on
the ship of good Orontes and his Lycians.
It threw the helmsman off the deck headfirst into
wild waters. Eddies spun the ship around
three times, then the raging undertow engulfed it.
A few men surfaced in the vast abyss. Weapons,*
planks, and Trojan treasure floated in the waves.
The storm seized Ilioneus' sturdy ship,
brave Achates' ship, Abas' ship, and old

Aletes' ship. They all let in fatal water
through the hulls' loose seams and gaping cracks.

Now Neptune sensed the sea's chaos and clamor,
the storm Aeolus sent. He felt the churning
of the sluggish waters of the deep. Perplexed,
he raised his peaceful face and scanned the sea.
He saw Aeneas' wave-tossed ships, the Trojans
swamped by swells and the ruin of the sky.
Juno's angry treachery was clear to him.
He called Eurus and Zephyrus,* and said to them:

"Is it your noble birth that makes you bold?
You winds now dare to mingle sky and earth
and stir up waves without permission? Why,
I should—But first I'll soothe the wild sea. Then
you'll get what you deserve, and it won't be in words!
Get out of here, now, and tell your king:
rule over the sea and savage trident's *mine*
by lot, not his. *His* kingdom is the cave
where you live, Eurus. Let him strut in that court
and rule there—once his winds are jailed."

Faster than his words, Neptune soothed the swells,
routed huddled clouds, brought back the sun.
Cymothoe and Triton pried the ships off crags;
Neptune helped them with his trident. He cleared
pathways through long shoals and calmed the sea,
skimming wave-crests lightly in his chariot.
Just as riots often fester in great crowds
when the common mob goes mad; rocks and
firebrands fly, the weapons rage supplies;*
but if they see a man of weight in piety
and service, they hush and wait to hear him;
he guides their minds and soothes their hearts with words—