Virgil, *Aeneid* I.257-296

Jupiter outlines the future descendants of Aeneas – Rome’s great leaders

**Name of the author:** Virgil  
**Date:** 29 BCE to 19 BCE  
**Language:** Latin  
**Category:** Roman  
**Literary genre:** Epic and Poetry

**Title of work:** Aeneid  
**Reference:** I.257-296

**Commentary:**

In this passage, Jupiter calms a distressed Venus, angry at the continued suffering of Aeneas and his fellow Trojans. Jupiter offers a tripartite assurance of his promise that they will be raised up to glory once again through their founding of Rome. First and foremost his plan for them is *imnota*, and their destiny cannot be changed, secondly, his *promissa* of a home in Lavinium (Italy) will be honoured, and finally, Aeneas will be raised up (*sublimis*), and given godly status (I.257-260). Significantly, Venus is more concerned with the fact that Aeneas's troubles will prevent the glory that the founding of Rome will bring – Jupiter's consolation focuses purely on addressing this worry, rather than comforting a mother worried about her son's welfare. Jupiter offers a simple version of Roman history here, which will be expanded in more detail by Anchises, Aeneas's father, in book VI. After battling for three years in Latium, Aeneas will be victorious, and will lay the foundations for stability and security, physically with city walls (*moenia*), and morally with laws and customs (*mores*). The latter is exemplified later on with the identification of the Romans as the “nation (*gens*) of the toga”. In the context of the Aeneid's broader mission, this new era not only represents the founding of the Roman nation and the establishment of Roman peace, but all the hopes of the new Augustan age.

Commentators such as Julia Hejduk and James O'Hara argue that contrary to the “optimistic” readings of this passage offered by many scholars, Jupiter’s representation of future peace is rather bleak. This entire passage contains only one word with positive overtones (*mitescent*, “soften”), and this softening of the ages itself is only characterised as an absence of war. The usual Roman depictions of peace, such as fertility, freedom, and art (e.g. the imagery on the Ara Pacis) are nowhere to be seen here. It seems that for Jupiter, Roman imperium is justified, in Julia Hejduk’s words, simply by a “theology of victory” (see “Jupiter’s *Aeneid*,” p. 282-292). Any moral right that the Romans have to rule is irrelevant; they must be entitled to rulership because they were successful in bringing it about. However, this bleakness is precisely what Augustus’s rule will bring to an end, and so while Jupiter’s language is at times harrowing, this serves to form an even more striking contrast between events pre and post-Augustus.

We see in this passage one of the most characteristic features of the Aeneid, the interweaving of the past and the present. As Aaron Seider discusses in his *Memory in Vergil's Aeneid*, remembrance, veneration, and commemoration of past events and figures were central to the Roman way of life (from funerary rites to the erection of monuments). Establishing ancient, divine roots for Augustus was one of Virgil's key objectives. Towards this end, the different names given to Aeneas’s son, Ascanius, reinforce his Trojan roots (Ilius = Ilium, i.e. Troy) and connect him to Rome by naming him as the ancestor of the Julian family (Iulus = Julius). Ascanius rules in Lavinium for thirty years before founding Alba Longa, somewhat oddly referred to as the *gens Hectorea*. Hector, killed in battle at Troy, and left without heirs, serves purely to remind the reader of Rome's Trojan origins. Three-hundred years later Romulus and Remus will be born to the Trojan-named priestess Ilia and Mars, the Roman god of war. This union produces the people of Rome, which Jupiter makes explicit by highlighting the wordplay between Romulus and Romanus. Jupiter's assurances of Rome's military and civic triumph culminate with the phrase *imperium sine fine dedi*, which emphasises that Rome’s dominion has always been part of his divine will, and that it is boundless, not limited in time or space.
The reference to the Roman conquests of three Greek towns (2nd century BCE), cements the military superiority of Rome, and once again looks to the Trojan past with the mention of Aeneas’s great-grandfather, Assaracus. According to Richard Jenkyns (Virgil’s Experience, p. 394-396), connecting Roman conquerors of Greece with a figure from three generations before the Trojan War stretches the historical paradox of this passage somewhat. The climax, however, comes in the identification of Trojanus Caesar, the Julian name described as originating in the Trojan Iulus. It is finally as if “Troy is subsumed in Rome”, the final names we read in the passage being completely Roman: Fides, Vesta, Quirinus, and Remus. It makes most sense to understand this deified – he is “welcom[ed] to heaven” (I.290) – “Trojan Caesar” (I.289) as Julius Caesar, with Augustus then implied a few verses later. Augustus’s era of peace is introduced by tum (“then”), with the years of civil war following Julius Caesar’s death glossed over to emphasise the ceasing of wars that the former will preside over. Romulus/Quirinus and Remus are mentioned in between Julius Caesar and Augustus at the end of the passage (I.292-293) in a symbolic reconciliation of the twins, which represents the peace and lawful order that Augustus ushers in after Julius Caesar’s death. Similarly, the binding of furor impius (impious Rage) in verse 294-295 represents the end of civil war, the work of Augustus.

Keywords in the original language:

- bellum
- fama
- fatum
- imperium
- ius
- mos
- populus
- votum

Thematic keywords in English:

- Aeneas
- Alba Longa
- apotheosis
- Augustus
- empire
- eternity of the Roman empire
- fate
- glory
- Golden Age
- Italy
- Iulus
- Julius Caesar
- Jupiter
- Lavinium
- law
- nation
- peace
- Remus
- Roman people
- Romulus
- Trojans
- Venus

  Jones, Peter, Reading Virgil: Aeneid I and II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)
Seider, Aaron M., Memory in Vergil’s Aeneid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

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Ara Pacis (13-9 BCE)_Architecture

Reconstruction of the Ara Pacis

Ara Pacis: frontal view

Ara Pacis: side view

Ara Pacis: side view

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