THE SHIELD OF ARGIVE ABAS AT AENEID 3.286

Aeneas' stopover at Actium has struck most readers as an Augustan interlude in the odyssey of Aeneid 3. The scene is conspicuous among the other episodes in the trip for its brevity and for the fact that it does not advance the action toward the Trojan exiles' Italian goal. Instead the accent falls on prefiguring actions of Aeneas' distinguished descendant, Octavian, after he achieved victory over Antony at the same site in 31 B.C. Where the future Augustus dedicated spoils from the battle to Actian Apollo and instituted a festival called the Actian Games, the Trojans celebrate athletic games at Actium and their leader affixes an enemy trophy to the temple of Apollo there.¹ This last act, however, Aeneas' dedicatio, points allusively to the mythical past as well as to the Augustan future. To appreciate the full force of that complex reference, which enriches the thematics of the entire scene, hinges on our recognition of a mythological figure whose identity has been long in doubt. The narrator Aeneas reports that he hung up on Apollo's shrine 'the bronze shield worn by great Abas' (3.286 'aere cavo clipeum, magni gestamen Abantis'). Who is this Abas, and why is his mention here significant?

Since, like Homer, Virgil calls by the name Abas heroes of different nationalities—Trojan, Etruscan, Greek²—and since the other two instances in the *Aeneid* appear to be Virgilian inventions, we might be tempted to conclude that he is here simply applying an all-purpose name to a previously unknown Greek. That the single Homeric Greek usage is in the plural, to the Abantes from Euboea in the catalog of Greek warriors (*Iliad* 2.536ff.), perhaps further suggests that Virgil has no particular individual in mind.³ But Aeneas says he hung up 'clipeum *magni* gestamen Abantis',

- ¹ The Augustan background to the scene is even more extensive: Octavian restored and enlarged the Temple of Apollo at Actium and founded the town Nicopolis at the site of his camp. Dio twice refers to dedications in Apollo's honor from the naval spoils: Octavian offered several ships to Actian Apollo, presumably at the temple (51.1.2), and adorned the structure erected at the site of his camp, which contained a shrine of Apollo, with the beaks of the ships captured in the battle (51.1.3). Since 28 B.C. saw both the inauguration of the Actian Games (in Rome and Nicopolis) and the dedication of the Palatine Temple of Apollo, Virgil's mention of a lustration in honor of Jupiter (3.279) may point toward another major religious event of the same year, the censorial lustratio (see Robert B. Lloyd, 'On Aeneid, III, 270-80', AJP 75 [1954], 297-8). The two fullest surviving accounts of Octavian's memorialization of his victory at its site (Suet. Div. Aug. 18 and Dio 51.1.1-3) single out the same four measures (dedications; games; city; Temple of Apollo), to all of which Virgil alludes in this episode (on the city cf. 3.276 parvae succedimus urbi with R. D. Williams ad loc. [P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Tertius, Oxford, 1962]). It is possible that Aeneas' offering of the shield would have evoked yet another contemporary Augustan event, namely, the senate's vote of a gold shield for Augustus in 27 B.C., which was hung up in the Curia Julia (Res Gestae 34.2). The referee for CQ suggests that, since this shield is in fact known through a provincial copy from Arles (CIL 9.5811), the Temple of Apollo at Actium might have been another suitable repository for another copy, alluded to here by Virgil. Be that as it may, to my mind Virgil's primary Augustan reference here seems to be to the naval dedications.
- ² At 1.121 one of the Trojan leaders lost in the great storm; an Etruscan ally of Aeneas in 10.170 & 427. Homer has Abantes in possession of Euboea in the catalog of Greek warriors (*Iliad* 2.536 & 541 [= 4.464]), and a Trojan named Abas at 5.148. Constituent elements of these three Virgilian references are indebted to the Homeric: the name as Trojan at Aen. 1.121 and Il. 5.148; the listing in a catalog of warriors at Aen. 10.170 and Il. 2.536ff.; Abas as a victim killed in an aristeia at Aen. 10.427 and Il. 5.148.
- ³ Virgil seems, in fact, to be imitating this passage in our verse: note the close verbal, metrical, and syntactical correspondences between *Iliad* 2.541 (= 4.464) $\mu\epsilon\gamma\alpha\theta\dot{\nu}\mu\omega\nu$ $\dot{a}\rho\chi\dot{o}s$ 'Aβάντων / and Aeneid 3.286 'magni gestamen Abantis' /. But such imitation does not rule out the

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'the shield worn by great Abas.' And whenever Virgil uses the epithet magnus of a person, it is always to characterize a well-known figure.⁴ Now, Servius Danielis (on 3.286) identifies the Virgilian Abas in question with just such a figure, with Abas, the son of Lynceus and Hypermnestra, a hero whose fame rested primarily on a magnificent shield which brought victory to his native Argos even after his death.⁵ Since Abas was a very early king of Argos who lived many generations before the Trojan War, Virgil cannot have meant that Aeneas fought this Greek hero without committing a gross anachronism.⁶ Therefore, commentators have been reluctant to accept Servius Danielis' identification.⁷ Forbiger, however, long ago suggested a way around the anachronism: Aeneas will have conquered and despoiled an Argive descendant of the great Abas who carried the latter's renowned clipeus in battle.⁸ This interpretation has much to recommend it; but, although other commentators have flirted with the idea both before and after Forbiger,⁹ no one has fully developed or justified the suggestion.

It is difficult to believe that Virgil's verse would not immediately bring to the minds of ancient readers the famous Abas of Argos. For the story of this Abas resonates so strongly in the context. From 'Hyginus' we learn that a shield originally worn by Abas' grandfather Danaus as a youth, who later dedicated it to Hera in her Argive temple, was given to Abas by his father in the same temple. ¹⁰ Abas himself eventually

possibility that, as I argue, Virgil is here referring to a specific individual not mentioned by Homer.

- ⁴ Acestes (9.128), Achates (10.344), Achilles (11.438; *Ecl.* 4.36), Aeneas (9.787, 10.159 & 830), Anchises (5.99, 8.168), Cato (6.841), Caesar (*Georg.* 4.560), Diomedes (8.9), Hector (6.166), Hercules (8.103), Iulus (1.288), Orion (10.763), Theseus (6.122), Turnus (10.503). The first two named may seem to be exceptions, but both are treated as well-known figures in the *Aeneid.*
- ⁵ D. Servius on *Aeneid* 3.286. Servius' comment goes in a different direction, identifying Abas as one of the Greeks killed with Androgeos at Troy in Book 2.
- ⁶ This clashes with the usual sorts of anachronism in the *Aeneid*, for a survey of which see N. Horsfall in *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* (Rome, 1984), 1.151–4 s.v. 'anachronismi', with bibliography.
- ⁷ J. Conington and H. Nettleship, *The Works of Virgil* (London, 1884): 'Virg. can hardly be thinking of this mythical person, whose date would involve an anachronism here'; they do note, however, two striking 'coincidences' between Virgil's episode and the legend of Argive Abas, on which see below. Cf. J. W. MacKail, *The Aeneid* (Oxford, 1930): 'Who this Abas was... there are no means of determining; Virgil was presumably following some local legend of which there is no record.' H. J. Rose, commenting on Servius Danielis' supplement to the story in Hyginus 170, says 'hunc autem Abantem qui apud ipsum Vergilium quaerunt, operam perdunt' (*Hygini Fabulae* [Leiden, 2nd ed., 1963], 120. R. D. Williams mentions Abas of Argos but is noncommittal. An exception is P. Hofman Peerlkamp, *P. Virgilii Maronis Aeneidos Libri I-VI* (Leiden, 1893), ad loc.: 'Nobilissimus autem erat hic Abantis clipeus.' See also note 9 below.
- ⁸ A. Forbiger, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera* II (Leipzig, 1873): 'Alludit autem poeta ad celeberrimum illum clipeum, quem Abas, antiquissimus Argivorum rex, Lyncei f. Perseique avus, in Iunonis templo affixit, ut ab eo, qui in ludis Argis instituendis victoriam reportasset, in sollemni pompa praemii loco gestaretur... Unum igitur ex posteris huius Abantis Maro ab Aenea in bello Troiano occisum armisque spoliatum esse fingit.'
- ⁹ C. G. Heyne notes, in an excursus devoted to the subject (# IX in *P. Vergilii Maronis Opera* [London, 1793], 2.436; cf. Heyne-Wagner [Leipzig and London, 1832], 2.580-81): '... fingere tacite potuit, fuisse unum ex Argivis principibus, qui ab Abante ad se hereditate transmissum clipeum gestaret; quem a se caesum Aeneas spoliaverit.' Cf. T. E. Page, *The Aeneid of Virgil* (London and New York, 1894 repr. 1962), ad loc.: 'Perhaps Virgil supposes this shield to have been taken by some Argive warrior to Troy and there won by Aeneas'; and on 5.360: '... the "shield of Abas", which Aeneas dedicates, seems to be the famous "shield of Abas" usually kept in the temple of Juno at Argos, and which must have been brought to Troy by some Argive champion from whom Aeneas had won it.' Note the qualification in each instance. Most recently, G. D'Anna in the *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* 1.1-2 s.v. 'Abante' agrees with Forbiger's suggestion.

rededicated the weapon to Hera. Aeneas, then, is not simply dedicating enemy spoils; he rather precisely matches the Greek hero in question by affixing this *clipeus* to a deity's temple. The Trojan hero appropriates the triumphal gesture of the great Argive champion at the same time that he prefigures the dedications of Octavian. Moreover, three ancient authorities attribute the very invention of shields—presumably Greek shields are meant—to this Abas or his two sons. Aeneas' particular offering was thus chosen for its momentous symbolic value: the leader of those who survived the Greeks' destruction of Troy dedicates the archetypal Greek $d\sigma\pi is$.

Apparently this event was part of the pre-Virgilian legend of Aeneas. Servius Danielis reports that Aeneas had consecrated this shield in a temple at Samothrace. 13 If this is correct, then Virgil here follows his common practice of transferring actions from their traditional site in the journey to another.¹⁴ In so doing, he also intensifies the meaning of Aeneas' dedication of Abas' shield. In contrast to the traditional legend of Aeneas' travels, in which he makes numerous offerings to deities, this dedication is a singular act in Aeneid 3.15 Like the games on the shore that precede it, Aeneas' offering at the temple seems to be an act of thanksgiving for having just come through so many Greek areas unscathed: 'iuvat evasisse tot urbes / Argolicas mediosque fugam tenuisse per hostis' (3.282-3). 16 In view of the provenience of the particular object offered to Apollo, it is perhaps significant that Aeneas here terms the threatening cities Argolicas, 'Argive.' To offer an enemy weapon, however, also asserts a victory of sorts over that enemy, an assertion that coheres with Aeneas' view of the Trojan War in Book 2. There he speaks of the war as a moral victory for the Trojans, who had beaten the Greeks in battle but were overcome by deceit and divine opposition (cf. 2.13 and 195–8). Virgil enhances this added signification by placing the event at Actium, where it anticipates Octavian's climactic conquest of Antony. Although one must admit that Aeneas' dedication marks a humbler achievement—a fuga per hostis—the gesture nonetheless takes its place in the full context of Jupiter's great prophecy for Aeneas and his descendants in Book 1: 'domus Assaraci ... victis dominabitur Argis' (1.284-5).

The subtext of Abas' shield already as shield-relic in Argos accentuates the striking inversion of recent affairs in Aeneas' triumphant gesture. The Trojan appropriates the Greek's dedication as well as his weapon. Again, Virgil elaborates this reversal by situating the event at Actium. At Argos, the shield was consecrated to the city's chief deity, Hera, that is, in the context of the Trojan War, to one of the Greeks' greatest champions, and, in the context of the Aeneid, to the divine archenemy of Aeneas. Now, at Actium, Aeneas further redefines this votive offering by affixing it to the

¹¹ D. Serv. ad loc.: 'quidam sane Abantem inventorem clipei ferunt.' On the sons, Proetus and Acrisius, as inventors of shields, see Apollodorus 2.2.1 and Pausanias 2.25.7; cf. Schol. Eurip. *Orestes* 965.

¹² Cf. M. Paschalis, 'Virgil's Actium-Nicopolis', in *Nicopolis I. Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Nicopolis* (Preveza, 1987), 65. J. Henry, *Aeneidea II* (Dublin, 1878), 407 thinks of Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 577–9 as a focus for the 'tit-for-tat'.

¹³ D. Servius on *Aeneid* 3.287 'sciendum tamen hunc clipeum ab Aenea apud Samothraciam in templo consecratum, quod poeta per transitum tetigit.'

¹⁴ On the whole subject, see R. B. Lloyd, 'Aeneid III and the Aeneas Legend', AJP 78 (1957), 391.

¹⁵ See R. Heinze, *Virgils epische Technik* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1915), 103. Dedications to divinities (erection of shrines and temples, sacrifices and other offerings) occur at eleven of the seventeen stops of the Aeneadae reported in the pre-Virgilian accounts. For the details see Lloyd, 'Aeneas Legend', 383–7.

¹⁶ Cf. 278 'insperata... tellure potiti / lustramurque Iovi votisque incendimus aras'.

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temple of Apollo, staunch supporter of Troy in the war, during the exiles' travels to Italy, and thereafter.¹⁷ What is more, Virgil has Aeneas comment on the inversion inherent in Aeneas' dedication of Abas' shield by means of his accompanying votive inscription: 'AENEAS HAEC DE DANAIS VICTORIBUS ARMA' (3.288). Nearly everyone points to the irony in noting that the dedication comes from a victorious foe, victoribus instead of victis, the more usual designation in such contexts. But it seems to have escaped notice that this discrepancy matches the irony in the background of the votive offering, in Aeneas rededicating the Greek Abas' dedication. In effect, Aeneas' epigraph glosses the history of the shield; it makes explicit the implicit transformation of an emblem of Argive victory into a mark of Trojan-Roman success. Moreover, in this verse the poet subtly identifies the ultimate origin of the shield. While Danai is a common Virgilian designation for 'Greeks,' the use of the word Danais here (instead of, say, Grais), highlighted by caesura, obliquely points in Alexandrian fashion to the first dedicator of the shield, Abas' grandfather, Danaus. 18

As the crowning event of the stop at Actium, Aeneas' dedication at the temple aptly sums up the episode. Like the other actions singled out by the narrator, the lustration and offerings in honor of Jupiter and the games on the shore, the presentation of the shield is a religious event. It has particularly strong thematic links with the *ludi*, both foreshadowing Octavian's measures after the battle of Actium.¹⁹ In view of this connection, it is also suggestive that the shield of Abas was intimately associated with the institution of regular games at Argos. These games, at which the victorious athlete received a shield instead of a crown, took their aetion from Abas' receipt of the shield in Hera's temple.²⁰ A proverb called the person who had won the ἀσπὶς ἐν Ἦργει blessed.21 Virgil transfers the games of the Aeneadae to Actium from another site in the earlier legend of Aeneas' travels.²² as he does with Aeneas' dedication of the shield. In each case he is certainly motivated by the wish to construct an ancient precedent for Octavian, but his original joining of these two actions at the same site perhaps has as much to do with Abas as with Octavian. Even though the text invites no thought of the Argive games until after the fact, the climactic mention of the dedicatio soon after the celebration of the Iliaci ludi seems to make both events parts of the aemulatio Abantis.23

If the foregoing remarks convince that the Servian scholium is correct in pointing to Abas of Argos, they have still not addressed directly Forbiger's suggestion, namely, that Aeneas captured the shield from one of Abas' descendants. This is, of course, the

- ¹⁷ Paschalis, op. cit., 65.
- ¹⁸ In Book 2 Virgil exploits the word *Danai* for another learned effect, etymological wordplay (dona Danaum): see 2.36, 44, 49; W. Moskalew, 'Myrmidons, Dolopes, and Danaans: Wordplays in Aeneid 2', CQ 40 (1990), 275-9.
- ¹⁹ An additional link may be that both feature Trojan appropriations of things Greek: in the case of the games, the characteristically Hellenic athletic competitions are termed 'Iliacis ... ludis' (3.280; cf. 281 'patrias... palaestras').
- 20 Hyginus 273'... ἀσπὶς ἐν "Αργει. quibus ludis qui vicit accipit pro corona clipeum, ideo quod Abas Lyncei et Hypermestrae filius nuntiavit Danaum parentibus perisse, cui Lynceus de templo Iunonis Argivae detraxit clipeum quod Danaus in iuventa gesserat et Iunoni sacraverat, et Abanti filio muneri dedit' (cf. 170). On these games see further Pindar Ol. 7.83, Nem. 10.22, Hesychius s.v. 'Αγών χαλκείος, CIG 234, 1068, 2810, 3208, and the bibliography cited by Thomas Kelly, A History of Argos to 500 B.C. (Minneapolis, 1976), 194 note 51.

 21 Zenobius 6.52 ώς τὴν ἐν Ἅργει ἀσπίδα καθελὼν σεμνύνεται (Ε. L. Leutsch and F. G.
- Schneidewin, Paroemiographi Graeci [Göttingen, 1839], 1.175).
 - ²² Zacynthus (Dion. Hal. 1.50.3); see Lloyd, 'Aeneus Legend', 391.
- ²³ Cf. Conington-Nettleship: '... the story about the games again seems as if it might be glanced at in the Actian games..., as if Aeneas were bearding the old hero on his own ground'. However, they write off this suggestion as resulting from 'coincidence'.

most reasonable explanation; otherwise we must suppose that he got the *clipeus* from a source unrelated to Abas. Since Virgil does not draw attention to this issue, it may seem wrongheaded to pursue it at all.²⁴ But it is not otiose, I think, to explain briefly why Virgil could have naturally expected his readers to assume that Aeneas stripped the weapon from one of Abas' countrymen or kinsmen. Inherited weapons are not uncommon in epic.²⁵ Parallels exist in literature and history for the reuse of dedicated shields in particular.²⁶ Later in the *Aeneid*, in fact, Virgil speaks of a shield that the Greeks had once taken down from a temple of Neptune.²⁷ Quite apart from such parallels, however, the story of Abas' shield is one of reuse: first Danaus as a youth, then Abas; after the latter's death, Servius Danielis (on 3.286) informs us, an Argive youth once used the weapon to ward off an invasion of the city. Valerius Flaccus seems to have appreciated this aspect of the legend, and to have read Virgil in the way that we are proposing. In language echoing the Virgilian passage, he speaks of a Greek hero with a glorious shield that was once worn by his father Abas ('clari decus... orbis, / quem genitor *gestabat Abas*,' 1.452–3).²⁸

Be that as it may, a more direct poetic reference to Abas of Argos, which also imitates the Virgilian verse, should banish any lingering doubts that Virgil had the same Greek hero in mind. This chapter in the Rezeptionsgeschichte of the Virgilian passage is in some ways the strongest piece of evidence. In the fifteenth book of his Metamorphoses, Ovid has Pythagoras recount a well-known episode in the legend about the philosopher. Pythagoras reports that he himself recently saw hanging in Juno's Argive temple the shield that Menelaus stripped from him in his former life as the Trojan warrior Euphorbus (15.163-4): 'cognovi clipeum, laevae gestamina nostrae, / nuper Abanteis templo Iunonis in Argis.' The characterization of Argos as 'Abantean', which evokes the famous arms of Abas, perfectly suits the context. It in fact enriches that context by unfolding a quite precise parallel or background for the sage's recollection: the shield-relic of Euphorbus-Pythagoras hangs in the same shrine as another celebrated *clipeus*, that of Argos' native son, Abas. At the same time, the adjective Abanteis—evidently an Ovidian innovation—caps an allusion to the Virgilian Aeneas' ex-voto at Actium ('aere cavo clipeum magni gestamen Abantis', Aeneid 3.286). Ovid definitely alludes to this verse: note that the echoing apposition ('clipeum ... gestamina' / 'clipeum ... gestamen') occurs at exactly the same metrical position; and gestamen is a rare word before the Silver Age.²⁹ Then comes the accompanying mention of an Abas. Ovid has his own thematic reasons for alluding to this passage. For instance, the Virgilian intertext hints at eventual Trojan and

²⁴ Cf. Paschalis, op. cit., 65 note 49: 'The fact that Abas was not a hero of the Trojan war is hardly relevant, since the dedication is a purely symbolic act'. Similarly, A. Cartault finds the Argive provenience of the shield the most important factor: 'désigné comme le bouclier argien typique et légendaire' (*L'art de Virgile dans l'Énéide* [Paris, 1926], 245 and 283 note 1).

The locus classicus is the boar's tusk helmet of *Iliad* 10.261–71. In the *Aeneid* both Pallas and Turnus bear their fathers' swords (10.394, 12.90), paralleling Achilles' use of the spear of Peleus in the *Iliad* (19.387ff.). At *Aeneid* 10.317–22 the sons of a companion of Hercules bear the club that they have apparently inherited from their father.

²⁶ Eurip. Her. 695-9, Livy 24.21 (cf. 22.57), both in a state of emergency; and Arrian, Anab. 6.9. See Page on Aeneid 5.360.

²⁷ 5.359-60 'et clipeum... / Neptuni sacro Danais de poste refixum'. The most convincing explanation of the passage remains that by T. E. Page, 'Note on Virgil, *Aeneid* 5, 359', *CR* 8 (1894), 300-301 and in his commentary ad loc.

²⁸ Valerius conflates the Virgilian reference with Apollonius *Arg.* 1.77-8. See N. E. Lemaire, *C. Valerii Flacci Argonauticon libri octo* (Paris, 1824), 1.100.

 $^{^{29}}$ Before the Silver Age only in these two passages, Aeneid 7.246 and Met. 1.457 & 13.116. See TLL 1955.43ff.

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Roman success at a moment of recalling a loss from the Trojan War; Pythagoras will later elaborate on Rome's emergence from Trojan ashes in another section based on Aeneid 3.30 For our purposes it is significant that Ovid explicitly mentions Argos in connection with his imitation of the Virgilian line. By doing so, he shows that he sees what Virgil has done31 in referring to Aeneas' dedicatio of the shield of Abas from Argos. One might counter that Ovid could himself be establishing a link between the clipeus of Virgil's unknown Abas and that of the Argive Abas, in the same way that he cleverly connects two dedicated shields on display in the same Heraeum. But it is much more characteristic of Ovid to turn subtle or unstated associations of other poets into direct statements.32 Here the geographical modifier expands upon, and comments upon, Virgil's oblique reference to the mighty Argive hero's shield. In effect, Ovid participates in ancient commentators' practice of chasing up particularly allusive pieces of Virgilian antiquarianism.33

To return to the reader of Virgil from whom we began, we may conclude that Servius Danielis is correct about both the manner and the matter of Virgil's allusion: 'sed Vergilius, amans inventa occasione recondita quaeque summatim et antiquam contingere fabulam, de Abante dixit.'34

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³⁰ See *Met.* 15.431–52 (Helenus) in the light of 422–5 just previous. I discuss both imitations of Virgil at length in a forthcoming paper, 'The Memories of Ovid's Pythagoras'.

³¹ I borrow the phase from James O'Hara's discussion of a similar instance in the *Fasti*: 'Naming the Stars at *Georgics* 1.137–8 and *Fasti* 5.163–82', AJP 113 (1992), 61.

³² For another example see J. F. Miller, 'The *Fasti* and Hellenistic Didactic: Ovid's Variant Aetiologies', *Arethusa* 25 (1992), 20 and note 24 (on *Fasti* 1.327–8 & Callimachus *Aetia* fr. 75.10–11).

³³ On this practice, see S. J. Harrison, *Vergil*, *Aeneid 10* (Oxford, 1991) on 388-9 and E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London, 1980) on 7.234.

 34 For several useful comments I am indebted to Professors Hans-Peter Stahl and James O'Hara and the anonymous referee for CQ.