

MISENUS AND THE CUMAEAN LANDFALL: ORIGINALITY IN VERGIL'S USE OF TOPOGRAPHY AND TRADITION*

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Associated with Aeneas' Visit to Cumae in the Sixth Book of the *Aeneid* are the strange events of Misenus' death and burial. The entire scene is preliminary to Aeneas' Descent into the Underworld which takes place by Avernus, a lake not far distant from Cumae itself. In the following pages I shall argue (1) that Vergil's inclusion of the Misenus-episode is a rehandling of tradition which created a special difficulty for the poet in terms of Cumaean topography and (2) that Aeneas' Visit to Cumae, like that of Misenus' itself, is a further innovation to tradition. The argument is worth setting forth in some detail, since Vergil's commentators seem not to have noticed how extensive has been Vergil's reshaping of the Aeneas-legend at these points. Indeed if our argument is correct, we shall have found reason to modify the accepted view that Aeneas' landfall at Cumae was a part of the Aeneas-legend before Vergil. Thus the paper, which conducts an *examinatio* into an aspect of Cumaean topography and tradition, provides new evidence confirming Vergil's method of writing poetry by mythological innovation as opposed to the view that he merely versified an existing tradition.

The particular difficulty to which I have referred is apparent to the attentive reader from the description of the events themselves. Aeneas glides *Euboicis Cumarum . . . oris* (*Aen.* 6.2) and beaches the ships. Immediately afterwards he makes for the *arces* (line 9) presided over by Apollo and is met there by the Sibyl, who prophesies in her cave and tells him that before he can make the Descent into the Underworld

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he must first fetch the Golden Bough and bury the lifeless body of a friend which is polluting the whole fleet (*Aen.* 6.136–55). Perplexed by this sad announcement of a friend's death, Aeneas leaves the Sibyl's cave on the Cumaean acropolis—not the misnamed “Grotta della Sibilla” of local tradition by Avernus¹—and while deliberating with his companion Achates on its implications is surprised to discover the body of Misenus lying lifeless “on the dry beach,” *in litore sicco* (*Aen.* 6.162). The latter is said to have roused Triton to jealousy by blowing on a hollow shell, and the god had overwhelmed him by a foaming wave “amid the rocks,” *inter saxa* (*Aen.* 6.174). No more is said by Vergil concerning the location of Misenus' death: from the description of the events so far, however, it is natural to infer that Aeneas found the body washed up after the catastrophe near the mooring of the Trojan fleet off Cumae. We would presume further that the trees which Aeneas and his companions start felling for the funeral (cf. *Aen.* 6.175–84) are cut from the nearby *Silva Gallinaria*. But at this point we meet with our difficulty. For between 184 and 212 Aeneas collects and carries to the Sibyl the Golden Bough,² and when he rejoins the cremation of Misenus, the event is depicted as taking place

monte sub aërio, qui nunc Misenus ab illo
dicitur aeternumque tenet per saecula nomen. (*Aen.* 6.234 f.)

Prima facie at least, it appears now as though the scene has suddenly shifted from Cumae, where Misenus' dead body was discovered *in litore sicco*, to the burial at the foot of Cape Misenum some five miles away.

In his famous Commentary on Book Six of the *Aeneid* Eduard Norden passed over this difficulty and envisaged a different arrangement for the scenes of the drowning and discovery of Misenus' body. He

¹ For the confusion of the two caves in local tradition and in the minds of some modern Vergilian scholars, see my “Christ's Resurrection at Avernus: A Vergilian Influence,” *C&M* 30 (1969) 300–07. For the relative topography of Apollo's temple and the Sibyl's cave, together with various *testimonia*, see my “Vergil *Aeneid* 6.40 ff. and the Cumaean Sibyl's Cave” forthcoming in *Latomus* (since 1971).

² Aeneas takes the Bough *sub tecta Sibyllae* (*Aen.* 6.211), presumably to the Sibyl's cave on the acropolis. H. E. Butler, *The Sixth Book of the Aeneid* (Oxford 1920) 114, 124, assumed that the journey was made to the Grotta della Sibilla (see note 1 above). Brooks Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (corr. ed. Oxford 1966) 287, apparently overlooked the episode altogether in making Aeneas carry the Bough to the funeral.

suggests that of two ancient roads which are still to be seen leading from Cumae to Misenum, Aeneas and Achates took the western road by the sea, and he implies also that they walked the whole way to Misenum before coming upon Misenus' body on the beach.³ Misenus' burial "at the foot of the Cape"⁴ evidently in Norden's view took place near the find of the body. And the further assumption on Norden's part that Misenus had drowned among the rocks (*inter saxa*) of Porto di Miseno in the waters of Baiae⁵ completes his case that Misenus' drowning was close to where he was both washed up and buried. But how on this arrangement are we to harmonize Misenus' place of drowning in the Bay of Baiae with Aeneas' Cumaean landfall (and there is no question of Norden doubting that Aeneas landed at Cumae)?⁶ For Vergil surely gives the impression that Misenus had challenged Triton a little after landing. Otherwise we must understand that Misenus was washed overboard like Palinurus⁷ and that this incident on the voyage went unnoticed until the Sibyl drew Aeneas' attention to the lifeless body on the shore.

Norden's arrangement, then, far from being a solution, only intensifies the problem by leaving us to face another difficulty, one to which his followers have generally paid little heed. Norden, who is not alone in assuming that Misenus in the *Aeneid* was somehow drowned in the waters of Baiae, has in effect for his interpretation of Vergil adopted the traditional setting of Misenus' death recorded by Dionysius of Halicarnassus. According to this tradition the Trojans sailed into the harbour of the Opicans which was named after Misenus, one

³ E. Norden, *Aeneis Buch VI* (Leipzig 1926³) 182, writes as though Misenus' body in *litore sicco* and his burial "an den Strand" (see further next note) were at one and the same place.

⁴ *Ibid.* 197, "Der Grabhügel lag am Fuss des Berges."

⁵ *Ibid.* 158 (on *Aen.* 6.174, *inter saxa*). Norden here quotes from J. Beloch, *Campanien* (Bresl. 1890²) 196, "Die Ufer des äusseren Hafenbeckens sind grösstenteils felsig und steil abfallend." And Beloch refers here to the Porto di Miseno.

⁶ *Ibid.* 110, cf. 117.

⁷ And this would be contrary, surely, to the promise by Neptune at *Aen.* 5.814 f. that *Unus erit tantum, amissum quem gurgite quaeres; / unum pro multis dabitur caput*. Chr. G. Heyne, *P. Virgili Maronis Opera*, cur. G. P. E. Wagner (London 1830-32⁴), on line 814 remarks: "Male Serv. hoc ad Misenum refert; qui nec in navigatione periit, sed accessu iam ad Cumanum littus facto," and cf. P. Heinze, *Vergils Epische Technik* 452, note 1. It is now generally agreed that Palinurus was the innocent victim (5.841) whose loss at sea and subsequent death satisfied Neptune's prediction.

of their number who died there: ἐκεῖθεν δὲ καταράντες (sc. οἱ περὶ Αἰνείαν) εἰς λιμένα βαθὺν καὶ καλὸν ἐν Ὀπικοῖς, τελευτήσαντος καὶ αὐτόθι Μισηνοῦ τῶν ἐπιφανῶν τινος, ἀπ' ἐκείνου τὸν λιμένα ὠνόμασαν, κ.τ.λ. (*Ant. Rom.* 1.53.2). But whereas Norden left the traditional Baiaeian drowning unreconciled to the Cumaean landing in the *Aeneid*, the difficulty which this poses has not passed entirely unnoticed by others. Hitchcock accordingly argues that Vergil seems to have conflated two traditional events, namely the landing in or near the Gulf of Baiae, during which time Misenus issued his fatal challenge, with the later landing near Cumae.⁸ Latimer, on the other hand, denies the Cumaean landing altogether. He rejects as too burdensome the notion that Misenus' body was transported from Cumae to Misenum, and the possibility that Misenus conveniently walked from Cumae to Misenum in his lifetime before issuing the challenge to Triton⁹ he also dismisses as too naive. Instead he assumes that by *Euboicis Cumarum adlabitur oris* in line 2, which is usually taken to mean that Aeneas landed off the coast of "Euboean Cumae," Vergil may have had in mind the entire coastline including the Baiaeian Gulf since by the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. the Euboean colony of Cumae had established hegemony over the entire Phlegraean Fields. And since Cumae was too exposed to offer a harbour (a claim now made far less likely by Paget's discovery of traces of an ancient harbour at the northern end of Lago Fusaro not far below Cumae),¹⁰ he concluded that Aeneas in the *Aeneid* must have landed in the little Bay of Misenum in the Gulf of Baiae which was his traditional landfall.¹¹

All of these arguments, however, betray in my view a tendency to accept the authority of Vergil's sources without examining how Vergil has used them. Despite the traditional landfall and the suzerainty of Cumae over Baiae, Vergil's words in line 2 are naturally understood to mean a Cumaean landfall, or at least a landfall on the Cumaean rather than the Baiaeian side of the coast. And since Vergil omitted

⁸ L. S. Hitchcock, "Selective Topography," *CJ* 28 (1933) 505-14, esp. 507 f.

⁹ This assumption can be found, for example, in J. Hubaux, "Misène," *AC* 2 (1933) 154.

¹⁰ R. F. Paget, "The Ancient Ports of Cumae," *JRS* 58 (1968) 152-69. See also the map in A. G. McKay, *Vergil's Italy* (New York 1970) 197.

¹¹ J. F. Latimer, "Aeneas and the Cumaean Sibyl: A Study in Topography," *Vergilius* 5 (1940), esp. 30 f. and n. 22. Ovid, *Met.* 14.101-05 is also adduced, which is dubious evidence. Cf. also *id.* *TAPA* 69 (1938) xliii.

the traditional landfall at Cape Palinurum,¹² he was surely equally capable of omitting Aeneas' traditional landfall in the Bay of Baiae if it suited his purpose.¹³ Other traditional landfalls recorded in Dionysius are also ignored and others substituted by Vergil in the third book of the *Aeneid*.¹⁴ Indeed as Mr. Camps aptly observes, it is remarkable how limited is the actual contribution of the pre-Vergilian Aeneas-legend itself to the content of Vergil's story. He concludes that "in all the first half of the poem it has provided only the content of Book 3 and of the two lines at the beginning and end of Book 6 which record the landing of the Trojans at Cumae and Caieta; perhaps also the firing of the ships by the rebellious women and the settlement of the travel-weary at Segesta in Book 5."¹⁵

We might even go further and ask also whether, *pace* Camps and Hitchcock above, the landing at Cumae was in fact a traditional landfall at all. Indeed there exists no evidence of Aeneas' visit to the Avernian region before Naevius and no evidence before Vergil that Aeneas ever visited or landed at Cumae.¹⁶ Either, then, Vergil has

¹² See further p. 69 below.

¹³ This much of Vergil's innovation is recognised by Heyne, *op. cit.* 2. Exc. III. 1008 and esp. IV. 1011: "[Virgilius] discessit ab aliorum . . . fide etiam in hoc, quod non in sinu Baiano sed ultra Misenum versus Cumas classem appulsam esse voluit." Cf. also S. Eitrem, "La Sibylle de Cumes et Virgile," *SO* 24 (1945) 92, who nevertheless does not enquire in detail into how far Vergil has innovated tradition.

¹⁴ For excellent summaries see R. D. Williams, *P. Vergilii M. Aeneidos Liber Tertius* (Oxford 1962) 8–12, and W. A. Camps, *An Introduction to Vergil's Aeneid* (Oxford 1969) 75 ff.

¹⁵ W. A. Camps, *op. cit.* 82. Cf. also Norden, *op. cit.* 350: "Was Vergil darüber [referring to 'die Zeit des Aufenthaltes der Trojaner an der kampanischen Küste'] in der Legende vorfand, war nicht viel: die Begegnung des Aeneas mit der Sibylle (s. den Kommentar S. 148 f.) sowie Tod und Bestattung des Misenus (S. 179)." And even the meeting with the Cumaeen Sibyl is in doubt; see note 18 below.

¹⁶ J. Perret, *Les Origines de la Légende Troyenne de Rome* (Paris 1942) 103, goes so far as to argue that "il n'existe aucun indice que cette localisation d'Enée à Cumes et sur l'Averne ait préexisté à Naevius." But there is in fact no good reason to believe that Cumae as well as Avernus was visited by Aeneas in Naevius if P. Corssen, "Die Sibylle im sechsten Buch der Aeneis," *Sokrates* N.F. 1 (1913) 1 ff., is right that Naevius' *Bellum Punicum* simply narrated Aeneas' visit to the Cimmerian Sibyl (who is carefully distinguished in tradition from the Cumaeen, as we know from, e.g., Varro fr. 12 ed. W. Strzelecki referring to the Cimmerian Sibyl in Naevius), which led to an *evocatio* of Aeneas' father on the shore of Avernus. Cf. also S. Mariotti, *Il Bellum Punicum e l'arte di Nevio* (Roma 1955) 40 ff. I do not find compelling the argument that the distinction between the two Sibyls is Varro's (because Varro refused to believe that the Sibyl whom Naevius had made a contemporary of Aeneas was really the Cumaeen and so himself

newly introduced Aeneas' Cumaean landing into the legend or he has brought it in from a lesser-known tradition of which nothing any longer remains. Now since the story of Aeneas' wanderings after his departure from Trōy is told in several versions, as Dionysius himself acknowledges,¹⁷ it is not altogether impossible that the Cumaean landing was a traditional landfall which Dionysius simply did not report. But against this we must balance the fact that in earlier versions of the Aeneas-legend Aeneas received a prophecy either from a Sibyl on Mount Ida or from Cassandra herself (who is reported in the *Suda* s.v. Σίβυλλα actually to have been called a Sibyl), and Waszink may well be right in arguing that the prophecy by the Cumaean Sibyl was not part of the earlier Aeneas-legend,¹⁸ in which case there is no reason why Aeneas should have landed at Cumae before Vergil brought him thither to visit the Sibyl. And if Vergil first introduced Aeneas' visit to the Cumaean Sibyl on the acropolis, might he not also have introduced the Cumaean landing?

There is, moreover, no record of Misenus' association with Cumae in the pre-Vergilian Misenus-legend and there is no particular reason either why Misenus, originally a companion of Odysseus in the Italian tradition,¹⁹ should have landed at Cumae before he was brought thither with Aeneas. Vergil needed Aeneas' comrade in the port of call immediately preceding the *catabasis* perhaps to improve upon

attributed the Cimmerian to Naevius): but the matter is too complex to be discussed adequately in a footnote and will be treated more fully by me in a book planned on the *Catabasis*.

¹⁷ *Ant. Rom.* 1.49.1: τὰ δὲ μετὰ τὴν ἔξοδον (i.e., Aeneas' departure from Troy) ἐπιπλείω παρέχει τοῖς πολλοῖς τὴν ἀπορίαν.

¹⁸ See J. H. Waszink, "Vergil and the Sibyl of Cumae," *Mnemosyne* 1 (1948) 43–58. The question had been broached before but without close scrutiny, e.g., by H. E. Butler, *op. cit.* 85 f.: "Vergil, in view of the important part played by the Sibylline books at Rome, may have been the first to introduce the Sibyl of Cumae into the Aeneas legend, one of the many devices for introducing national colour into his epic." Brooks Otis, *op. cit.* 286, note 1, wrongly believes that the Sibyls of Cumae, Troy, and Cimmeria are mentioned by Naevius, Piso, and Varro respectively and to my mind misses the point of Waszink's argument, which is that Vergil in creating his own narrative has innovated tradition regarding the Sibyl.

¹⁹ For Misenus as Odysseus' companion see, e.g., Polybius *ap.* Strabo 1.2.18, who may have drawn from Timaeus, and for his connection with Aeneas in a Greek writer see the quotation from Dionysius on p. 66 above. For fuller references and discussion of Misenus' story in local legends (some of which Vergil evoked) see J. Hubaux (above, note 9) 135–66 and the works cited in note 21 below.

Homer, whose catabatic hero Odysseus just prior to the *Nekyia* left Elpenor unburied ἐπεὶ πόντος ἄλλος ἔπειγε (*Od.* 11.54). But the burial of Misenus by *pious* Aeneas on the Approach to Avernus still required the addition of an unburied hero to correspond to Elpenor's role as Dead Companion who converses with the mortal visitor at the threshold of the Underworld. And on an unknown strand more than forty miles away Palinurus' body was lying opportunely unburied for just this purpose. Had Vergil omitted Misenus and made Aeneas bury Palinurus instead, this important ingredient in the *catabasis* would have been missing. In Misenus' death Vergil may also have had in mind the contemporary and tragic death at nearby Baiae of Marcellus, son of Augustus' sister Octavia and husband of his daughter Julia, whose wandering shade is celebrated by Propertius at 3.18.1-16.²⁰ But it is worth emphasising further the stroke of genius involved in making Misenus' burial a prerequisite for Aeneas' Descent. For Vergil is thereby enabled to bring in the aetiological legend about his Cape—it may even be called a characteristic of the poet to introduce people who left marks on toponymy.²¹ The choice of Cumae as the actual landfall of the Trojans, on the other hand, evokes the historic tradition of Cumae as the first Greek colony in Italy, and this associates in turn the civilising mission of Aeneas with the historic civilising function of early Greece.²² Vergil implies an earlier link still between Cumae and Crete by bringing Daedalus to Cumae in anticipation of Aeneas' arrival

²⁰ I owe this reference to the kindness of Professor A. G. McKay. Cf. also his excellent article on the topographical and archaeological aspects of the sites of Caieta, Misenum, and Palinurum in "Aeneas' Landfalls in Hesperia," *G&R* 14 (1967) 8.

²¹ See on this with reference to Misenus H.-D. Reeker, *Die Landschaft in der Aeneis* (Hildesheim 1971) 138, and F. della Corte, *La mappa dell' Eneide* (Firenze 1972) 107-10: neither author, however, raises the topographical awkwardness which this entails in the *Aeneid*. Moreover in the Sixth Book Vergil incorporates the aetiological legends associated with Caieta and Palinurus as well as Misenus. And these too, like Misenus, were Greeks originally. For the transition of Greek eponymous heroes into Trojans and the extent of the Tyrrhenian eponymous tradition generally in pre-Vergilian legend see J. Perret (above, note 16) 101-24 and cf. G. K. Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily and Rome* (Princeton 1969) 106-10.

²² The theme of the reconciliation of the Greeks and Trojans begins already in Book Three with Achaemenides. Vergil also incorporates the Greek Evander and the myth attributed to Lucius Coelius Antipater by Strabo 5.3.3 that Rome was an Arcadian colony.

from Troy (*Aen.* 6.14 ff.).²³ And since Daedalus' connection with Cumae is not to be found in any pre-Vergilian legend, there is a good chance that Vergil is the first to have introduced Daedalus to Cumae, despite the phrase *ut fama est* at *Aen.* 6.14.²⁴

In the light of these innovations on Vergil's part we can now ask what is left of the aforementioned topographical awkwardness with which we began this enquiry over the finding of Misenus' body on the beach near Cumae and its burial *monte sub aerio, qui nunc Misenus ab illo/dicitur*. No doubt any conclusion we may reach on this subject is bound to be subjective. But if one takes the *sub* in this phrase to mean, as Norden does above, "at the (immediate) foot" of the Cape, one can imagine, I suppose, that Misenus' body was taken to its resting-place before the rites described in 175 ff. are begun. If so, Vergil passes lightly over the transfer of the body—perhaps in the Sibyl's ambiguous command *sedibus hunc refer ante suis et conde sepulchro* at 152. The transfer of the body has of course no poetical significance and the insertion of the Golden Bough helps further to divert the reader's attention from topographical details. Distances are in any case fairly easily telescoped in fiction and heroic poetry and Vergil may well have conflated the extremities of the whole area in this manner. Or the conflation may work in a different way. If the *sub* is taken loosely to extend over the whole area dominated by the Cape, then no inconsistency at all need exist between the places of drowning and burial. Vergil in fact says neither that Misenus was buried *underneath* the Cape (though its resemblance to a *tumulus* has often been pointed out) nor

²³ There is still no trace, however, of an actual Minoan settlement at Cumae, as O. Gruppe, *Griechische Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte* I, 360 f., long ago pointed out. Vergil's purpose was therefore largely artistic, to introduce the scenes on the Cumaean Gates, though there may be a hint also that the Cretans were the founders of European civilisation (cf. *Aen.* 3.104 ff.).

²⁴ On the absence of this version in the pre-Vergilian Daedalus-legend see M. de G. Verrall, "Two instances of symbolism in the Sixth *Aeneid*," *CR* 24 (1910) 44. For the usual view that Vergil drew on Varro or the tradition taken over by him, see E. Norden, *op. cit.* 120 and 179. Suspicion, however, of Vergil's phrase *ut fama* has already been expressed by L. P. Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil* (Cambridge 1969) 113, on *Georg.* 4.318, and on p. 117 he remarks of this passage: "I do not think we should attach great weight to the allusive manner in which Virgil tells the story as evidence that it was already known; this allusiveness is studied art, and tells us all we need to know as we go along." Wilkinson's remarks surely apply equally to *Aen.* 6.14.

that Aeneas actually visited the Cape in order to name it in commemoration of his companion's death. The Cape is a prominent landmark which Aeneas would have sighted on the voyage round to Cumae and it can be clearly seen inland from, for instance, Avernus or from Cumae itself. The actual awkwardness as it must have presented itself to Vergil, who knew the area well (for many years he lived only a few miles from Cumae, cf. *Georg.* 4.563 f.), was, then, not so much the distances to be covered, which are cunningly telescoped, as the transfer itself of the scene of drowning from the Baiaean to the Cumaeen coast—a change necessitated by the innovation of Aeneas' landfall. The fact that so few commentators have noticed any awkwardness at all is perhaps the chief testimony to the skill of Vergil's poetic art.