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Aeneas' Journey in Contemporary Literature

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AENEAS' JOURNEY IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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Translated from Italian by Gavin Williams

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GIORGIO CAPRONI, FROM TYPEWRITTEN NOTES (1946-1948?)

[...]

I did not know that, in setting out by boat,
all the land would disappear



This couplet is the conclusion to the passage cited above (see under the heading “Antandros”), and is the only part of that passage that was returned to several times by Caproni, as of 1959, in two prose works, and in the short poem *Per certe strade della bianca Bari...*

The first stop-off on Aeneas' journey, as we know, was in Thrace, with the construction of the first walls of the city of *Aenus*. Here the wonder of Polydorus – the youngest of Priam's sons, placed by his father in the care of the king of Thrace, Polymestor, who, seizing his wealth, had him killed and thrown into the sea – terrorizes the refugees with the spears embedded in his dead body which were then turned into a bush, the branches of which, if broken off, spout drops of blood. Hence the decision, immediately after holding a funeral ceremony for Polydorus, to withdraw from the impious country. Caproni's couplet on departing by ship could be a loose translation, or rather a reworking, of this moment:

<p><i>Inde ubi prima fides pelago placataque venti dant maria et lenis crepitans vocat Auster in altum, deducunt socii navis et litora complent; provehimur portu terraeque urbesque recedunt.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Aeneid III 69-72</i></p>	<p>Then, just as soon as we can trust the sea, as soon as the air allows us tranquil waters and while the south wind, softly whispering, invites to journeying, my comrades crowd the beach to launch our fleet. We leave the harbor. Our eyes have lost the cities and the land.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Translated by Allen Mandelbaum</p>
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The image of the landscape receding as one departs from a port must have been a scene that struck a chord with Caproni, having lived in cities on the sea (first Livorno, later Genoa), and who was the brother of a sailor. In carrying out this reworking, Caproni seems to have reworked, and split into two, Virgil's line 72, 'transforming' *provehimur portu* into "in setting out by boat", and *terraeque urbesque recedunt* into "all the land would disappear". As for "I did not know that", it would seem to be a variation by the poet, and to be psychologically interesting: Caproni identifies with Aeneas, as if, at the moment of setting sail, it were one of the first times that he was venturing to sea, and noting the way the land receded from view.

Further reading:

- A. Dei, *L'orma della parola. Su Giorgio Caproni*, Padova, Esedra editrice, 2016.
- F. Giannotti, *L'Enea ritrovato. Un appunto dattiloscritto di Giorgio Caproni*, "L'Ulisse. Rivista di poesia, arti e scritture", 23, novembre 2020, pp. 122-137.