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Aeneas' Journey in Contemporary Literature

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AENEAS' JOURNEY IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

ANTANDROS

By Filomena Giannotti

University of Siena
Department of Philology and Criticism of Ancient and Modern Literatures

Translated from Italian by Gavin Williams

March 2021

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

Yes, a fire on the shores of the sea, at night, is always a wonderful sight!

Troy, in flames, was collapsing, house by house, stone by stone.

Aeneas, barefoot, was in the grip of a glee that too closely resembled drunkenness.

Above the blazing Troy rose a red cloud of smoke, full of flames and crackles, giving the sea also a red glare, as if a sky of bricks was looming over it.

Every so often, but made harmonious by the distance, the roar of a collapse (like the crash of a tree that has been felled) and the long wailing of women.

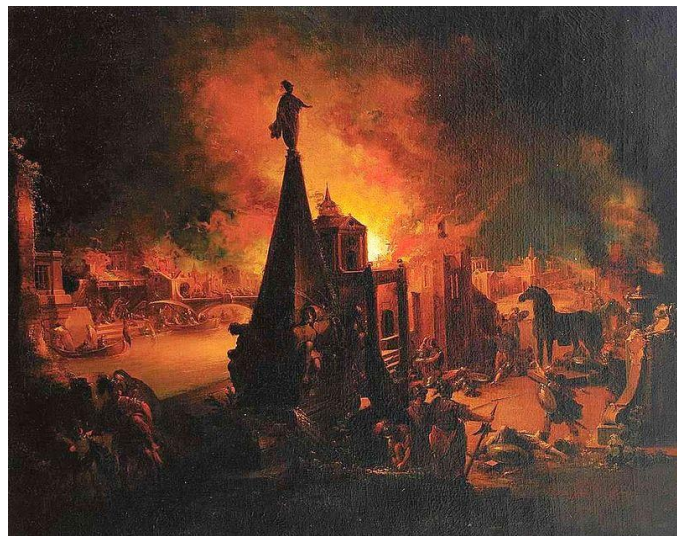
Over that collapse, other sudden and flaring clouds of red smoke, full of a myriad flames, some of which, detached from the rest, came to fall even at Aeneas' feet.

Immense peace, solemn, around those bare feet (of Aeneas).

Every so often, harmonious and distant,

the roar of a collapse is heard

[...]



J. G. Trautmann, *Blick auf das brennende Troja*

The beach of Antandros, south of Troy, where Aeneas would build the fleet with which he would undertake his voyage in the Mediterranean, is used by Giorgio Caproni (see under the heading “Troy”) as the setting not just of a few short scenes in the aforementioned short poem *The Passage of Aeneas* (*Verses* IV 1-4 and 9-12; V 1-4), but also of this enigmatic fragment on Aeneas. Composed of one part in prose and two couplets (for the second of which see below, under the heading “Aeneadae”), the passage was only published in 2016, on the basis of a copy of typewritten notes found among the papers of the Giorgio Caproni Fund at the Archive of the Vieusseux Cabinet in Florence. The theme of Aeneas is addressed in an eccentric way that is totally different from all the other numerous writings

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devoted by Caproni to Virgil's character, which suggests an initial interpretation of the myth in a research direction that was later abandoned, after the poet's crucial meeting with the statue in Piazza Bandiera in 1948, in a context of physical, social and cultural ruin. Indeed, Aeneas is represented here not escaping from Troy, but on the seashore, alone, and without any of his family members, and, above all, almost inebriated with a strange and paradoxical cheerfulness (perhaps influenced by Caproni's passion for Ungaretti and, to be precise, for the *Allegria* – which in its first edition, dating to 1919, was given the no less paradoxical title *Allegria di naufragi*). In the background is the blaze of Troy, with the crashing of collapsing buildings (reiterated in the final couplet) and the wailing of women, as in certain tragic passages of Virgil's poem:

<p>[...] <i>Iam Deiphobi dedit ampla ruinam Volcano superante domus, iam proximus ardet Ucalegon; Sigea igni freta lata relucent.</i></p> <p>[...] <i>penitusque cavae plangoribus aedes femineis ululant [...]</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Aeneid II 310-311 e 487-488</i></p>	<p>The spacious palace of Deiphobus has fallen, victim of the towering Vulcan. And now Ucalegon's, his neighbor, bums; and wide Sigeum's harbor gleams with fire.</p> <p>[...] and the vaulted walls echo with the wail and woe of women [...]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Translated by Allen Mandelbaum</p>
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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.