



AENEAS TODAY

Aeneas' Journey in Contemporary Literature

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AENEAS' JOURNEY IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

CRETE: PERGAMEA

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1 CLAUDIO PASI, *KPHTH. MMVII* (2021)

Its engines switched off, the fishing boat comes to a halt in the empty bay
of the barren island that stands before
the ruins of Knossos, and Ida's tree-covered heights.

A few tourists dive into the deep water.

I walk down with my son, who is the same age as Ascanius
when, from the shores of Troy, he arrived here with his father.

Cinzia, my wife, calls to us from above to be careful.

Schools of fish swim past. That amphora, set in the sandy sea floor,
resembles a black diamond.

Later, two sailors in their undershirts offer everyone
chilled beer, souvlaki and vine-leaf rolls.

Honey-cakes for the children. But it's time to go.
Alongside the boat swims a dolphin, that for a moment
is like a god appearing and disappearing again.





Claudio Pasi (born in 1958, in Molinella), who has also written in Latin (and in Bolognese dialect), is a poet who often returns to the ancient world in his poetry, and in particular to the motifs of travel and sailing. In this poem, never before published, he relives a family memory, about a holiday on the island of Crete. In his memory, as a classically schooled poet, the private tale of an excursion by boat cannot fail to be linked to the sea voyage which – following a mistake by Anchises in interpreting the words of Apollo at Delos – it is told once brought Aeneas' followers to these same shores. The poet's son, who is swimming in the sea with his father, is the same age as Ascanius was. The places are harked back to with short, concise references from Virgil: for Crete, Virgil uses several times the adjective Cnosius (*Aen.* III 115, V 306, VI 23, VI 566), from the name of the ancient capital, Knossos. And when Anchises thinks that he is supposed to identify Crete as the destination given by Apollo, he begins with these words:

<p><i>Creta Iovis magni medio iacet insula ponto, mons Idaeus ubi et gentis cunabula nostrae</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Aeneid</i> III 104-105</p>	<p>Out in the middle of the sea lies Crete, the island of great Jupiter. There is Mount Ida, cradle of our people.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Translated by Allen Mandelbaum</p>
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The name of Mt Ida, on Crete – also referred to in *Aen.* XII 411 with regard to medicinal herbs used by Venus to heal Aeneas' wounds – is actually mentioned by Anchises as the source of the name of the Mount Ida that is located in the Troad (*Aen.* III 112). Brief memories of a normal day, like the warnings by his wife, or the snack offered to the excursionists by some local sailors, appear against this background of Virgilian memories, lending a certain grandeur to them. The metre, a 'barbarian' elegiac couplet, conspires to conjure up an atmosphere with an ancient feel, despite its – intentional – appearance as being more suited to a fragment of *epos*, and the contained space of an epigram. An

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atmosphere reinforced by the emergence, at the end, of a dolphin, which is compared to the fleeting epiphany of a god.

Further reading:

- <https://www.atelierpoesia.it/intervista-a-claudio-pasi/>
- C. Pasi, *Periplo* ["collection of fragments from an imagined odeporic poem", in Latin hexameters] with nine drawings by L. Caccioni, Modena, Galleria Rossana Ferri, 1994.
- A. Fo, *Schegge odeporiche dell'odierna recezione di poeti latini: fra Catullo, Ovidio e Rutilio Namaziano*, "Semicerchio. Rivista di poesia comparata", LXIII, 2020 (2), pp. 37-44: 39-40.

2 FURNARETTO VIERI, *LABIRINTO DI LACRIME* (2021)

La pietà per i vinti ed il dolore
 Pity for the defeated, and pain
 are the metre that tempers the noble song,
 not glory or the government of peoples
 assigned by destiny to the Quirites:
 the gloomy labyrinth of the past,
 the distant roots that reach back deep
 into the submerged centuries beyond history
 retrace the trail of origins
 via Ariadne's thread that continues to last,
 but that never leads to salvation
 from the original tangle from which there is no way out.
 Going through the underground tunnels and chambers
 an ancient suffering does not vary
 under the unhappy light of the stars
 which do not relieve mortals of their grief and woes:
 Pergamea is pursued by the oblique ray
 of baleful Sirius that unleashes
 the epidemic, which is a sign of the mistake
 of the answer misinterpreted by Anchises;
 but at Knossos, or among the valleys of Enotria,
 a soft land of wine, once awash
 with the blood of heroes who will fall there,
 there is no end to the grief of mortal men.
 Nobody dries the tears of things.



Dosso Dossi, *La peste a Pergamea*

In this painful and touching revisitation, which has not yet been included in a collection, Fornaretto Vieri (born in 1952, in Florence), the author of numerous collections of poetry and a collaborator for several different literary magazines, transforms the mythical symbol of Crete into a “gloomy labyrinth of the past”, an “original tangle from which there is no way out”, despite “Ariadne’s thread that continues to last”. Thus it is that the canonical elements of the legend of the labyrinth of Knossos, in its melodic hendecasyllables, are mixed with those among the richest in *pathos* in the *Aeneid*, and that are especially dear to Virgil: not just “glory or the government of peoples”, but rather “pity for the defeated, and pain”, “the blood of heroes” that will stain Enotria, the land of wine, and the “tears of things”, which retains an echo of the famous *sunt lacrimae rerum* (*Aen.* I 462). The references to the episode of the stay on Crete by Aeneas’ followers, with the construction of the first walls of the city of *Pergamea*, the sudden spread of a pestilence, and the suggestion by Anchises to return to Delos to ask Apollo once again, after the misunderstanding over the quest for the “ancient mother”, also display an

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insistence over more tragic details, such as that “oblique ray/ of baleful Sirius that unleashes/ the epidemic”, that sums up effectively this passage from Virgil:

<p>[...] <i>subito cum tabida membris corrupto caeli tractu miserandaque venit arboribusque satisque lues et letifer annus. Linquebant dulces animas aut aegra trahebant corpora; tum steriles exurere Sirius agros, arebant herbae et victum seges aegra negabat.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Aeneid III 136-142</i></p>	<p>[...] when a sudden and wasting pestilence fell on our bodies from some polluted quarter of the sky: death's time, and terrible for trees and crops. Men left sweet life or dragged their tainted bones. The Dog Star burned the fields to barrenness. The grass was parched. Sick grain denied us food.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Translated by Allen Mandelbaum</p>
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Further reading:

- <http://poesia.blog.rainews.it/2019/07/luce-e-destini-nelle-poesie-di-fornaretto-vieri/>