

## ROME – THE COST OF EMPIRE

Aeneas (the hero of Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid*) is famous for his devotion to his family. After realizing fighting is no use and Troy is doomed, he carries his father, Anchises, on his shoulders out of the burning city, leading his son Ascanius by the hand, as his wife Creusa follows behind. This is a literal depiction of *Pietas* (duty to family)—he is carrying out his duty to his family, by carrying his father. The *Penates*, household gods of Troy (2.790), are carried by Aeneas as he flees, symbolizing the preservation of Trojan identity and continuity. This reflects his *Pietas* (duty to his people and the gods), reinforcing his destiny as the founder of a new civilization. The *Penates* serve as a physical and spiritual link between the fallen Troy and the future Rome, thus signifying destiny and the unbroken lineage of Trojan heritage with divine approval from Jupiter—this is fated to be.

During the siege of Troy, with the Greeks swarming the city, Aeneas' heart is in conflict. He desires to stay in the falling Troy but knows that his family and he need to get out in order to survive. He has a deep attachment to his homeland and people, and even his father, Anchises, initially refuses to leave. This is because the Trojans have a profound sense of national unity, thus a deeper connection to their country and their fellow Trojans, making it more challenging for Aeneas to leave. We see him experiencing the horrors of war—the brutal death of Priam's son, Polites, in front of his own father, the king, pillaging of burning temples, dead comrades all around, and the death of his wife, Creusa, which deters him from wanting to continue. He succumbs to despair and even considers dying in battle alongside his comrades rather than fleeing. After the destruction, loss of his beloved home, and the numerous deaths, survival becomes meaningless—especially with little time for him to process his trauma. However, the trauma of war also fuels Aeneas' *Furor* (rage and violent emotion), pushing him to the brink and nearly making him abandon his ideas of mercy and duty for revenge.

Aeneas is conflicted between his *Pietas* (duty to keep his family safe) and his desire to stay in his beloved country of Troy, giving in to his *Furor* and dying in battle as a warrior much like Achilles—a heroic death. "...my heart was burning to gather comrades for battle and rush to the citadel with them," "Frenzy and danger drove me on, and suddenly it seemed a noble thing to die in arms" (2.310). Virgil tends to use the uncontrollable frenzy and burning of fire to describe *Furor*, such as Dido's burning love for Aeneas and Aeneas' burning hatred for Helen, which connotes a lack of control as fire cannot be tamed. From these thoughts, we see his sense of duty and obligation as a warrior to fight for his home. This is also seen when he initially attempts to resist the Greek invasion alongside his comrades.

We see the effects of war on his mental soundness—war runs the risk of *Furor* due to the emotions involved, the devastation it leaves in its wake. This is presented as Aeneas fights an inner battle against falling to irrational and hate-filled behaviour. But if he were to give in, allowing his emotions and other violent forces to run uncontrolled, acting out of anger (his *furor*), how could he fulfil his duty to his family, as once he loses himself in battle, acting only on his emotional whims, he will have to abandon them, unable to leave Troy without their aid. The fall of Troy is deeply painful for Aeneas, who must witness the death of King Priam and the suffering of his people. This makes it difficult for him to accept defeat and abandon his fallen home, especially as he must leave to protect the remainder of his surviving comrades and his family.

Virgil perhaps depicts this conflict following the siege of Troy from personal experience. The destruction of Carthage—similarities can be drawn to Troy—and living through war is still fresh in

Virgil's mind. He depicts Aeneas' inner conflict and struggle in his journey after showing the effects of war following destruction. Perhaps this is symbolic of how Virgil viewed living after the siege of Carthage.

Ultimately, Aeneas leaves Troy, his beloved home, behind after Hector comes to him, "...when Hector suddenly appeared before my eyes in my sleep, full of sorrow..." (2.270) "You must escape, son of the goddess. You must save yourself from these flames" (2.280-90), and "You have given enough to your native land and to Priam," which is assuring Aeneas that he should now put his duty to his family ahead of his duty to his country. He has given enough to Troy and it is his time to leave safely instead of dying in the ruins, which is not his destiny. His godly mother, Venus, appears before him at Priam's palace, "...wild anger in you? Why this raging passion?...Will you not go first and see where you have left your father, crippled with age, and find whether your wife Creusa is still alive, and your son Ascanius?" (2.590), physically intervening in the battle and giving Aeneas the truth that Troy is doomed. He must focus on saving his family and again the imagery of fire is used, conveying his *furor*. He has a duty to his family and his son, who symbolizes the future generations of the Trojan heritage.

Virgil remembers the destruction of Carthage as recent history. As a victim, he would have viewed this siege negatively since he was originally Italian long before he was an official Roman citizen and was himself displaced from his land following the land confiscations ordered by Augustus—the very man who commissioned Virgil to write this piece of propaganda (*The Aeneid*)—in order to reward his veteran soldiers with land. This could have deeply influenced his writing through the themes of exile, loss, and displacement, specifically Aeneas' journey, which mirrors the sense of forced migration after the destruction of Troy. We see this also in how Virgil resonates with Aeneas' forced departure and the struggles of the Trojans to find a new home after the loss of their family's property. This reflects the awareness of the human cost of war, thus the empire, shaped by Virgil's personal history.

He could see similarities between Carthage and Troy, as Homer's epics recited such as the pillaging and endless bloodbaths. Scipio Africanus, a Roman general and statesman, following the end of the Third Punic War and the sack of Carthage, recites a passage from Homer's Iliad, which acknowledges that Troy's fate is not unique—all great cities, even Rome, could share the same fate, reflecting Virgil's concerns that the empire was built on destruction and no power is eternal. This suggests that Rome itself was once in Carthage's position as the conquered and victim to imperialism rather than the conqueror.

From Virgil's *Aeneid*, we understand the themes of war and the human cost of conquest, which have striking parallels to the current war in Ukraine. It was written as a foundational myth for Rome, built on greatness and conquest (such as the destruction of Troy), but also exposes the devastating consequences of war—similarly to how Russia justifies its invasion of Ukraine through historical and imperial narratives. Virgil does not glorify war without its cost. Aeneas witnesses the destruction of Troy—his home in ruins, his family shattered, and his people displaced and forced into exile in order to survive the destruction of their homeland—much like Ukraine faces.

Aeneas is shown to initially be overcome with grief and rage, showing war dehumanising both the victors and the defeated. The character Aeneas' repeated tension between *Pietas* and *furor* suggests an awareness that war is not purely glorious but also tragic and moral. Virgil could have related to the grief Aeneas feels with how deeply it is described in the *Aeneid*.