Suspicion on three lines of the *Aeneid* (12.166-68)

To put an end to their conflict, Latins and Trojans have finally reached an agreement under which the two leaders, Turnus and Aeneas, will meet in single combat: the result of their duel will decide the outcome of the war. The two armies have already sided to watch the fighting, and now “the kings” are arriving (12.161 ff.):

*Interea reges, ingenti mole Latinus*

*Quadriiugo uehitur curru, cui tempora circum*

*Aurati bis sex radii fulgentia cingunt,*

*Solis aui specimen ; bigis it Turnus in albis,*

*Bina manu lato crispsans hastilia ferro ;*

*Hinc pater Aeneas, Romanae stirpis origo,*

*Sidereo flagrans clipeo et caelestibus armis,*

*Et iuxta Ascanius, magnae spes altera Romae,*

*Procedunt castris…*

“Meanwhile the kings advance: Latinus rides upon his massive four-horse chariot;

and twice-six golden rays – an emblem of the Sun, his ancestor – surround his temples;

a pair of milk-white horses carry Turnus;

two broad-tipped javelins quiver in his grip.

Against them from the camp site marches out the founder of the Roman race, father Aeneas, blazing with his star-bright shield and heaven-given arms; Ascanius,
the second hope of mighty Rome, is near him.”

This translation¹, which is fairly representative, it seems, of the current general trend, is still far from obvious. Let us pass on the meaning of the expression *ingenti mole*, 161, which can be applied to Latinus himself as well as to his chariot or his escort². The essential is elsewhere, it concerns the strange anacoluthon that leaves *reges* without grammatical function³, except to make it the subject of *procedunt*, considering the verses 161b-168 as a (how long!) parenthesis⁴.

Such an uncertainty encourages more than one commentator to think that the passage was still under construction at the time of the poet's death⁵. This kind of hypothesis costs nothing, except that in this case the passage suffers less from an incompleteness than from an overload. Now, as much the incompleteness can be used to excuse Virgil, so much the overload would result from an unthinkable awkwardness on his part. The alternative is to consider the possibility that the lines 166-68 (here in red) are the work of an interpolator, which would lighten the endless parenthesis while ensuring a grammatical status to *reges*.

Let’s look without complacency at the disputed text:

- Besides its redundancy (*origo* somehow repeats *pater*), the verse 166 contradicts what will be said by Jupiter at v. 834-38 (*genus Ausonio mixtum... sanguine*); and the mention of Rome in this circumstance has little relevance.

- The grandiloquence of verse 167 almost borders on ridicule, especially since this same adjective, *flagrans*, will return soon after to designate "the burning altars", *flagrantibus aris*, 171.

¹ By Allen Mandelbaum (1961)
² Plessis-Lejay (Paris, 1913) opt for the first solution (stature of the king); the third solution (importance of the escort), already preferred by Servius, is retained by R. D. Williams in his commentary (1973) and F. Ahl (2007); the second one (which was argued by S. B. Slack in CR 26 (1912), 123, on the basis of 8.693: *Tanta mole uiri turritis puppibus instant*) is accepted by W. F. Jackson Knight (1956), A. Mandelbaum, R. Fagles (2006).
³ Many put up with it. See recently R. Tarrant, *Virgil Aeneid Book XII*, Cambridge, 2012: “The most plausible view takes it [reges] distributively, i.e. as introducing the separate clauses describing Latinus and Turnus.” But he himself sees the objection: “Here, however, *interea* forms an abrupt opening, and *reges* does not immediately suggest Latinus and Turnus.” The quality of rex cannot be denied to Aeneas (see for instance 6.36 and 6.55).
⁴ So Servius.
⁵ See for instance R. D. Williams: “This sentence is clearly unrevised”; R. Tarrant: “Several features of this passage suggest that it had not attained its final form.”
Line 168 introduces Ascanius with a prosaic et iuxta which comes immediately after (and not in connection with) another et and will be followed by still another coordination (et que, 169). One might also question the presence here of this young prince, described as puer, "child" (v. 435) by his father, and whom he carefully keeps out of the battle. But what best betrays the forger is probably the high-sounding formula used to glorify this boy, magnae spes altera Romae⁶, which heavily aims to match Romanae stirpis origo applied to Aeneas, so creating a perfect equality between the father and the son, as if spes were more or less equivalent to origo. Without doubt, commentators believe themselves firmly on Virgilian ground with the description of Ascanius as spes, "hope", but there are important differences with the three examples they cite in this respect (spes surgentis Iuli, 6.364 and 10.524; spes heredis Iuli, 4.274), since the word spes is used here in the nominative singular, and not in the accusative plural, and is put in apposition to Ascanius acting as subject, while in the other three cases Iulus (alias Ascanius) is genitive complement of the name⁷. The phrase spes Iuli (plural) spontaneously evokes the young man's expectations (subjective meaning), and secondarily the hopes his father places in him (objective meaning)⁸: here, on the contrary, there is no question at all of his own hopes, but only of the hope that he represents for the Roman community (and that we take Romae in the subjective or objective sense, it does not change anything)⁹. In other words, Ascanius is emptied of all inner life and transformed into a pure symbol, a statue so to speak: an impression still reinforced by the flat et iuxta, all the

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⁶ The phrase inevitably evokes altae moenia Romae, 1.7 (see R. Tarrant), but somewhat flattening it by substituting a banal adjective for a more evocative one.

⁷ The case of spes Iuli in 1.556 is different, because there the expression refers mainly to "the hope of seeing him alive". But, even if one wants to analyse Iuli as a genitive of definition ("Iulus, our hope"), it remains that the idea of young age and promise related to young age is very pregnant in this spes: R.G. Austin (Aeneidos Liber Primus, Oxford, 1971, ad loc.) glosses the word by "promise"; in the same way Servius, also ad 1.556: "bene de Ascanio spem dicit propter aetatem."

⁸ R. Tarrant is very clear on this point: "Elsewhere spes in connection with Iulus/Ascanius refers to his hopes for future rule." See also R.G. Austin (Aeneidos Liber Quartus, Oxford, 1955) ad 4.274: "either 'the hopes that Iulus has' of being Aeneas' heir, or 'the hopes that Iulus inspires' as heir; the former is preferable." But it would seem that most translators, at least in English, do not agree.

⁹ In the subjective sense ("the second hope of mighty Rome", A. Mandelbaum), Ascanius would be supposed to represent the hopes of a Rome still non-existent (Romae used proleptically). In the objective sense, favored by R. Tarrant ("the promise of Rome's greatness"), Ascanius would embody the promise of Roman grandeur.
more awkward that this new coordination seems to connect two logically unrelated phrases (et caelestibus armis et iuxta Ascanius)\textsuperscript{10}.

But we must go further in the criticism. If indeed, as we have just seen, our \textit{spes Romae} has no real equivalent in the \textit{Aeneid}, he has some in the \textit{Bucolics} and the \textit{Georgics}. In the first eclogue (v.15), Meliboeus calls \textit{spem gregis}, "hope of the flock", two newly born kids; in the fourth georgic (v. 162), \textit{spem gentis}, "hope of the nation", designates the brood of bees\textsuperscript{11}, even more explicit is the phrase \textit{spemque gregemque} from the third georgic (v. 473), which distinguishes between "the hope of the flock" and "the flock itself". In light of these examples, it appears that in Virgilian usage the word \textit{spes} equals "child", "adolescent", "promise of", just as flowers are, in Malherbe’s words, "la promesse des fruits". It designates the last generation, and, in addition, a generation that has not yet reached puberty, so that calling Ascanius \textit{altera spes Romae} is not only impossible (it would require that Aeneas be his brother, not his father), it’s really grotesque.

The connection \textit{Hinc... procedunt castris} was not particularly felicitous, since the adverb \textit{hinc} generally marks origin, which puts it virtually in competition with \textit{castris} ("From there (i.e. the camp) they leave the camp"). Once these three calamitous lines are removed, things become clearer: after having taken before the king the resolution to fight alone against the Trojan chief, Turnus had gone to the camp, where Latinus had rejoined him. Now they are going out together from this camp\textsuperscript{12}. The priest follows them with the sacrificial beasts. Then they perform the rites (v. 172-74):

\begin{quote}
\textit{Illi ad surgentem conuersi lumina solem}
\textit{Dant fruges manibus salsas et tempora ferro}
\textit{Summa notant pecudum paterisque altaria libant.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} Compare for example the case of 7.649 (\textit{Filius huic iuxta Lausus}), which introduces a superb presentation of Lausus near his father Mezentius.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Aliae spem gentis adultos / Educunt fetus}, "Others initiate / The adolescent hopefuls of the tribe", L. P. Wilkinson (Penguin, 1982).

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Procedunt castris} is modeled on \textit{Considunt castris}, the last line of Book 11, except that \textit{castris} referred there to the two respective camps while here, for most commentators, it means the Trojan camp. For us, it is the Latin camp. Significant is the embarrassment of R. Tarrant in this regard, since, \textit{ad} v. 169, he writes that \textit{procedunt castris} “strictly speaking applies only to Aeneas and Ascanius (since Turnus would have emerged from the \textit{tecta} mentioned in 81)”, while \textit{ad} v. 161-72 he only says that the application to Latinus is “improbable”.
“Turning their heads to face

the rising sun, the captains reach out their hands,

pouring the salted meal, and mark off the brows

of the victims, cutting tufts with iron blades

and tip their cups on the sacred altar fires.”

As long as the three parasitic lines have not been removed, commentators will be vainly looking for the referent of Illi\textsuperscript{14}. For us, the question does not arise, for it is clear that this Illi correlates with the Aeneas of verse 175: first, Turnus and Latinus proceed to the sacred rites\textsuperscript{15}, then Aeneas pronounces his oath.

It seems that the authenticity of 166-68 had never been questioned until now, and for good reason, since they probably were there from the beginning, i.e. from the publication of the poem two years after the death of the author. Let's not forget that Augustus supervised the edition, and that, without this fraudulent addition, the Virgilian version could only frustrate a man who admired himself through the Trojan hero. He therefore took advantage of the audacious hyperbaton reges .. procedunt to slip into the text in order to extol, as he says pompously, "the origin of the Roman breed", the great Aeneas. Without worrying about small collateral damage\textsuperscript{16}... -jym 2018.04.13

\textsuperscript{13} Translation by R. Fagles.

\textsuperscript{14} Compare "the captains", R. Fagles "the princes", W. F. Jackson Knight; “both warriors”, A. Mandelbaum; “the group… everyone”, F.Ahl. The question is generally eluded by the commentators, who, as R. Tarrant writes, “maintain a prudent silence”.

\textsuperscript{15} As there are only two animals, a sheep and a pig, it is difficult to see how the doxa manages to imagine the scene with four actors.

\textsuperscript{16} The forced insertion of these three pompous verses in praise of Aeneas reminds the interpolation of the sixth stanza of Horace’s Ode 4.6: cf. \url{http://www.espace-horace.org/jym/odes_4/O_IV_06.htm}. 