

A French Jesuit's Lectures on Vergil, 1582–1583: Jacques Sirmond between Literature, History, and Myth

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An unstudied manuscript in Princeton contains lectures delivered by the youthful Jacques Sirmond at the Jesuit college of Pont-à-Mousson. In contrast to the received picture of Jesuit pedagogues as devoted rhetoricians, Sirmond explained *Aeneid* books 3 and 12 in a self-consciously historical way, concentrating especially on Roman law and religion and their interaction. His concerns are discussed in light of sixteenth-century scholarship on ancient Rome, contemporary Vergil commentary, humanist interest in the history of culture as a hermeneutic tool, and Sirmond's own later career as a philologist and ecclesiastical historian. Sirmond's comments on *Aeneid* 12 in particular show how he used religious and legal information in an unusual ethical reading of Vergil's text. Like some other early modern readers, Sirmond read Vergil's poem, other ancient literary texts, and Roman historical texts and documents as equivalent and interchangeable sources of information.

SOMETIME AROUND 1600, a versatile young wanderer found himself in the city of Pont-à-Mousson in the Lorraine. In the course of his travels he had escaped enslavement, imprisonment, women, storms, lawyers, alchemists, and assassins, and it occurred to him that his life might become easier if he were an educated man. So he entered the Jesuit college of Pont-à-Mousson as its only adult pupil, later explaining his motives as a mixture of avarice and unsullied humanistic sentiment:

Once I learned how many men had freed themselves from poverty through learning—and because I grew tired of my ignorance, which had snatched from my grasp any knowledge of antiquity, so that I could not even contemplate the misfortunes of the ancients to console myself—I resolved to devote myself to a scholar's life.¹

¹John Barclay, *Euphormionis Lusinini Satyricon* (*Euphormio's Satyricon*) 1605–1607, ed. and trans. D. A. Fleming (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1973), 182, §II.1: "Ego vero posteaquam intellexi, quam multi se literis ex paupertate vindicassent, etiam ignorantiae pertaes, quae mihi rerum antiquarum notitiam auferebat, ut neque veterum miseriis ad solatium uti possem, constitui me in eruditorum disciplinam dare." I have consulted Fleming's English translation but have preferred to give my own renderings here and in the following quotations.

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With such prospects in view, being surrounded by prepubescent boys in the lowest grade was only a minor drawback. A greater problem was the feud in progress between the Jesuits proper and the head of the Pont-à-Mousson law faculty, which showed the Jesuits in particular in a bad light. "What mighty contests rise from trivial things," our student exclaimed, "by a path that is narrow but amply slippery!"² This notwithstanding, the young man advanced through all the classes in record time, becoming so enamored of the study of philosophy and theology that he decided to travel to Italy and join a religious order. By this time he had become the adopted son of William Barclay, the head of the law faculty; yet Barclay's strong disapproval could not dissuade the young man from his pious plan. In the event he never did join a religious order, nor did his learning ever earn him any money. His training did come in handy, however, when he faced a Jesuit in a public declamation contest, and again when he was seduced by a friend's wife who declared in a *billet-doux* that she could only fall in love with educated men.

The hero of this story was the celebrated Euphormio, protagonist of John Barclay's picaresque novel *Euphormionis Satyricon* (1604), a work that was widely read throughout the seventeenth century along with Barclay's other episodic indictments of European society at large.³ The novel was also autobiographical insofar as the law professor William Barclay was John Barclay's father in flesh and blood: the younger Barclay was in fact born in Pont-à-Mousson and had been led to take a jaundiced view of the place by his father's lengthy feud with his Jesuit employers.⁴ But regardless of the son's rather subjective view of the matter, the elder Barclay's documented difficulties might plausibly suggest a priori that his Jesuit hosts were intellectual reactionaries, suspicious of the new legal humanism Barclay represented and in general of anything but their own stereotyped and rhetorical mode of education and doctrinal polemic.

Unfortunately for historians of education, Euphormio more or less leaves us to guess at what went on in the classrooms of the Pont-à-Mousson Jesuits. So, for that matter, have all commentators after him, although some plausible reconstructions have seen light.⁵ It is a question of some interest, because in the late sixteenth century the Jesuits were busily establishing a position of significant educational influence in French-speaking regions, an influence they were to retain until near the end of the ancien régime.⁶ The contents of their increasingly widespread teaching would thus seem to invite study.

²*Euphormionis Lusini Satyricon*, 184: "[P]roher rerum minimarum in ingentia crimina sat patentes angustiae!" Readers will recognize that my translation quotes Pope's *Rape of the Lock*.

³Günter Berger, "John Barclay's *Euphormio*: Zur Rezeption eines neulateinischen Bestsellers in Frankreich," in *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Torontensis*, ed. Alexander Dalzell, Charles Fantazzi, and Richard J. Schoeck (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1991), 231-40.

⁴See the documents printed by Gaston Gavet, *Diarium Universitatis Mussipontanae (1572-1764)* (Paris and Nancy: Société des amis de l'Université de Nancy, 1911).

⁵See René Taveneaux, ed., *L'Université de Pont-à-Mousson et les problèmes de son temps* (Nancy: Université de Nancy, 1974), and Joseph M. O'Keefe, *The Pedagogy of Persuasion: Jesuit Education at Pont-à-Mousson* (S.T.L. thesis, Weston School of Theology, Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

⁶The classic study of Jesuit education is Gabriel Codina Mir, *Aux Sources de la pédagogie des Jésuites, le "modus parisiensis"* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1968); see also Aldo Scaglione, *The*

In recent years, indeed, the early Jesuits have been the subjects of considerable attention. We are often reminded that education was not the original purpose of their order, and that Jesuit scientists and mathematicians made important contributions to the state of early modern knowledge in general.⁷ As to the Jesuits' literary teaching, however—by all accounts a crucial part of their humanistic educational program—the received picture of them as doctrinaire rhetoricians has been left to stand.⁸ Here I do not attempt to evaluate the early Jesuits' enterprise *tout court*, but on the level of the individual classroom there does exist a witness with fewer literary pretensions and less scruple about boring his reader than John Barclay. He is a pupil named Michael Reginaldus, whose lecture notes on Vergil and Cicero taken in 1582–83 survive in a manuscript now at Princeton University.⁹ Reginaldus's notes allow us a unique opportunity to peer into the workshop of Jesuit literary exegesis and humanistic *Bildung*. They also allow us, at least on a local level, to challenge some preconceptions about the practices of early Jesuit educators.

In 1582–83 Reginaldus was enrolled in the second (that is, penultimate) class in the five-year college program, the year supposed to be devoted to the “human-

Liberal Arts and the Jesuit College System (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1986), and in general J. W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), chap. 6. For contention that the Jesuits' program was not so novel in France as sometimes believed, George Huppert, *Public Schools in Renaissance France* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

⁷On Jesuit scholarship in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, see Luce Giard, ed., *Les Jésuites à la Renaissance: Système éducatif et production du savoir* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995); François Laplanche, “Réseaux intellectuels et options confessionnelles entre 1550 et 1620,” in *Les jésuites à l'âge baroque (1540–1640)*, ed. Luce Giard and Louis de Vaucelles (Grenoble: J. Millon, 1996), 89–114; Bruno Neveu, “L'érudition ecclésiastique du XVII^e siècle et la nostalgie de l'Antiquité chrétienne” and “Archéolatrie et modernité dans le savoir ecclésiastique,” in *Érudition et religion aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), 335–63 and 365–83; Marc Fumaroli, “Temps de croissance et temps de corruption: Les deux Antiquités dans l'érudition jésuite française du XVII^e siècle,” *XVII^e siècle* 131 (1981): 149–68; and several essays in Emmanuel Bury and Bernard Meunier, eds., *Les Pères de l'Église au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1993).

⁸See, for example, Fumaroli, “Temps de croissance,” and the more extensive interpretation in *L'âge de l'Eloquence: Rhétorique et 'res literaria' de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique* (Geneva: Droz, 1980), chap. 4; on the nature of the Jesuits' instruction in rhetoric, see Barbara Bauer, *Jesuitische ars rhetorica: im Zeitalter der Glaubenskämpfe* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986), as well as J. D. Moss, “The Rhetoric Course at the Collegio Romano in the Latter Half of the Sixteenth Century,” *Rhetorica* 4 (1986): 137–51; and A. Battistini, “I Manuali di retorica dei Gesuiti,” in *La «Ratio studiorum»: Modelli culturali e pratiche educative dei Gesuiti in Italia tra Cinque e Seicento*, ed. G. P. Brizzi (Rome: Bulzoni, 1981), 77–120. For a trenchant account of the effects of Jesuit rhetorical pedagogy on French culture in general, see Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage, 1990), esp. 114–15, 148–50, and 170–71 nn. 14, 16.

⁹Princeton University Library, Department of Special Collections, MS Princeton 42. For the dates and the identity of the scribe and his teacher, fol. 95v: “Anno Dni 1582 et 1583 / Finis annotationum in tertium / librum Aeneidos a Magistro / Siremondo dictatarum 2. ordinis mo. / a Michaelae Reginaldo in secunda / classe audita sunt quae / in hoc libello continentur / Mussiponti. 1582” and fol. 37v: “Finis Annotationum / In duodecimum Aeneidos / Uirgilij de magistro / Sirmondo primi / ordinis moderatore / dictatarum anno / Dni 1583 / Mussiponti.” The *secunda classis* was the humanities year as a whole; the *primus ordo* and *secundus ordo* were apparently the two halves of that year (the *secundus* coming first).

ities.”¹⁰ He and his classmates would have been roughly fourteen to sixteen years old. What we apparently have is the record of the successive daily lectures that filled a fixed thirty-minute time slot in the humanities class over the course of a school year: the texts covered in this lecture were *Aeneid* books 3 and 12 and Cicero’s oration *Pro Cluentio*. Each school day probably contained three such lectures, most likely on a text of moral philosophy by Cicero, on a Latin poet (here apparently in alternation with a Ciceronian oration for part of the year), and on an elementary text in Greek.¹¹ There are no written exercises in the book, except for a few pages of energetically blotted poetry in draft. The contents of the ninety-seven folios of lectures are evidently material prepared in advance of class by the lecturer and cannot represent everything said in class for a year. And the notes are evidently a fair copy from rougher notes made in the class itself.¹² Still, despite or because of the highly formalized character of the notes, Reginaldus valued this record of his education enough to keep it at least until 1613, when he signed and dated the notebook again.

In form, the lectures Reginaldus heard were utterly traditional: they form a running commentary on the three texts involved, and the lecturer’s individual remarks range from small notes, little more than glosses, to complicated digressions of fairly oblique relevance to the text. The lecturer’s priorities, however, are not what we might expect from a college teacher of this time and in this place. The exegetical methods of the Ramists, which centered on humanist dialectic as a hermeneutical tool and were being widely adopted in France at this time, are totally absent from Reginaldus’s notes.¹³ It may not be surprising that Reginaldus’s Jesuit teacher eschewed the innovations of Ramus, since Petrus Ramus was notorious as an ardent Protestant (in fact, he was killed in the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre of 1572). But neither did Reginaldus’s teacher subscribe to anything

¹⁰The first three years were spent on grammar and the fifth on rhetoric; this sequence was a constant throughout the Jesuit system, although a few schools offered only three or four years out of the full program. See Codina Mir, *Aux sources* and Scaglione, *Liberal Arts*.

¹¹For the standard instructions on curriculum, see Laszlo Lukács, S.J., ed., *Monumenta Paedagogica Societatis Jesu*, 6 vols. (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1965–92), 2:210–12 (*Ratio studiorum*, 1565), and 5:151–53 (*Ratio studiorum*, 1586); see also the reading lists from individual colleges at 3:527–98 (mostly dating from the 1560s). These documents also suggest that the Ciceronian moral philosophy would have been replaced at some point in the year by Cypriano Soarez’s *De Arte rhetorica*.

¹²Production of the fair copy was doubtless an assigned task. Not only does Reginaldus often squeeze or expand lines to make the end of a comment coincide with the end of a page; he once wrote a note to himself (or his teacher) about his outstanding copying obligations: “Orationis Plancianae Annotationes manent in scriptis, breuitatis chartae causa” (my notes on the oration *Pro Plancio* remain in draft because I don’t have enough paper; fol. 95v).

¹³For Ramist pedagogy, see Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities* (London: Duckworth, 1986), 161–84; Ann Blair, “Ovidius Methodizatus: The *Metamorphoses* of Ovid in a Sixteenth-Century Paris College,” *History of Universities* 9 (1990): 73–118; and the anonymous commentary reproduced in full by Kees Meerhoff and Jean-Claude Moisan in “Précepte et usage: Un Commentaire Ramiste de la 4e *Philippique*,” in *Autour de Ramus: Texte, théorie, commentaire*, ed. Meerhoff and Moisan (Montreal: Nuit Blanche, 1997), 305–70. On Ramus and Ramism in general, see the classic study by W. J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), and the more recent interpretation of Kees Meerhoff, *Rhétorique et poétique au XVIe siècle en France: Du Bellay, Ramus et les autres* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

that resembles the traditional mode of Ciceronian rhetorical exegesis, which is generally thought to have been the dominant style in early Jesuit teaching.¹⁴ It is certainly true that some contemporary Jesuit productions fall into a classically Ciceronian mold. Over against the Pont-à-Mousson lectures on the *Aeneid* we might set the prodigious Vergil commentary of Juan Luís de la Cerda, S.J., who had apparently combed all classical and patristic literature for the stylistic parallels he arranged in column after folio column, or the equally imposing commentary in which Jacobus Pontanus, S.J., gave a rhetorical explanation for nearly every phrase in the text.¹⁵ Reginaldus's teacher, however, designed his lectures in the humanities and rhetoric as a fairly intensive introduction to the history, mythology, and religious and social customs that lay behind ancient texts. Nothing delighted him more than elucidating a place-name, a provision of the Law of the XII Tables, or the minutiae of Roman religious ritual. By and large, these were some of the fashionable preoccupations, not of Jesuit rhetoricians, but of the French and Italian antiquarian and legal scholars of the sixteenth century. In other words, it looks as if this particular chapter in the history of education needs to be explained by reference to contemporary scholarship and intellectual life rather than the history of educational theory proper.

The link between the Pont-à-Mousson lectures and professional philological scholarship is not just one of content. Reginaldus was thoughtful enough to record the name of his teacher: it was Jacques Sirmond, who was at this time in his early twenties but evidently well on the way to the remarkable erudition that was to make him one of the leading Jesuit scholars of the first half of the seventeenth century.¹⁶ In the course of an extremely long career, Sirmond assisted in the preparation of Cesare Baronio's ecclesiastical history, published editions of early French ecclesiastical councils and of authors such as Sidonius Apollinaris, Fulgentius, and Rabanus Maurus, and wrote doctrinal polemics against the Jansenists. In Reginaldus's notes, Sirmond displays a wealth of knowledge—some borrowed, some apparently his own—that shows that his lifelong intellectual orientation toward the history of religion and culture was already firmly in place in the early 1580s.

Because Sirmond himself was educated in a French Jesuit college, it seems plausible that the Jesuits were also the source of his intellectual tastes.¹⁷ Indeed, it would appear that there was at this time a concerted effort within the Jesuit order

¹⁴Codina Mir, *Aux sources*; Scaglione, *Liberal Arts*; Fumaroli, "Temps de croissance." On Ciceronianism in general, see Izora Scott, *Controversies over the Imitation of Cicero* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1910).

¹⁵De la Cerda: *P. Virgilii Maronis Priores sex libri Aeneidos argumentis, explicationibus, notis illustrati* (Leiden, 1612) and *P. Virgilii Maronis Posteriores sex libri Aeneidos, argumentis, explicationibus, notis illustrati* (Leiden, 1617); Pontanus: *Symbolarum libri XVII quibus P. Virgilii Maronis Bucolica, Georgica & Aeneis, ex probatissimis auctoribus declarantur, comparantur, illustrantur* (Augsburg, 1599).

¹⁶See "Vita Jacobi Sirmondi Societatis Jesu," in Jacques de la Baune, ed., *Jacobi Sirmondi Soc. Jesu Presbyteri Opera Varia*, 5 vols. (Venice, 1728), vol. 1; and Jean Pierre Nicéron, *Memoires pour servir à l'histoire des hommes illustres*, vol. 17 (Paris, 1732), article "Jacques Sirmond," 153–80; more recently, Fumaroli, "Temps de croissance," 154–60, 164–65.

¹⁷He attended the college at Billom: de la Baune, "Vita," first unnumbered recto page and Nicéron, "Jacques Sirmond," 153–54.

to produce young scholars who could compete with Protestant and Gallican apologists on the battlefields of national and ecclesiastical history. In Rome, Cesare Baronio's *Annales*, on which Sirmond collaborated, were intended as a direct reply to the Lutherans' *Magdeburg Centuries*.¹⁸ In France, Pierre Grégoire, who joined the Pont-à-Mousson law faculty in the 1580s, deployed his erudition against Gallican legal scholars. Fronton du Duc, Sirmond's contemporary and fellow-teacher at Pont-à-Mousson, went on to become nearly as renowned as Sirmond for his scholarship in ecclesiastical history, chronology, and philology in general. Exactly how all of these people and their interests came together in the late sixteenth century is beyond the scope of the present study, although an important story is certainly waiting to be illuminated. The immediate point is that we have in Reginaldus's notes a richly documented case in which scholarly concerns carried over into a Jesuit classroom. Sirmond's lectures do not give the impression that he considered the classroom a kind of magic circle from which adult intellectual concerns had to be excluded.¹⁹

To appreciate the slightly unexpected nature of Sirmond's lectures, we need to recall how the Jesuits' humanistic teaching has generally been understood. The standard Jesuit education in the *studia humaniorum literarum* lasted five years, with the first three years devoted to grammar, the penultimate or "second" year to the humanities (*classis humaniorum literarum*), and the final or first year to rhetoric.²⁰ At some schools it was possible to progress to philosophy, theology, and advanced degrees. But in the five-year lower sequence, Ciceronian rhetoric was explicitly conceived as the summa of the enterprise at hand, and much time was devoted to the reading of rhetoric textbooks and Cicero's orations and the composition of Latin themes and declamations.²¹ It might seem plausible, then, that the reading of classical authors in general was also conducted along rhetorically oriented lines. The commentaries of Jacobus Pontanus and Juan Luís de la Cerda would serve, again, as excellent examples of this mode of reading; although these commentaries were too large and expensive to be purchased by pupils, one imagines that more than one lecturer availed himself of their work in the years that followed.

¹⁸For Baronio's *Annales*, Fumaroli, "Temps de croissance," 156–57; Laplanche, "Réseaux intellectuels"; P. Riché, "Gerbert et le gallicanisme du Xe siècle au XIXe siècle," *Revue de l'Histoire de l'Église de France* 72 (1986): 5–17, esp. 9–12. For Grégoire, J. H. M. Salmon, "Gallicanism and Anglicanism in the age of the Counter-Reformation," in *Renaissance and Revolt: Essays in the Intellectual and Social History of Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 155–88, esp. 177–79. For du Duc, Irena Backus, "L'édition de 1618 des œuvres de Basile de Césarée et sa fortune," in Bury and Meunier, eds., *Les Pères de l'Église*, 153–73, esp. 157–60, 172–73, and François Oudin, S.J., "Fronton du Duc," in Nicéron, *Mémoires*, vol. 38 (Paris, 1737), 103–39; for Oudin's authorship of this article, see Augustin de Backer, Aloys de Backer, and Carlos Sommervogel, eds., *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*, 11 vols. (Brussels: O. Schepens; Paris: A. Picard, 1895–1932), 6:col. 25. See also in general Neveu, "L'érudition ecclésiastique" and "Archéolâtrie et modernité."

¹⁹I have hesitations, in other words, about Fumaroli's portrait of the early Jesuits as leading a kind of intellectual double life in which traditional humanist pedagogy and antiquarian research were rigorously separated. See Fumaroli, "Temps de croissance."

²⁰Codina Mir, *Aux sources*; Lukács, *Monumenta Paedagogica*, 2:203–214 (*Ratio studiorum* of 1565) and 5:141–156 (*Ratio studiorum* of 1586).

²¹Above, n. 8.

Sirmond's concerns, however, were very different, at least when it came to literary interpretation. He used the explication of Vergil as a pretext for exploring a vast range of subjects, among which rhetoric was prominent by its nearly total absence. Although Sirmond was also probably responsible for teaching rhetoric to his class through a standard textbook like that of Cypriano Soarez, he rarely allowed rhetorical concerns to spill over into the reading of Vergil in the "humanities" class. And it is especially apparent that Sirmond's scanty treatment of rhetoric was a deliberate choice, because many of his comments on *Aeneid* 3 were drawn, without acknowledgment, from another source: the enormous Vergil commentary of Lambertus Hortensius, first published a few decades earlier.²² For geographical, mythological, and linguistic information Sirmond was often happy to rely on Hortensius, either copying his words directly or adapting them into slightly simpler Latin. But when it came to questions of rhetoric or literary form—subjects that were also treated in Hortensius's commentary—Sirmond acted as a strict censor who allowed to pass only what was slight and innocuous. Thus Sirmond's most ambitious rhetorical remarks are generally signposts that alert his students to transitions in the text; for example, "This is a geographical portrait of Thrace," "Resumption of the narrative after a digression," or "Aeneas makes an exclamation calculated to strike a chord in the mind of Dido."²³ This is not information designed to make Reginaldus and his fellow-pupils into great homilists and political persuaders.

Sirmond's interpretive priorities appear even more sharply when we compare Hortensius's and Sirmond's respective comments on the speech of supplication uttered by Achaemenides near the end of book 3. Achaemenides was, according to Vergil, a Greek who had left Troy in Odysseus's expedition and been accidentally left behind in the cave of the Cyclops Polyphemus; he had managed to escape and had now been living in the wilds, Crusoe-like, for the past three months. In this speech he begs the Trojans, his erstwhile enemies, to rescue him, and warns them that the blinded Polyphemus is still seeking revenge on the entire human race. The speech is a model of wretched self-abnegation, and Hortensius breathlessly praises it for its rhetorical style: "Vergil narrates the story aptly, clearly, with fitting ornament, concisely, and plainly (as indeed he invariably does), and moreover with

²²Little is known of Hortensius, including his vernacular name. He was rector of the *Gymnasium* at Naerden and produced further commentaries on Lucan and Aristophanes, in addition to several historical works; see Caspar Burmann, *Trajectum Eruditum* (Utrecht, 1750), 155–62. The *Enarrationes in sex priores libros Aeneidos Virgilianae* was first published in 1559; an expanded edition, the *Enarrationes doctiss. atque utiliss. in XII. Libros P. Virgilii Maronis Aeneidos*, was printed at Basel in 1577 and again in 1596 (n.p.). Hortensius's notes on the final six books of the *Aeneid* are thin compared with his work on the first six books, and it seems possible that Sirmond had the 1577 edition but found Hortensius's notes on book 12 insufficient for his purposes. I cite the 1577 edition in what follows.

²³Sirmond ad 3.13, "Terra procul vastis," fol. 75r: "Chorographia Thraciae"; ad 3.56, "Quid non," fol. 76v: "Exclamatione utitur ad permonendam Didonis animam accommodata," with Hortensius ad locc.

verisimilitude, in order to create trust in the speaker," and so on.²⁴

Sirmond was not to be drawn into panegyrics so easily. "This is a frank and probable narration," he concedes, "but contrary to history (*contra historiam*), if it is true that Odysseus only came to Sicily ten years after the fall of Troy."²⁵ Sirmond was pointing out that Aeneas and his friends could never have encountered Achaemenides at all, since Aeneas's party had landed on this coast (according to Vergil) several years before Odysseus's expedition had landed there according to the *Odyssey*. Achaemenides was necessarily fictional, even within Vergil's fiction. Sirmond's observation is not quite original, since it had been made already by Servius in the early fifth century.²⁶ Nonetheless, his indignant rejection of Hortensius's long-winded rhetorical praise is an excellent example of the way in which Sirmond adapted his primary source of information to suit his own nonrhetorical ends.

As his comments on Achaemenides suggest, Sirmond was in general greatly interested in facts, as many of them as it was possible to assemble. *Aeneid* 3 in particular afforded Sirmond large opportunities to display the fruits of his reading, which had clearly extended well beyond Hortensius's commentary. *Aeneid* 3 recounts the lengthy voyage of Aeneas and his party from Troy to Carthage, in the course of which they pass (and Vergil applies some significant epithet to) several dozen notable cities and landmarks. In response, Sirmond explains numberless points of geography and natural history, often citing Pliny and Strabo as authorities. He gives etymologies of personal names and place-names, usually tracing them to Greek sources and often referring to Varro. He quotes many parallels from Greek and Latin authors, both those whom Vergil imitated (mainly Homer) and those who imitated Vergil (such as Ovid). In book 12, when the narrative shifts to a battle scene, Sirmond goes on to explain ancient siege engines and military formations.²⁷ In all of this Sirmond supports himself with citations of scholarly humanist authors, chiefly Adrian Turnèbe, Willem Canter, Carlo Sigonio, Ludovico Ricchieri (Coelius Rhodiginus), Alessandro d'Alessandro, and Gian Piero Valeriano Bolzani.²⁸

²⁴Hortensius ad 3.613, "Sum patria," coll. 627–28: "Narratio, in qua ratione circumstantiarum necessario omisum est exordium.... Narrat itaque in re trepida apte, distincte, ornate, breuiter & dilucide, (ut omnia) & quidem uerisimiliter, ut penes dicentem sit fides. In quo laconismo diligenter artificium narratorij generis in prosopographia expressit & obseruauit."

²⁵Sirmond ad 3.613, "Sum patria ex Ithaca," fol. 93v: "Narratio aperta et probabilis sed contra historiam, si quidem verum est decimo tantum anno quam Troia euersa fuit in Siciliam peruenisse Ulyssen. Quae porro de Cyclopiis immani ritu et barbaria fabulatur mutuatus est ab Homero 9 Odysseae et multa ab eo Ouid. loco supra citato."

²⁶Servius ad 3.623, "Vidi egomet duo"; see Maurus Servius Honoratus, *Servianorum in Vergilii Carmina Commentariorum Editionis Harvardianae volumen III*, ed. A. F. Stocker and A. H. Travis (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the American Philological Association, 1965), 219–20.

²⁷Besieging a city: ad 12.672, "Turrim," fol. 31r. Military formations: ad 12.575, "dant cuneum," fols. 29r–v (citing Vegetius, Aristides, and others).

²⁸Turnèbe: e.g. Sirmond ad 12.176, "Esto sol," fol. 14v, referring to *Adversaria* lib. 30 c. 29 (in the "Aureliopoli" 1604 edition, p. 685). Canter: e.g. Sirmond ad 12.4, "Poenorum qualis in armis," fols. 3v–4r, referring to *Novae lectiones* 3.26 (in the Antwerp 1571 edition, pp. 192–94). Sigonio: Sirmond ad 12.113, "Postera vix," fols. 10r–v, referring to Sigonio's *Scholia in Livium* (1555; 3d ed., Venice, 1572), ad 1.24, "Foecialis," fol. 6. Ricchieri: e.g. Sirmond ad 3.210, "Strophades," fol. 82r, referring to *Lectionum antiquarum libri XXX*, lib. 29 c. 27 (I consulted the Lyons 1560 edition).

At times Sirmond's learned remarks can seem random and miscellaneous—a perennial problem of the line-by-line commentary form. But beyond his assemblages of information we can also discern an interpretive pattern, sometimes fleetingly, sometimes more clearly. Sirmond was continuously interested in illuminating Vergil's narrative by recreating the social and ethical norms of Aeneas's society. Whenever a passage in the text invokes a clichéd or common thought, for example, Sirmond prefers to explain it by reference not only to literary parallels, but also to “vulgar” Greek or Roman proverbs he found in the commentary tradition (and in Erasmus, although Sirmond stops short of naming him).²⁹ In other words, Sirmond traces the common currency of some of Vergil's thoughts to timeless Roman oral culture rather than to Ciceronian commonplaces.³⁰ Most frequently, Sirmond's explorations of the cultural background to Vergil's narrative focuses on two interrelated subjects: religious customs and legal or political customs. Sirmond describes for his students a society in which the sacred and the public are interwoven and mutually supporting, forming a background that explains many of the most potentially foreign aspects of the text. On the broadest level, we might say that Sirmond was interested in the cultural history of the mythical age of Rome, and the way in which that culture determined the value of actions and events both large and small.

Aeneid 3, with its opening scenes of a sacrifice, a funeral, and the delivery of an oracle, was an ideal setting for this kind of approach. In the first hundred lines of the book Sirmond comments on all three of these rituals, along with subjects such as the *dii penates*, ancient notions of the body and soul, priestly garments, and catasterisms. The law enters the picture as well, in slightly idiosyncratic fashion, when Sirmond discusses the close encounter of Aeneas and his men with the shade of Polydorus. Polydorus, a Trojan prince treacherously killed by his guardian and abandoned on a beach, emits unearthly howls when his shade is inadvertently disturbed: Aeneas has stepped on the ground under which Polydorus's body lies and has broken a limb from a tree growing on the same spot. Sirmond follows

D'Alessandro: e.g. Sirmond ad 3.21, “Mactabam in litore,” fol. 75v, referring to d'Alessandro, *Genialium Dierum Libri Sex*, lib. 3 c. 12 (fol. 140v in the Frankfurt 1626 edition). Valeriano: Sirmond ad 12.475, “nidisque loquacibus,” fol. 26v, referring to *Hieroglyphica* lib. 22 (in the Basel 1556 edition, fols. 162r–163r). For background, see Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger*, vol. 1: *Textual Criticism and Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), chap. 3, William McCuaig, *Carlo Sigonio* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), Michela Marangoni, *L'armonia del sapere: I “Lectiōum Antiquarum Libri” di Celio Rodigino* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 1997), and Domenico Maffei, *Alessandro d'Alessandro, giureconsulto umanista* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1956).

²⁹E.g., Sirmond ad 3.414, “Haec loca,” fol. 88v, compared with Erasmus' “Euitata Charybdi in Scyllam incidi”; Sirmond ad 3.444, “Folij notas,” fol. 89v, compared with Erasmus, “Folium Sybillae”; Sirmond ad 12.320, “Incertum qua,” fol. 21v, compared with Erasmus, “Cum deo quisque gaudet et flet”; Sirmond ad 12.460, “Cadit ipse Tolumnius,” fol. 26r, compared with Erasmus' “malum consilium consultori pessimum.” In some but not all of these cases, Hortensius quotes the same proverb and could have been Sirmond's immediate source.

³⁰On rhetorical commonplaces, see Francis Goyet, *Le “Sublime” du lieu commun* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1996); and Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

Hortensius in pointing out that Polydorus's complaints were no mere piece of fussy cavilling, but quite justified according to the earliest Roman law:

[This is] a speech by Polydorus complaining of the injury done to him. For one of the laws of the XII Tables was "Let no one do injury to the deceased." And it was solemnly forbidden to exhume the bones of buried persons, to dismantle a tomb or burial mound, or to unearth their ashes. However, Polydorus excuses Aeneas in calling him "pious"—a great testimony indeed to Aeneas's piety, coming from one whom Aeneas had injured.³¹

We will encounter again the gesture by which Sirmond simultaneously creates an interpretive problem (Aeneas has contravened not just common courtesy but the most ancient Roman law) and finds its solution (Polydorus "excuses" him). Here Sirmond does this by a kind of pastiche method, drawing the idea of "excusing" from Servius's commentary and his information about the XII Tables from Lambertus Hortensius.

What is particularly noteworthy is Sirmond's interest in the XII Tables, the earliest code of Roman law, which scholars in Italy, France, and Germany had been seeking to reconstruct from later testimonies since the late fifteenth century.³² Although Sirmond draws on Hortensius for his information here, he apparently knew already what the XII Tables were and how they could be used to make inferences about early Roman society. Now according to Livy, as Sirmond would also have known, the XII Tables had not been formulated until AUC 302—that is, 635 years after the events of the *Aeneid*.³³ Yet the XII Tables were still the earliest written witnesses to Roman social practices, and Sirmond might also have thought he had an ally in the tradition that the XII Tables had been formulated on Greek models—a potential link to Troy and the eastern Mediterranean from which Aeneas and Polydorus came. Nonetheless, Sirmond is willing to make a fairly bold historical connection in the service of his basic interpretive principle

³¹Sirmond ad 3.41, "Quid miserum," fols. 76r–v: "Oratio Polydori per expostulationem de facti iniuria. Lex enim erat duodecim tabularum. Defuncti iniuria ne afficiuntur[.] nefasque erat sepulcorum ossa extrahere[.] aggerem tumulumue disijcere[.] cineres effodere[.] excusat tamen Aeneam pium vocans quod maximum est pietatis testimonium ab eo qui ledetur, tum obtestatur a Iure propinquitatis. Creusa enim coniunx Aeneae soror erat Polydori[.]" Sirmond is quoting nearly verbatim from Lambertus Hortensius ad 3.41, "Quid miserum" and "Parce sepulto," col. 452, with the exception of Sirmond's remark about "excusing," which is not in Hortensius: its source is Servius ad 3.42, "pias" (in the Harvard edition [note 26 above], 3:21).

³²On the history of the XII Tables in the Renaissance, see J.-L. Ferrary, "Naissance d'un aspect de la recherche antiquaire. Les premiers travaux sur les lois romaines: De l'*Epistula ad Cornelium de Filelfo* à l'*Historia iuris civilis* d'Aymar du Rivail," in *Ancient History and the Antiquarian: Essays in Memory of Arnaldo Momigliano*, ed. M. H. Crawford and C. R. Ligota (London: Warburg Institute, 1995), 33–72; and Ferrary, "La Genèse du *De legibus et senatus consultis*," in *Antonio Agustín between Renaissance and Counterreform*, ed. M. H. Crawford (London: Warburg Institute, 1993), 31–55. On a creative use of the XII Tables in the eighteenth century, see Arnaldo Momigliano, "Vico's *Scienza Nuova*: Roman 'Bestioni' and Roman 'Eroi,'" in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Middletown, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 253–76, esp. 263–69.

³³Livy 3.33–34, 37, 57.

that the actions Vergil describes should be adjudicated in an approximately context-specific way, namely, in light of the earliest documented history of Rome.³⁴

Other parts of his commentary show that for Sirmond, this principle positively excludes the use of Christian morality or metaphysics when dealing with the *Aeneid* and with pagan antiquity in general. So although we see that Sirmond follows Hortensius in referring Polydorus's complaints to the Law of the XII Tables, he departs markedly from Hortensius later in the same passage, when Aeneas describes how he and his men "buried" Polydorus' "soul in a tomb" (*animumque sepulcro condimus*), pouring offerings of milk and blood. Hortensius's commentary had explained this Roman ceremony well enough, but the explanation was overshadowed by Hortensius's splenetic invectives on the Roman conception of the soul:

This manner of conducting funerals for, or rather of burying the shades of those who have perished by some unhappy accident without the honor of a grave, is described partly here and partly in book 6. We ought to note the repugnant superstition, indeed the vanity of those ancient mortals, who were convinced of the impious notion that the souls of the dead wandered on the bank of the river Lethe and could not be carried over as long as their bodies were deprived of their due funeral rites and thus lay without honor. What a foolish and ridiculous fancy held their minds thus in thrall to impure spirits, so that they believed the shades of the dead lived in their tombs, and drank the blood of sacrificial victims slain there!³⁵

The overheated tone of all this apparently irritated Sirmond, and in his own comments he preserves Hortensius's facts while carefully vacuuming out his censures. The result sounds virtually anthropological in its tone of calm explication,

³⁴In fact, very shortly after Sirmond gave his lectures, the question was also raised whether the so-called law he and Hortensius quoted was really a law at all. Hortensius's apparent source of information was Aymar du Rivail's *Historia iuris civilis et pontificii* (Valence, 1515), which lists a law of the XII Tables reading "DEFUNCTI INIVRIA NON AFFICIUNTOR. SI INIVRIAM ALTERI FAXIT, XXV. ASSES AERIS POENAE SVNTO" (fol. xi^v). But Rivail's own apparent source, Aulus Gellius 20.1.12, did not include any phrase similar to "Defuncti iniuria non afficiuntor": the Venice 1515 edition of Gellius (for example) reads, "[N]onne tibi quocq; uidetur esse dilutum, quod ita de iniuria puniendi scriptum est? Si iniuria alteri facit. XXV. aeris poenae sunt." Rivail's phrase is equally foreign to modern reconstructions of the XII Tables: Salvator Riccobono, ed., *Fontes iuris romani antejustiniani*, pars prima, *Leges*, 2d ed. (Florence: Barbera, 1941), 54, reads for Law 8.4, "SI INIURIAM [ALTERI] FAXSIT, VIGINTI QUINQUE POENAE SUNTO." In Antonio Agustín's posthumously published compilation, *De legibus et senatusconsultis liber* (Paris, 1584), Agustín excluded the phrase about "defuncti" and spoke indignantly of Rivail's "fictions" (see e.g. 154); on Rivail's reputation and Agustín's views, see Ferrary, "Naissance d'un aspect de la recherche antequaire," esp. 58–59. All of this is to say that Sirmond's information in 1582–83 was about to become obsolete, but was not yet so.

³⁵Hortensius ad 3.62, "Instauramus," col. 459: "Hanc funerandi, seu potius animas condendi consuetudinem, eorum qui miserabili aliquo casu perissent, & quidem citra sepulturae honorem, hoc loco describit partim, partim in sexto. Hinc horrenda illa tum superstitio tum vanitas priscorum mortalium aduertenda est, quibus impiè persuasum erat, mortuorum animos circa amnem Lethaeum inerrantes transportari non posse, quam diu iustus funebribus defraudata corpora, sine honore iacerent. Quam stulta haec & ridicula persuasio effascinos ab impuris spiritibus animos tenebat, qui crederent manes mortuorum in sepulchris habitare? sanguinem caesarum uictimarum potare?"

even though the verbal similarity makes it certain that Hortensius was Sirmond's source. Reginaldus's notes read:

The custom of the ancients was to bury in a tomb (as they said) the shades of those who had perished by some accident without the honor of a grave. They were persuaded that the shades of the dead wandered on the bank of the river Lethe and could not pass over as long as their bodies were deprived of funeral rites and thus lay without honor. But, they believed, the shades were called back to their graves when a proper grave was prepared, and they remained buried in their tombs attached to their bodies for as long as the bodies themselves lasted. The rite by which this was done can be gathered from this passage together with the burial of Misenus in *Aeneid* 6.³⁶

Sirmond might have had a number of reasons for not calling attention to the "repugnant" and "impious" nature of his passage—for one thing, he may have felt it unwise to show his pupils how easy it was to assail ancient authors on doctrinal grounds. But it also seems likely that in Sirmond's hermeneutics, the Roman conception of the soul was not very different from ancient siege engines and the Law of the XII Tables. It was necessary information for understanding Vergil's narrative, and in particular for understanding why it was morally imperative for Aeneas and his men to pause in their journey and render this service to Polydorus.

It may be worthwhile to pause for a moment and observe what is unique and what is not so unique about Sirmond's interpretive assumptions as we have seen them so far. In the first place, Sirmond's method of explanation is strikingly different from both the Ciceronian and the Ramist modes of literary exegesis practiced by some of Sirmond's contemporaries. For a Ciceronian or a Ramist, the general structures that the literary text is shown to exemplify are the structures of exemplary discourse: the Ciceronian would call this exemplary discourse eloquence; the Ramist, dialectic. By contrast, the larger structures that Sirmond takes his text to exemplify are cultural and historical. These structures or codes can be either recovered from explicit historical expressions of them (such as the written Law of the XII Tables) or induced from particular instances and testimonies (as in the case of ritual practices). In either case, Sirmond uses general Roman customs, which he constructs historically, as the key to understanding the ethical character of particular actions in the text.

Insofar as he applies general structures of historical information to make particular actions comprehensible, Sirmond's approach also differs from that of Lambertus Hortensius, who in other respects shares Sirmond's high esteem for

³⁶Sirmond ad 3.62, "Ergo instauramus," fols. 76v–77r: "Antiquis mos erat eorum animas qui citra sepulturae honorem casu aliquo periissent, tumulo ut loquebantur condere. Illis enim persuasum erat mortuorum animas circa Leteum amnem inerrantes transfretare non posse, quamdiu funebribus defraudata corpora sine honore iacerent. Eisdem vero ad sepulchra reuocari credebant, legitima instaurata sepultura, tamdiuque in sepulchro conditas corporibus obnoxias permanere, quamdiu dum ipsa corpora durarent. Quo autem ritu id fieret, ex hoc loco et Miseni sepultura 6 Aene. intelligitur."

historical facts, especially those related to law and religion. When Sirmond deletes Hortensius's censures on the Roman notion of the unburied soul, Sirmond is using the facts as a key to contextual understanding, that is, to removing his pupils' potential shock and revulsion—whereas Hortensius uses the same facts as a means of instilling further shock and revulsion. It may not be too much to suggest that Sirmond tries to put his hearers in a Roman frame of mind by revealing the undisclosed assumptions behind the text, and thereby to make the text approachable. Hortensius's comments, by contrast, seem designed to alienate and estrange the text from his readers.

Although we can only speculate as to how Sirmond developed his interpretive methods and assumptions, they were not unique in the sixteenth century. As one parallel, we might look to biblical exegesis as practiced by Erasmus and other humanists who assumed that the divine author's intention could only be grasped by understanding the circumstances and ideas of the text's original audience.³⁷ For Erasmus, a proper understanding of the gospels requires not only linguistic competence and a solid foundation in Christian doctrine, but also a multidimensional picture of the world in which Jesus and the Apostles lived. Thus Erasmus urges the would-be interpreter to study the geography and natural history of the ancient Near East as well as the religious and social customs of the Jews and Greeks who appear in the biblical narrative.³⁸ Joseph Scaliger would later apply this principle

³⁷See Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); for an account that centers more particularly on the theological doctrine of accommodation, see Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the 17th Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), chap. 4. On Jesuit views for and against the principle of accommodation in the controversies over Copernicus, see Irving A. Kelter, "The Refusal to Accommodate: Jesuit Exegetes and the Copernican System," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26 (1995): 273–83.

³⁸Desiderius Erasmus, "Ratio seu methodus compendio perveniendi ad veram Theologiam," in *Opera omnia*, 9 vols. (Basel, 1540[–42]), 5:63–116 at 66–67: "Fit enim ut agnitis ex cosmographia regionibus, cogitatione sequamur narrationem obambulantem, & omnino non sine uoluptate, uelut una circumferamur, ut rem spectare uideamur, non legere. Simulque non paulo tenacius haerent, quae sic legetis.... Iam si gentium, apud quas res gesta narratur, siue ad quas scribunt Apostoli, non situm modo, uerumetiam originem, mores, instituta, cultum, ingenium, ex historicorum literis didicerimus: dictu mirum, quantum lucis, et ut ita dicam, uitae sit accessurum lectioni, quae prorsus oscitabunda mortuaeque sit oportet, quoties non haec tantum, sed & omnium pene rerum ignorantur uocabula...." My translation: "Once we learn from cosmographers about the regions [in which the events of the Bible take place], we can follow the shifting scenes of the story in our minds, as if we were being carried along with it, as if we were witnessing the events and not reading about them. This is not unpleasurable; moreover, what you read in such a way will stick much faster in your mind.... And when we have learned from historical books about the peoples among whom the events happened, or whom the Apostles were addressing—not only where they lived, but also their origin, customs, institutions, religion, and character—a marvelous amount of light and, as it were, life will be added to our reading. But that reading must be yawningly tedious, and dead, for people who are ignorant of these things, and indeed of the words for nearly everything." (Invectives against scholastic theologians follow.) On Erasmus's "goût pour les réalités concrètes" in biblical exegesis, see Jacques Chomarat, *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Érasme*, 2 vols. (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1981), 1:553–54.

A reference points out three other contemporary texts which emphasize the need for geographical and historical knowledge in the study of the Bible: Thomas More to the University of Oxford, Abingdon, 29 March [1518]; *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. E. F. Rogers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 112–20; Joachim von Watt (Vadianus), ed., *Pomponii Melae Hispani, libri*

with striking originality when he observed that the Last Supper had really been a celebration of the Jewish feast of Passover.³⁹ The Lutheran scholar Matthias Flacius Illyricus extended Erasmus's approach in a different direction as one of the authors of the *Magdeburg Centuries*, an enormous collaborative history of the Catholic church designed to show the church's gradual decline from original purity to decadence and corruption. To demonstrate this, Flacius and his collaborators sought to portray the *idea ac forma*, the "spirit and character" of the church in each age of its existence, building their depictions by using evidence such as liturgies, modes of sermonizing, and methods of internal government and communication in the church. Like Erasmus, Flacius and the Centuriators believed that historical habits of worship and belief were the indispensable key to understanding past events.⁴⁰ In this regard, these writers could have served as models for Sirmond's use of ancient Roman religion as a framework for explicating a text—and if Sirmond had not yet read the *Magdeburg Centuries* in 1582–83, he would soon do so in depth as a collaborator on the Roman reply to the *Centuries*, Cesare Baronio's *Annales*.

Sirmond's frequent mingling of religious and legal concerns in his explanations probably has another, related source. The legally influenced historical scholarship of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy and France was very often directed to past events (and present purposes) that combined the legal inextricably with the religious. Thus Lorenzo Valla's declamation on the Donation of Constantine, which is generally considered a founding work of humanist historical scholarship, argued against the church's legal claims to its present political domination in Rome.⁴¹ In the early sixteenth century the lawyer Alessandro d'Alessandro composed his much-printed antiquarian work, the *Genialium dierum libri sex* (1524), on a similar principle. Beginning with ancient Rome and fanning out to encompass the entire ancient Mediterranean excepting Judaea, d'Alessandro explained how ancient political and religious institutions interpenetrated in foundation myths, municipal calendars, temples and public buildings, priesthoods, and

de situ orbis tres, adiectis IOachimi VAdiani Heluetic in eosdem Scholiis (Vienna, 1518), esp. fols. b3v–4v (and on the interpretation of Vergil, fol. b3r); Joachim von Watt, *Epitome trium terrarum partium* (Zurich, 1534), esp. fol. Av^r (dedicatory epistle) and the index of biblical place-names.

³⁹Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger*, vol. 2: *Historical Chronology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 316–20; Debora Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 35–37.

⁴⁰The *Magdeburg Centuries* were officially titled *Ecclesiastica Historia*, 13 vols. (Basel, 1559–74); for their historiographical priorities and the collaborators' mode of work, see Heinz Scheible, *Die Entstehung der Magdeburger Zenturien: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der historiographischen Methode* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1966).

⁴¹Valla, *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio: The Treatise of Lorenzo Valla on the Donation of Constantine*, ed. and trans. Christopher B. Coleman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922; reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971); for comments, see Donald R. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law, and History in the French Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), chap. 2; and Joseph M. Levine, "Reginald Pecock and Lorenzo Valla on the Donation of Constantine," *Studies in the Renaissance* 21 (1974): 118–43 (reprinted in Levine's *Humanism and History* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987]).

public ceremonies of all kinds.⁴² Sirmond had read d'Alessandro carefully, as we can see, for example, from a reference to d'Alessandro on the animals sacrificed to the various Roman gods, from which Sirmond concludes independently that Aeneas's sacrifice of a bull to Jupiter in *Aeneid* 3 was *non rite mactatum*, not ritually correct.⁴³ We might further compare the interpenetration of legal and religious concerns in François Baudouin's *Plan for a Universal History* (1561), and in the whole body of polemical historical writing produced during the Wars of Religion in France.⁴⁴ To the latter genre Sirmond himself was later to contribute, not only through his work on Baronio's *Annales* but also through his independent publications, such as his editions of early French ecclesiastical councils.⁴⁵

If Sirmond's style of explication is unusual among literary interpreters, that is, then it sat squarely in the center of a broader humanist tradition of contextual, historical reading. And if Sirmond's comments were often local and restricted to a particular passage, as in his comments on the Achaemenides and Polydorus episodes in *Aeneid* 3, he was also capable of using the reconstructed culture of prehistoric Rome as the key to deeper, more far-reaching interpretations. In his remarks on *Aeneid* 12, Sirmond fashions the kind of antiquarian information we have already seen into a sustained contextual commentary that results in a reading of the poem that is both authentically literary and unexpectedly modern in tone. It looks as if Sirmond, predisposed to see the ethical character of individual actions as being determined by historical cultural norms, notices first a great interpretive problem and then a solution to it—both of which seem to be quite unparalleled in other contemporary commentaries.

The action of *Aeneid* 12, as Sirmond sees it, is roughly as follows. Turnus, prince of the besieged Latins, solemnly vows to meet Aeneas in a single combat that will determine the outcome of the war in progress. The Latins and Trojans perform religious ceremonies, acknowledging their acceptance of this means of ending the fighting. Meanwhile, however, Turnus's sister Juturna fears for his safety and, with the aid of Juno, sows discontent among the Latin ranks. General fighting

⁴²For a discussion with emphasis on d'Alessandro's legal training, see Maffei, *Alessandro d'Alessandro*.

⁴³Sirmond ad 3.21, "Mactabam in littore," fol. 75v: "notandum vero taurum hoc loco Ioui non rite mactatum. Ut scribit Alexander lib. 3 cap. 12." D'Alessandro had written, "Atque omnibus fere diis suae victimae, & sua sacra constituta sunt, quae praeterire & transgredi non erat fas. Namque aliena hostia dii non placantur. Quippe Ioui tauro, verre & ariete sacra facere non licet: quia soli Neptuno, Apollini & Marti taurus immolatur. Tametsi flaminis uxor omnibus nundinis Ioui arietem mactet, & triumphus die Ioui taurus hostia dicata sit": *Genialium dierum libri sex*, book 3, chap. 12 (in the Frankfurt 1626 edition, fol. 140v).

⁴⁴Baudouin, *De Institutione historiae universae, et eius cum iurisprudentia coniunctione* (Paris, 1561); for comments, Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship*, 129–36, and Erich Hassinger, *Empirisch-rationaler Historismus: Seine Ausbildung in der Literatur Westeuropas von Guicciardini bis Saint-Evremond* (Bern and Munich: Francke, 1978), 106–10. On French polemics, see Adrianna E. Bakos, "The Historical Reputation of Louis XI in Political Theory and Polemic during the French Religious Wars," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21 (1990): 3–32; and Pontien Polman, *L'Élément historique dans la controverse religieuse du XVI^e siècle* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1932).

⁴⁵See Riché, "Gerbert et le gallicanisme," and J. H. M. Salmon, "Clovis and Constantine: The Uses of History in Sixteenth-Century Gallicanism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 41 (1990): 584–605, esp. 604–5.

breaks out, culminating in a final meeting of Aeneas and Turnus. Turnus begs for his life, but Aeneas, seeing Turnus wearing an ornamental belt taken from Aeneas's slain friend Pallas, dispatches Turnus's soul to the nether regions, groaning indignantly as it goes.

Certain readers in the sixteenth century found this ending abrupt if not ethically troubling. The most famous solution was that of Maffeo Vegio, who composed a new thirteenth book which depicts Turnus's funeral and the marriage of Lavinia; it was widely printed in subsequent editions of the *Aeneid* itself.⁴⁶ Twentieth-century scholars, who generally operate on a shorter interpretive leash than Vegio permitted himself, content themselves with voicing persistent questions about the morality of Aeneas's imperial project, and particularly about the justice of Turnus's death.⁴⁷ Sirmond's approach falls somewhere between these two responses. Like the modern critics Adam Parry and Michael Putnam, Sirmond seems to feel that Turnus's death was a potential blemish on Aeneas's virtue. Unlike them, he is quite sure that the purpose of the *Aeneid* is to depict Aeneas acting justly.⁴⁸ So Sirmond laboriously constructs a historical context that puts Turnus ineluctably in the wrong by the standards of the earliest Roman law and religion. To put it rather crudely, Turnus deserved whatever he got according to the cultural code which the learned Vergil had written into his poem.

Sirmond argues this point through an intensive, almost single-minded discussion of the making and breaking of the *foedus* or pact between the Trojans and the Latins. He begins by pointing out the similarity of the ceremony in Vergil to the one described in Livy's first book when the Romans and the Albans seal the most ancient *foedus* in the Roman historical record.⁴⁹ In effect, Sirmond is both identifying a Vergilian source and arguing the validity of his own cultural-historical approach for a fictional work. Sirmond then dwells on the religious and public

⁴⁶See Craig Kallendorf, *In Praise of Aeneas: Virgil and Epideictic Rhetoric in the Early Italian Renaissance* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 100–128, and earlier works cited there.

⁴⁷For a survey, see S. J. Harrison, "Some Views of the *Aeneid* in the Twentieth Century," in *Oxford Readings in Virgil's "Aeneid,"* ed. S. J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1–20, esp. 1–10; more recently, David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Susanne Lindgren Wofford, *The Choice of Achilles: The Ideology of Figure in the Epic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

⁴⁸For canonical so-called pessimistic readings, see Parry, "The Two Voices of Virgil's *Aeneid*," in *The Language of Achilles and Other Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 78–96 (first published *Arion* 2 [Winter 1963]: 66–80), and Putnam, *The Poetry of the "Aeneid": Four Studies in Imaginative Unity and Design* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965); a more nuanced view is in W. R. Johnson, *Darkness Visible: A Study of Virgil's "Aeneid"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). Compare Sirmond, introduction to book 12, fol. 2r: "Cuiusmodi [sc. "epopoieia"] est Aeneis Virgiliana in qua viri prudentis simul et fortis speciem in Aenea effingit poeta[,] quarum virtutum alteram in Achille hom[er]us alteram in Ulysse descripserat[,] non astringitur utque poeta alicuius recti viri moribus aut historiae[,] quam habet pro argumento moerae ["merae"] narrationis[,] sed et variatim affingit pro perfecti viri idem quam animo comprehendit, et ex adumbrata ac illustrata historia aut alia recte facie descripta conficit poema iuxta illud Horatii in Arte poetica preceptum

Respicere exemplar vitae moralisque iubebo

Rectum imitorem et vivas hinc ducere voces." (He quotes Hor. *Ars poet.* 317–18.)

⁴⁹Sirmond ad 12.113, "Postera vix," fols. 10r–11r, where he gives a lengthy quotation from Livy 1.24, and also compares the Vergilian *foedus* to the ritual preceding the monomachy of Paris and Menelaus at *Iliad* 3.264–301.

nature of the Vergilian *foedus*, seizing on separate elements in Vergil's description and delivering lengthy disquisitions on Roman animal sacrifice, the gods who received sacrifice, and the whole ancient taxonomy of sacred plants.⁵⁰

In a change from his approach to book 3, Sirmond now devotes a modest proportion of his commentary to rhetorical exegesis, perhaps in conjunction with the beginning of his pupils' study of rhetoric.⁵¹ He introduces book 12 with a discussion of poetry and the epic, largely following Julius Caesar Scaliger's *Poetics*. More importantly from an interpretive standpoint, Sirmond gives careful attention to the characters of Turnus and Latinus as revealed by their speeches at the opening of the book's action. Turnus comes off badly, as an impetuous and opportunistic character—a born oath-breaker if ever there was one.⁵²

The bulk of Sirmond's interpretive work is thus complete at an early point in book 12. But as the action proceeds to other things he assiduously keeps the theme of the pact alive, drawing out the religious overtones of events, summarizing narrative transitions with reference to their effect on the pact, and in general using the word *foedus* at every opportunity.⁵³ Vergil's description of the fighting, by contrast, he mainly skims, often letting as many as twenty lines pass without comment. He does, however, pause to point out the justice of the death of Tolumnius, the Latin who had thrown the first spear to initiate the general conflict.⁵⁴

Near the close of the book, when Turnus's death is imminent, Sirmond again decelerates his progress through the text and finds a way to reinvoke the *foedus* theme apropos of passages totally unrelated to Turnus: Juno's oath on the river Styx becomes the occasion for extended remarks on divine *iusiurandum*, and the narrator's subsequent reference to the Dirae or Furies permits him to expand on the

⁵⁰In addition to 12.113, see Sirmond ad 12.118, "Diis communibus aras," fols 11 v, 12.120, "Velati lino," fol. 11 v–12 r, 12.120, "Verbena," fol. 12 r, and 12.130, "Defigunt tellure," fols. 12 r–12 v.

⁵¹See nn. 8 and 11 above.

⁵²On poetry and the epic, see fols. 1 v–2 r; for Turnus's character, e.g. Sirmond ad 12.11, "Nulla mora," fol. 4 r: "Oratio Turni iuvenilis arrogantiae et temeritatis plena..." and ad 12.48, "Quam pro me curam," fol. 6 v: "Insolens quidem et superbum sed personae congruens responsum ut intelligas fato quodam Turnum trahi ad mortem cuius animus nec Latini consilio et Lauinia et Amatae precibus fleatur."

⁵³For further references to the *foedus*, see Sirmond ad 12.170, "Setigeræ foetum," fol. 14 r; 12.176, "Esto sol," fol. 14 v; 12.198, "Latona genus," fols. 15 v–16 r; 12.200, "Fulmine sancit," fol. 16 r; 12.201, "Tango aras," fol. 16 v (where the key term temporarily changes to *iusiurans*, swearing of oaths); 12.204, "Ut sceptrum," fols. 16 v–17 r; 12.233, "Uix hostem alterni," fol. 18 v; 12.244, "His aliud maius," fol. 18 v; 12.266, "Telum contorsit in hostes," fols. 19 v–20 r; 12.320, "Incertum qua," fols. 21 r–v; 12.460, "Cadit ipse Tolumnius," fol. 26 r; 12.468, "hoc concussam," fol. 26 v; 12.503, "tanton placuit," fol. 27 r.

⁵⁴Sirmond ad 12.460, "Cadit ipse Tolumnius," fol. 26 r: "Prouerbium fuit apud Rom. celebratissimum malum consilium consultori pessimum ex greco illo hesiodi versu ut videtur ductum... hoc vero apte in Tolumni auguros quadrat qui author foederis violandi violati poenas dedit." The proverb is from Erasmus, *Adagiorum Chilias Prima*, ed. M. L. van Poll-van de Lisdonk, M. Mann Phillips, and C. Robinson (= *Opera omnia* II, 1), pars prior (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1993), 226–28, §114, and was quoted in Hortensius's comment ad 12.460, col. 1540.

terrifying vengeance that awaits evildoers.⁵⁵ By the time Turnus and Aeneas finally meet, little further comment is necessary. Sirmond rather cynically describes Turnus's speech of supplication as a formulaic rhetorical plea for pity, and he assures his hearers that Turnus's soul is immortal (presumably so as fully to appreciate its torments *apud inferos*).⁵⁶ But the incriminating belt of Pallas, which most modern critics take to be the proximate cause of Aeneas's sudden anger and Turnus's death, barely interests Sirmond. He only notes it at all in order to supply an etymology for the word *bullis*, the belt's ornamental bosses.⁵⁷ The famous belt is evidently beside the point in Sirmond's moral conception of the poem: Turnus's fate has been sealed by the disintegration of the *foedus* several hundred lines before.

Sirmond conducts his reading by implication rather than by direct assertion, and in the process he allows himself to sidestep a few pertinent questions. Most obviously, he never argues for his assumption that the personal responsibility for the breaking of the pact lay with Turnus. He does once suggest that Vergil's divine machinery is a poetic device for adding weight to human deeds, which we might take as an oblique denial that Juno and Juturna actually caused the fighting, as the narrative claims they did. But why the particular human at fault must be Turnus, Sirmond does not explain.⁵⁸

A second, rather weightier problem presents itself if we try to analyze Sirmond's methods using modern notions of history, fiction, and myth. Quite simply, the age whose cultural history Sirmond was so interested in reconstructing fell well before any recorded history except the *Aeneid* itself. So, for example, the Law of the XII Tables, which Sirmond uses as evidence for archaic beliefs about the sanctity of graves, was not actually written until more than six hundred years after the time of the poem's action.⁵⁹ Likewise, the first recorded *foedus* in Roman history, which seems to Sirmond a convincing parallel for the *foedus* between the Trojans and the Latins, took place according to Livy about 350 years after the events of the *Aeneid*.⁶⁰ That such episodes in the poem are themselves likely to be retrojections, or indeed deliberate anachronisms, on Vergil's part did not bother

⁵⁵For *iusiurandum*, see Sirmond ad 12.816, "Adiuro caput Stygii," fols. 34v–35r; for the Dirae, see ad 12.845, "Sunt geminae," fols. 35r–v. In discussing the text slightly preceding this, Sirmond had again begun to emphasize religious subjects in general: see ad 12.771, "Puro campo," fols. 33r–v; 12.779, "Quos contra Aeneadae...," fol. 33v; 12.786, "Quod Venus audaci," fols. 33v–34r; 12.840, "Celebrabit honores," fol. 35r.

⁵⁶For Turnus's speech, see Sirmond ad 12.931, "Equidem merui," fols. 36v–37r; for the immortality of the soul, 12.952, "Uitaeque cum gemitu," fol. 37v: "Quibus verbis non obscure animos immortales significat, secus ac quidam sentire illum somniauit...."

⁵⁷Sirmond ad 12.942, "Fulserunt cingula bullis," fol. 37r. For recent comments, see G. Karl Galinsky, "The Anger of Aeneas," *American Journal of Philology* 109 (1988): 321–48; and Michael C. J. Putnam, "Anger, Blindness, and Insight in Virgil's *Aeneid*," in *Virgil's "Aeneid": Interpretation and Influence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 172–200.

⁵⁸Sirmond ad 12.320, "Incertum qua," fols. 21r–v. He begins by quoting Servius ad loc. (without naming him) to explain that despite Vergil's suggestive language, Aeneas's wound came at the hands of a man, not a god. Sirmond continues: "Proinde ipse Virg. res magnas et graues diuino numini tribuere solet.... Quoniam quae in deos cadere finxerunt antiqui in illis perfectissimam speciem expresse-runt[.] hinc poetae quae amplificare volunt ea comparant cum deorum similibus factis."

⁵⁹See n. 33 above.

⁶⁰Livy 1.24.

him at all.⁶¹ On the contrary, Sirmond treats those alleged archaic realia that paralleled the realia of historic times as the latter's actual historical precursors and ancestors. He certainly thought of the *Aeneid* as documentary evidence for the culture of the Trojans and the Italians around 1200 BCE, and not (as we would consider it) a key document for the cultural history of Augustan Rome.

This disjunction comes about not so much through obtuseness, I think, as through a kind of bold, exploratory overreaching. Sirmond begins with an interpretive method that his contemporaries had developed for synthesizing historical information and attempts to extend it back to mythical events. He wishes to illuminate his text through a large and miscellaneous documentation of Roman cultural history, but he has to describe a period that lacked the kinds of documentation that his method is designed to exploit and adjudicate. In this Sirmond is no different from contemporaries who wrote on that most famous Roman myth, the legend of Romulus and Remus, using apparently sophisticated critical methods to adjudicate the details of conflicting accounts, yet never pausing to question the basic truth of the entire narrative.⁶² Like Pierre Ronsard, whose *Franciade* (1572) involves the similar problem of presenting a mythical story in copious and verisimilar detail, Sirmond often ends up paying inordinate attention to minute facts that are not really facts to begin with. On the other hand, like his other contemporaries, the theological and legal interpreters, Sirmond is capable of rising to larger ethical questions that demand sustained attention to a particularly urgent theme in his text. That all of this happened in a Jesuit classroom is yet another reason to rethink the boundaries we may sometimes be too quick to draw between scholarship and humanistic teaching, between antiquarianism and literary study in the Renaissance.

⁶¹For Vergil's anachronisms in antiquarian matters, see F. H. Sandbach, "Anti-Antiquarianism in the *Aeneid*," in *Oxford Readings in Vergil's "Aeneid"*, ed. S. J. Harrison, 449–65.

⁶²H. J. Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome in Historiography from Petrarch to Perizonius* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1962), esp. 36, 39–40.

An important article appeared too recently to use in this paper; see Paul Nelles, "Historia magistra antiquitatis: Cicero and Jesuit History Teaching," *Renaissance Studies* 13 (1999): 130–72.