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MEZENTIUS AND THE ETRUSCANS IN THE AENEID

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Mezentius is the very first entry in the Catalogue of the Latin Allies at the end of Aeneid VII (647-654); he is Turnus' most important ally. "First to enter the war is harsh Mezentius from the Etruscan borders, the despiser of the gods (contemptor divum)" - and in this sense the prime antagonist of pius Aeneas. With him is his son Lausus leading a thousand men from Agylla, Virgil's learned Greek equivalent for Caere, the site of which was very near the modern Cerveteri. When Turnus makes his feverish declaration of war, Mezentius is active conscripting levies of farmers on the plains of Latium (A.VIII, 7f.). His previous history and fortunes are left for Evander's narration to Aeneas later on in Aeneid VIII (470 ff.), and this is for us a crucial passage. Evander tells Aeneas that his people's manpower is no match for its fame ... "but I am ready to unite with you mighty nations and a camp rich in royal forces ... You arrive here at the call of Fate. Not far from here is the site of the city of Agylla, still inhabited ... For many years it flourished, then Mezentius ruled it with tyrannical sway and cruel arms. I need not recall the unspeakable slaughter and savage deeds of this despot ... He even used to bind dead bodies with living ones, fitting hands to hands and faces to faces (what a torture!), and so he used to slaughter them by a protracted death, dripping with blood and gore in that terrible embrace. But at last the citizens at the end of their patience took up arms and surrounded the monstrous madman and his house, cut down his followers, and hurled fire on his roof. During the massacre he escaped and fled to the territory of the Rutulians and was protected by the weapons of his guest-friend Turnus. So the whole of Etruria has risen in righteous fury: they demand to have the king back for punishment under threat of immediate war ... Of these thousands, Aeneas, I will make you leader." For, as Evander explains, the Etruscans are forbidden by an oracle to choose a leader of Italian stock and he himself is too old to accept the leadership offered by their chief Tarcho. He did not lack good reason for enmity, for Mezentius had attacked his little settlement on the Palatine causing cruel destruction and loss of life (A. VIII, 569 ff.). Eventually Aeneas and his forces go to meet Tarcho and the Etruscans who are encamped in a grove sacred to Silvanus, not far from Caere (an interesting detail, for Silvanus has an Etruscan equivalent Selva: see M. PALLOTTINO, The Etruscans, p. 165); (A.VIII, 585 ff.). Aeneas' overtures meet with the expected success, and Tarcho and the Etruscans embark under his leadership; details of the forces are given in the Catalogue of the Etruscan Allies (A. X, 146 ff.). Meanwhile Mezentius has taken an energetic part in the attack on the Trojan camp (A. IX, 521 f., 586 ff.), but it is at the end of Aeneid X, after Aeneas has landed with the allied Etruscans and Turnus has been removed from the battle through Juno's intervention, that Virgil presents us with Mezentius' 'Απίουσα (689 ff.). He first withstands alone the combined hatred and attacks of the Etruscans and is made the subject of three magnificent similes. He kills Orodes in hand-to-hand combat, and when the dying man predicts a similar fate for him, he replies with an angry smile

nunc morere. ast de me divum pater atque hominum rex
'viderit.

(A. X, 743 f.)

"Die now. As regards me, let the father of gods and king of men see to it" (except

that the tone of viderit is more like the English "it's his look out".) When he at last confronts Aeneas he prays

dextra mihi deus et telum, quod missile libro,
nunc adsint! voveo praedonis corpore raptis
indutum spoliis ipsum te, Lause, tropaeum
Aeneae. (A. X, 773 ff.)

"May this right hand, my god, and this javelin which I poise to hurl, now aid me. I vow you yourself, Lausus, clothed in the spoils stripped from this brigand's body, as my trophy of victory over Aeneas". Note that the trophy is dedicated not to Mars, like the one Aeneas dedicates at the beginning of Aeneid XI, but to Mezentius' god, his right hand and spear. But Mezentius' god fails him; his spear misses Aeneas and kills Antenor instead. Aeneas is more successful: he wounds Mezentius and has the advantage, but as he raises his sword to strike, Lausus interposes. The disabled Mezentius retires to tend his wound and rest, fusus propexam in pectore barbam (838), "letting his beard, combed down in front, flow over his chest". Lausus' gallantry leads to his destruction, and Mezentius seeing his lifeless son is filled with bitter self-reproaches for having allowed him to intercede, and for having disgraced his name with his own guilt:

idem ego, nate, tuum maculavi crimine nomen,
pulsus ob invidiam solio sceptrisque paternis. (A. X, 851 f.)

"It was I too, my son, who stained your name with my guilt, driven out in hatred from the throne and sceptre of my fathers". He then speaks to his war-horse Rhaebus: together they will either avenge Lausus or perish. He challenges Aeneas, who prays to Jupiter and Apollo: to this Mezentius' reply is

nec mortem horremus, nec divum parcimus ulli. (A. X, 880)

"I have no fear of death, nor regard for any of the gods". In the following duel Aeneas triumphs; Mezentius accepts the death-blow fearlessly, begging only that his body be buried with that of his son.

At dawn of the following day Aeneas lops the branches off a huge oak and dresses it in Mezentius' armour as a tropaeum to Mars. The breast-plate is pierced in twelve places (A. XI, 9 f.): this is obviously not the result of the last combat, and why twelve so specifically? We have seen that Virgil insists that the whole of Etruria was banded against Mezentius (A. VIII, 494), and that he had had to withstand their combined onslaught (A. X, 691 f.); there can be little doubt that the twelve holes in the breast-plate symbolise the twelve cities of the Etruscan Confederation: a timely reminder that Virgil sometimes alludes to facts which he nowhere explains or even mentions.

Aeneas dedicates his tropaeum and then cheers his men: the way to Latinus and his city is now open, the greatest obstacle, Mezentius, now exists no longer:

haec sunt spolia et de rege superbo
primitiae manibusque meis Mezentius hic est. (A. XI, 15 f.)

... "these are the spoils and the first-fruits (primitiae, an unexpected word in such a context) from the proud king, and this (trophy) is Mezentius, the work of my hands".

The canonical version of the role of the Etruscans

When Virgil consulted the sources, perhaps simply to refresh his memory of what he had learnt at school, what would he have discovered about the part played by Mezentius and the Etruscans in Aeneas' early struggles in Latium? Whether Fabius Pictor or Ennius mentioned the Etruscans we do not know, but certainly one of the oldest and most respected versions of the saga was to be found in the first book of Cato's Origines, and the main outlines of his account can be reconstructed from scattered notes of Servius.¹

1. Latinus grants a piece of land to the Trojans for settlement, but further encroachments by the Trojans lead to war against the Latins and their allies, the Rutulians led by Turnus. In the first engagement in which Aeneas is involved Latinus is killed.
2. Turnus then flees to Mezentius and renews hostilities with his support; in the second engagement Turnus falls and Aeneas "disappears" (non comparuit is Cato's (or Servius') curious expression (Servius on Aeneid IX 745)).
3. Ascanius inherits the war and eventually kills Mezentius in single combat. Aeneas' disappearance is accounted for more explicitly in a version of uncertain origin which once again can be put together from scattered notes of Servius.² From this it emerges that in the second engagement, in which the Rutulians with Etruscan support fought against the Latins (presumably reallied with the Trojans), Turnus was the first to fall, but then Aeneas was driven to flight by Mezentius. A fearful thunderstorm broke out, darkening the day, and swelling the stream of the river Numicus: Aeneas in his flight fell into the river and was drowned or disappeared.³

Substantially the same account is given by Livy (I, 1-3) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (I, 57 ff.), except that they both lay stress on the initial peaceful settlement between Aeneas and Latinus, the marriage of Aeneas and Lavinia immediately after, the founding of Lavinium, and the uninterrupted alliance of Trojans and Latins; they also both report a peaceful settlement between Ascanius and Mezentius.

In all these accounts Latinus is an early victim of the fighting and Mezentius outlives Aeneas. But the point of most interest to us is that all three authorities agree in reporting a defeat of the Rutulians, an appeal to Mezentius, and a renewal of warfare with Etruscan assistance. Cato (Servius on Aeneid I 267) says that Turnus fled to Mezentius (Turnum postea ad Mezentium confugisse, eiusque fretum auxilio bella renovasse), and so does Livy (I, 2, 3: inde Turnus Rutulique diffisi rebus ad florentes opes Etruscorum Mezentiumque regem eorum confugiunt). Dionysius of Halicarnassus, roughly contemporary with Virgil, differs from this canonical account of the episode only in saying (I, 64) that Turnus was killed before the remaining Rutulians allied themselves with Mezentius. (Dionysius, incidentally, calls Turnus Τυρρηνός "the Etruscan", which is more likely to be an important clue than a scribal error, for the basic kernel of truth in the whole saga is no doubt a reminiscence of early wars between a settlement on the Latian plain and two Etruscan princes, Mezentius and Turnus, who were at least united in hostility to what they considered their natural subjects).

As far as the extant evidence allows us to judge, Virgil was the first to reverse the traditional situation completely and make Mezentius flee to Turnus and eventually die before him; most probably he himself originated this version, and if he did not, he must have been in a distinct minority in preferring it to the other.

The point of Virgil's innovation in the legend and its residual problem

It is well known that Virgil both condensed and modified the material and the time sequence of some of the early sagas when he came to construct the second half of the Aeneid. The ways in which he did this have been sensitively analysed by R. HEINZE¹, and his analysis endorsed by KARL BÜCHNER.⁵ His object clearly was to make the drama of "Aeneas in atium" culminate in Aeneas' marriage with Lavinia, the founding of a city, and the synoecism of immigrants and natives. This scheme naturally precluded any early and complete alliance with the Latins, and the telescoping of the chronology ranged them and Turnus and Mezentius simultaneously against Aeneas. Such a situation left Virgil's hero embarrassingly short of troops; and troops there must be for the Iliadic Aeneid. The solution which Virgil chose to remedy the deficiency was not an obvious one, for the legend which makes Aeneas visit Caere and there form an alliance with Tarcho (and Tyrrhenos) is tenuous and ill-attested (it is reported by Timaeus, Geogr. des Westens 44, and is alluded to in the dark and riddling words of Cassandra in Lycophron 1232 ff., where she is reported as saying that a certain kinsman of hers, the son of Castnia (= Aphrodite) ... after considerable wanderings ... will be received by Pisa and "the glades of Agylla rich in flocks". A friendly army will be united to him by Ulysses and the two sons of the king of the Mysians, Tarchon and Tyrseos. He will then find his company devouring the tables on which they have eaten, and be reminded of an ancient prophecy). It is not beyond the bounds of probability that the solution he chose was prompted in part by a wish to present the Etruscans in a sympathetic light as from the very beginning the supporters of the founders of the Roman Empire. The hundred-and-one hints in the Aeneid that Virgil was deeply versed in Etruscan lore and appreciative of their past glory point in this direction, as also does his own early contact with the still living Etruscan traditions in the commune of Mantua. However this may be, Virgil's solution leaves us with one very important question: was the estrangement of Mezentius from his people which it necessitated purely an ad hoc invention of Virgil's (of the kind he was, as we have seen, entirely capable of making), or is it a vestige of a true tradition? For Virgil did not simply reverse the canonical roles of Turnus and Mezentius: there is no tradition that Turnus was expelled by the Rutulians, whereas Virgil makes of Mezentius a deposed outcast.

The evidence for a Sacral Kingship of the Etruscans

- (a) At the present stage one must keep an open mind, but if it were a true fact that Mezentius was deposed and expelled and under threat of death, he would in this respect be like those sacral kings or king-gods of whom FRAZER found abundant evidence in primitive societies, whose reign likewise ended in expulsion or death because the tribe thought that its own prosperity was commensurate with the power and virility of its chieftain; a decline in manhood (Virgil does say that Mezentius' beard was flowing down over his chest) spelt doom for the sacral king.

At first sight it seemed to me that this resemblance was entirely fortuitous. Further investigation convinced me that this is indeed the kind of anthropological background against which an early - one might almost say prehistoric - Etruscan king must be viewed. The sacral king of savage societies has other characteristics: he is not merely temporal ruler, but an incarnate god; not only is his word law, but it is obeyed and enforced with all the selfless passion that superstitious dread even in times much nearer our own has worked up in the cause of some "religious" belief or other. And he is also a weather-magician, for he is credited with complete control of

the conditions that produce fertility of crops and hence the very existence of the community. Virgil's account gives the hints, and a small amount of other evidence gives corroboration, for believing that Mezentius' credentials for having fulfilled these offices are very good indeed.

- (b) We have seen that when dedicating the trophy of Mezentius' arms, Virgil makes Aeneas use the word primitiae, "first-fruits". The meaning would most naturally seem to be that Mezentius' arms are the first-fruits of the harvest of war and so dedicated to Mars; and this is sufficient for an understanding of the passage. But Virgil, I suspect, knew more about the previous legend of Mezentius than suited him to incorporate into his picture, and this word primitiae is the first indication of it. For as Macrobius tells us (Sat. 3, 5, 10), any diligent reader of the first book of Cato's Origines (no longer extant) will remember that Mezentius commanded the Rutulians to offer to himself the primitiae, the first-fruits, which they were in the habit of offering to the gods, and through fear of a similar command all the Latins made the following vow: "Jupiter, if it is more pleasing to you that we should give them to you rather than to Mezentius, make us the victors". Macrobius adds that this was the reason for Virgil's giving the label contemptor divum to Mezentius, not his lawlessness towards men. This version of Cato's is of course the oldest: later versions substitute for primitiae, the first-fruits of all crops, simply the whole of the wine produce, and link this up with the institution of the Vinalia, the Wine Festival on the 23rd April. Moreover, three of six transmitters (and adapters!) of this version⁶ say that the imposed tribute of wine was annual.⁷

So far then we have a story of annual tribute of one or more species of the fruits of the earth paid to a man who arrogated to himself the position of a god, and who had some kind of power to enforce his demands. Parallels to the individual parts of the story easily suggest themselves - one might think of feudal tithes paid to oppressive barons, or on the other hand of the megalomaniac Caligula posturing as an incarnate deity, or the "lord-god" Domitian: all, I think, misleading clues. One's first thought would perhaps not be of Tootonga, the sacred chief of the Tonga Islands, but Tootonga is, I believe, the parallel we are looking for.⁸ The most important points are these: Tootonga is himself regarded as divine, a sacred religious chief; he receives a yearly tribute of yams at the grave of the last Tootonga or another member of his family; the people are informed that in return for performing the ceremony, continuing to observe the rites and to pay respect to the gods, the gods (= spirits?) will protect them; the day ends with festal activities, eating, drinking, wrestling, boxing, dancing; and "we are informed, the quantity of provisions distributed was incredible and the people looked upon it as a very heavy tribute" (J. G. FRAZER). FRAZER (op.cit. p. 132) has established beyond doubt that offerings of first-fruits of this kind to a chief or king are made to him in his religious rather than his civil capacity. Nothing that is known of early Etruscan religion (and precious little is in fact known) is inconsistent with a view that it passed through a phase which could produce a sacred chieftain or king-god, as it seems Mezentius was; and what we know of Etruscan/Roman prehistory tells us unambiguously of a considerable period of Etruscan domination south of the Tiber over Rome and Latium, when the native population would have to obey Etruscan overlords. Such a view of Mezentius' status is indirectly supported and complemented by the fairly well-established theory of the original powers of the lucumones, the rulers of the individual city-states of Etruria. For it seems highly probable that the character assumed by a victorious Roman imperator in the dazzling hour of his triumph

derives, changed of course and diluted, from the usual and permanent status of a lucumo. The lucumo wore a cloak of heaven, embroidered with stars, and was on occasions identified with Tinia, the Etruscan Jupiter; he performed sacrifices and ordained festivals in accord with various happenings of the solar system, and appeared at regular periods to the people to receive their sacrifices and to transmit the will of heaven.⁹

More however remains to be extracted from Virgil's own account, not to give further support to Mezentius' title to a divine kingship, but to clarify the social ethos and atmosphere in which he moved.

The Torture and the Spear

(I) tormenti genus (A.VII, 487)

The practice described here was ascribed to the Etruscans by Cicero (a citation from the lost Hortensius in Augustine contra Pel. 4):

qui quondam in praedonum Etruscorum manus incidissent, crudelitate excogitata necabantur, quorum corpora viva cum mortuis, adversa adversis accommodata, quam aptissime (v.1. artissime) colligabantur.

"Formerly those who had fallen into the hands of the Etruscan brigands were slaughtered with calculated cruelty: their bodies still living were bound with bodies of the dead with the corresponding parts fitted to each other to match as much as possible."

This was the custom of Etruscan praedones; praedo, curiously, is the word used by Mezentius to describe Aeneas (A.X, 774). In Roman law, (Digest 49, 15, 24) the word designates not a person with whom there exists a formally declared state of war, but an enemy brigand. Among the Etruscans, as among many other primitive peoples, inter-community raiding was a common and accepted thing, bringing honour and prestige to the successful.¹⁰

What of the custom itself? It would be grossly anachronistic to see here a prototype of Belsen, caused by the same factors. Fairly evidently we are here dealing with some kind of human sacrifice: to understand it we should work backwards from the little we know of Roman practice. Discounting various ritual survivals in the historical period which can only or most satisfactorily be explained as vestiges of human sacrifice, because the token sacrificed is clearly a substitute (e.g. in the rite of the Argei), actual instances of ritual human slaughter in the history of Rome are very rare. The best known is undoubtedly the burying alive of a male and female Gaul and a male and female Greek in the Forum Boarium, first in 228 B.C. and then again in 216 B.C. This was not a sacrifice in any usual sense: it was not offered to any god. At first sight one would guess that it was a magical war sacrifice, the foreign couple representing the whole of the nation it was desired to exterminate or vanquish. Unfortunately the dates do not coincide with any period when the Romans were in any significant sense at war with Gauls or Greeks; there were admittedly Celtic auxiliaries among Hannibal's troops in 216 B.C., but why not choose Carthaginians? The dates do coincide however with times of burying alive a Vestal Virgin found guilty of incest: this would certainly explain the method of slaughter of the Gaul and Greek pairs, but still leaves their nationality problematic. The theory now generally accepted (e.g. by LATTE RGG 257) is that of Cichorius (Röm.

Studien 1923). The incest of a Vestal Virgin was a very serious matter, doubly serious in times of war, when the good-will of the gods was so vital; it no doubt enhanced the already panic-stricken atmosphere of war-hysteria caused by Rome's critical position in these years; in such a state of extreme concern recourse was had to a very old (and perhaps no longer completely understood) piece of ritual, basically a magical war ritual as we originally suspected, ultimately derived from the nation which was for a long time threatened and eventually overthrown by Greeks from the south and Gauls/Celts from the north - the Etruscans.

But if human sacrifice was virtually unknown to the official state religion of historical times, in the context of Roman social life it was a common and familiar occurrence. For the gladiatorial combats which eventually became the opium of the people started as funeral rites for the aristocratic dead. As Servius says (on A. X, 519): "It was the custom for prisoners of war to be slaughtered at the graves of brave men; after this was considered cruel, it was decided that gladiators should fight in front of the graves." We are not now concerned with the dramatic element, the spectacle of combat, but with the sacrificial element: the slaughter was certainly intended to placate the unappeased spirit or ghost of the dead man, and it is equally certain that this ritual was Etruscan in origin. It can hardly be coincidental that the first gladiatorial combat in Rome was traditionally located in the Forum Boarium, the scene of the ritual burial of the Gaul and Greek substitute sacrifices.¹¹ Thanks to the survival of a most tangible and exciting piece of archaeological evidence, we can penetrate even further backwards to what is fairly certainly a representation of the very origin of the custom.

Some of the best known tomb-paintings in the necropolis at Tarquinia are those in the so-called Tomb of the Augurs, so-called because two of the figures appear to be, but are not, practising divination by the flight of birds. The tomb is dated to about 530 B.C. or a little later, and it is interesting that the expert M. PALLOTTINO¹² believes that striking features of artistic execution derive from an art current typically represented at Caere, the once capital of Mezentius. To quote his own words:¹³ "A mysterious world of atavistic beliefs and dark sanguinary rites, charged with primitive, starkly physical ferocity, is revealed to us in the paintings of this small, lavishly decorated tomb... On the sides, fierce, bloodthirsty funeral games are depicted with an almost overpowering realism." The picture which most concerns us is of a gruesome combat: a hairy-chested man wearing nothing but a loin-cloth and blindfolded by a twisted white cloth is trying to use his club to ward off a fierce dog; the dog has already bitten deeply into various parts of his body and blood is running from his wounds; his attempts at self-defence are futile and doomed to failure because he is entangled in a rope; one end of the rope is attached to the dog, the other is manipulated by the torturer, a figure wearing shorts, a short red tunic, a high conical cap, and also a mask and a long black beard: he bears the name phersu = Latin persona, "a mask". I believe that in this Etruscan painting we see the twin embryo of Rome's most popular spectacles, the drama and the gladiatorial show. To trace their evolution would be another, no less fascinating, story. For us, this picture throws a completely new light on Mezentius' method of torture, and makes it very rash to dismiss it merely as a fiction. I suggest that the most feasible explanation is this. Etruscan warriors, praedones, engaged in the by no means dishonourable pursuit of robbery with violence against alien or even other Etruscan communities, were careful to recover their own dead and also quite naturally took prisoners. Their own dead would of course be objects of great respect and awe; their spirits were clamouring for revenge, appeasement and nourishment; unsatisfied they

might become fearful and malevolent. How better could a primitive, savage, materialist mind offer appeasement than by binding to the dead a still living prisoner to give his atoning blood and life-spirit?

Such seems to be the most likely explanation of this custom, the actual historicity of which, as attested by Cicero and Virgil, there is no good reason to doubt. Whether Mezentius himself enforced it is another question. For Virgil may have seized on it gratefully to account for the estrangement of Mezentius from his people which Virgil's new version of the saga postulated. If Virgil's account contains any vestige of the truth, Mezentius' connection with the custom will probably have been due to some kind of overlordship he exercised over the Etruscan Confederation. This body has often been compared with a Greek Amphictyony in that the ties of union were almost exclusively religious; offensive and defensive alliances of the Confederation as a whole are never heard of, and anything so sophisticated as commercial alliances hardly comes into question. Mezentius as religious head of the Confederation, probably its sacred chieftain or king-god, will not have originated but enforced a long-standing feature of the cult of the dead.

(II) dextra mihi deus et telum (A. X, 773)

Against this background of physical violence, primitive superstition and divine power, what, if anything, are we to make of Mezentius' address to his right-hand and spear as his god? (A. X, 773 ff.). To the god-fearing this must seem blasphemous, and must have seemed impious even to those who for purely political and civil reasons gave their tepid support to the Augustan state religion. It fits in of course perfectly with the general attitude of the contemptor divum, as Virgil sees him, and commentators are ready with parallel expressions in Greek literature which Virgil may have had in mind. CONINGTON-NETTLESHIP ad loc. cite Aeschylus Septem contra Thebas 529 ff., where the messenger speaking about Parthenopaeus says: "He swears by the spear he holds, bold to revere it more than a god and beyond his eyes, to sack the city of the sons of Cadmus in spite of Zeus." And Idas in Apollonius of Rhodes, Argonautica I, 467 ff. says: "Bear witness now, my darting spear, with which I win far more honours than others in war, nor does Zeus aid me as much as my own spear..." But I would like at this point to enter a general word of caution about "literary reminiscences" of this kind in Virgil. It is rather too often assumed that the finding of such a "parallel passage" is all that is needed to understand Virgil's words fully. The truth of the matter is that Virgil was so drenched in literature and so respectful of previous literary tradition that many ideas presented themselves to him already invested with associations, the whole process being at least as often a subconscious reminiscence as a conscious imitation: it would be an error to mistake the associations for the idea. Even so, we might think that the present passage needs no further elucidation than the points already mentioned, and I would be inclined to leave it at that, were it not that a hint, nothing more, of a deeper meaning seems to emerge from a curious note of Servius on Aeneid VIII, 3. This note informs us that it was a ritual practice at Rome for whoever had charge of beginning a war to enter the shrine (sacrarium) of Mars, and to shake first the ancilia, the shields mysteriously fallen from heaven, and then the spear of the statue itself, saying "Mars vigila", "Mars, keep watch". Varro, giving the same information, speaks only of a spear, and the primitiveness of the custom does indeed suggest a period long before the introduction of statuary.¹⁴ Without investigating the extremely problematic origins of Mars-worship and the connection of the Salii with it, we may, simply from Servius' note, infer a very primitive regard for the spear as a sacred, almost a taboo object;

the spear was a fetish, or perhaps it would be better to say that the god or spirit was thought of as immanent in the spear. In this connection we may remember, without necessarily holding it as an article of faith, the theory that Quirinus, often identified with Mars, owes his name to quiris = "a spear".¹⁵ Mezentius' spear may also have had the same awesome status; it would fit in very well with the background to which he properly belongs; but the evidence is of course too tenuous for it to be anything but an interesting possibility.

In briefly summarising I would like to draw a sharp contrast between the first and second parts of this paper. In the first Virgil's complete reversal of the traditional account of the role of Mezentius and the Etruscans I take to be a proved case. By its boldness it illustrates much more dramatically than, for instance, the subtle modifications and shadings which he introduced into his account of Troy's last night, how far Virgil would go, and how far the canons of epic allowed him to go, in confronting his contemporaries with a new and unfamiliar version of the hallowed saga of their nation's origins.

The second half of this paper, where I have maintained that Virgil is the unconscious transmitter of details of great anthropological significance, is admittedly speculative and my approach has been frankly comparative. Recently, in Studies in the History of Religions IV (1959), The Sacral Kingship, pp. 371 ff., The Evidence for Divine Kings in Greece, the late Professor H.J. ROSE expressed severe scepticism of previous views (represented in A.B. COOK's Zeus), and denied that anything in the literary or material remains of mainland Greece warrants the assumption that Greek society passed through a phase of sacral kingship. In passing, he raps classical scholars severely over the knuckles for "a naïve misapplication of the Comparative Method", for assuming "that all civilised peoples have in their past any and every savage custom or belief, which can be shown to exist, or lately to have existed, among backward cultures". His strictures are of course perfectly justified: details which are superficially similar but drawn from two distinct societies may belong to entirely different contexts in each, and any one detail only acquires significance as part of a coherent whole. In Etruscan prehistory there is depressingly little evidence for anything to cohere with. Still, Etruscan studies are as yet in their adolescence; as they grow they will undoubtedly cast a most valuable light on the beginnings of Roman civilisation, and may provide a more precise context for the activities of early Etruscan leaders and kings. If they do, my guess is that they will move in the direction I have indicated, and make more of Mezentius than Virgil's belligerent tyrant. Should they corroborate his position as a sacral king, we would have another and very significant indication of the wide cultural rift not only between the Etruscans and the mainland Greeks, but also between the Etruscans and the Romans themselves, who seem not to have undergone a phase of sacral kingship in their evolution.¹⁶ In fact, the position of the Etruscans in this respect would be much more analogous to the state of affairs in the Near East, than to anything certainly known or even probable among their nearest civilised neighbours; and scholars who still interest themselves in the ethnic origins of the Etruscans can make what they will of that.

I hope that members of the Virgil Society will not think I have been too disrespectful to the poet they celebrate. I have after all maintained that when there was an established tradition, he misrepresented it, and when he told the truth

he did so unwittingly. I should perhaps end by saying that to my mind Mezentius remains one of Virgil's most impressive literary characterisations, gaunt, massive, arrogant and fearless, without love for anybody or anything except his son Lausus, his war-horse, and his right hand and spear; above all a monster of inhuman cruelty, a violent offender against god and man alike. And Virgil's creation was remembered: in the time of Apuleius (Apol. 56), Mezentius was a nickname for an ostentatiously irreligious person, a contemptor divum. Not the least significant point which has emerged is the enormous gulf between the facts as I have tried to recover them and Virgil's interpretation of them. Anthropologists do not make moral judgments it's not their business. Virgil does, and the judgment he makes marks a cheering progress in civilised values.

Notes

1. See PETER HRF pp. 44 ff.
2. On Aeneid I 259, and Servius auctus on Aeneid I 259, VII 150, XII 794.
3. So also Cassius Hemina (PETER HRF p. 69); Sisenna (PETER HRF p. 177) appears to have said that Aeneas was hacked down on the banks of the Numicus.
4. Virgils Epische Technik, especially Part I, chapter 5.
5. P. Vergilius Maro, Der Dichter der Römer, column 424.
6. Verrius Flaccus, Praenestine Calendar C.I.L. I² pp. 236, 316; Dion. of Hal., Antiq. Rom. 1, 65, 2; Plutarch, Quaest. Rom. 45.
7. For references to other authorities and a discussion of the whole topic, cf. J.G. FRAZER, Ovid Fasti IV, 879 ff.
8. Information about him can be obtained from W. MARINER's Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands² (London 1818) II, 78, 196-203, quoted extensively in J.G. FRAZER's Golden Bough, Spirits of the Corn and Wild II, 128 ff.
9. Cf. VON VACANO, The Etruscans pp. 127 ff.
10. Cf. VON VACANO, The Etruscans pp. 137 ff.
11. Cf. K. SCHNEIDER RE Suppl. III, col. 760 f.
12. Etruscan Painting p. 38.
13. op. cit. p. 37.
14. See WARDE FOWLER, The Religious Experience of the Roman People pp. 142 f.; WISSOWA, RuK² p. 144 and notes; LATTE, RRG p. 114 and notes.
15. Cf. WARDE FOWLER, op. cit. p. 143.
16. Cf. Studies in the History of Religions IV, G. DUMEZIL, Le Rex et les Flamines Maiores, p. 414, "... le roi romain ne paraît pas avoir été du tout un roi-dieu."