

## THE SONG OF IOPAS (II)

Comments on C. Segal's article, EMERITA 49, 1981, on the Song of Iopas in *Aen.* I 740-7. There is no basis for a comparison of a conception of world-order expressed there and that expressed by Anchises in *Aen.* VI 724-51. There is a need to clarify what is meant by 'based on the text'.

In an earlier article on the Song of Iopas<sup>1</sup> I criticised certain views on the subject put forward by Professor Segal<sup>2</sup>, who has since written a further paper on it<sup>3</sup>, four topics in which call for comment, namely (I) Segal's complaint that I misquote and misrepresent him (pp. 17 and 22), (II) his criticism of my methods of interpreting the Iopas passage, (III) Segal's own further constructive remarks on it and (IV) his demand for «interpretations based on the text». Regrettably Segal did not confine himself to the criticism of opinion and method but also (p. 23) accused me of irresponsibility for expressing an opinion which, as will appear, he cannot even show is erroneous and implied that I used the work of another scholar without acknowledgment. This last may well be dealt with at once. Segal writes (p. 19), «Kinsey observes that these three constellations 'were all important for navigation' (p. 80, cf. Austin's commentary, *ad loc.*, not cited by Kinsey on this point, 'All these constellations were important for navigation')» and in a footnote to the passage quoted «R. G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus*, Oxford 1971, p. 225, who also notes (p. 224) the repetition of I 744 in III 515 ff., again a point made by Kinsey (p. 80) without reference to Austin. Austin's commentary was, of course, not yet pu-

<sup>1</sup> EMERITA 47, 1979, pp. 77-86.

<sup>2</sup> *Hermes* 99, 1971, p. 336 ff.

<sup>3</sup> EMERITA 49, 1981, pp. 17-25.

blished when my earlier study appeared». The quotation and the point Segal refers to are taken from a passage of some twelve lines, most of which I owe to Austin, on p. 80 of my article. I indicated my debt in the normal way by a footnote tied to the end of the passage.

# I

Misquotations are soon dealt with since Segal cites none. As for misrepresentation, Segal refers to only four passages where it is supposed to have taken place. (a) On p. 19 Segal writes, «I did not deny, as Kinsey seems to imply (p. 84) that there were other associations of Atlas and other possible reasons for Virgil's making Atlas the teacher of Iopas». The words Segal is referring to are «Moreover in the *Aeneid* Atlas is not represented as 'a harsh outlaw' as Segal would have it... Other and better reasons can be found for making Atlas Iopas' teacher». These words do not appear to have the implication imputed to them but in any case the question is not what are the possible reasons for making Atlas Iopas' teacher but what reasons are justified by Virgil's text. I pointed out that Atlas has respectable associations in the *Aeneid* and since Virgil makes Iopas into an impressive figure (see below) it is justifiable to bring in those associations here. The context of Iopas' Song also justifies us in bringing in Atlas' associations with astronomy. Segal (p. 20) brings in *Aen.* IV 246-51 and 481-2. Neither appears relevant. The former passage consists simply of physical description (I see no justification for saying it shows «the clearly negative cast of his character», whatever that is supposed to mean), whilst in the latter Atlas is mentioned as a picturesque way of indicating the place of origin of the witch. Segal writes (p. 20), «Atlas himself, of course, is only the bearer of the heaven's starry pole». Exactly; his association with witchcraft is purely one of locality.

(b) I wrote (p. 85), «This, he argues, is the only appearance of music in the *Aeneid*». Segal objects (p. 22), «What I actually said was, 'Pöschl observes that this is the only time that music is actually performed in the *Aeneid*'. Since Segal seems to cite Pöschl with approval and music can hardly make an appearance without being performed (I did distinguish between 'appearance' and 'reference') where is the misrepresentation? I was concerned to show that what evidence there was suggested that the Trojans did not reject music. It hardly seems relevant to object that Cretheus was «an unfortunate bit of cannon fodder», a contemptuous phrase which is, in any case, hardly in accordance with



Virgil's sympathetic description of him<sup>4</sup>, or to cite Misenus' folly in challenging the gods to a contest<sup>5</sup>.

(c) I wrote (p. 85), «Segal thinks the very presence of music also indicates decadence». Segal objects (p. 22), «I said nothing, furthermore, about 'Carthaginian decadence', nor did I ever use the word 'decadence' at all». In fact I did not attribute the word 'decadence' to Segal and what I meant by 'decadence' had already been made sufficiently clear by words some of which Segal does use. Nor did I attribute to him, as he seems to think, the opinion that the Carthaginians were decadent. That much is clear from the context, even the context of the previous sentence alone. The point under discussion in these paragraphs is whether the Iopas passage produces an unfavourable impression of the Carthaginians.

(d) Segal (p. 23) objects to my statement (p. 85), «Segal in general follows Kranz but suggests some further points» on the ground that he made two criticisms of Kranz. But two criticisms do not necessarily invalidate a statement I was careful to qualify. Moreover the point under discussion here is, I repeat, whether the Iopas passage produces an unfavourable impression of the Carthaginians. Kranz thinks it does. I think it does not. On this main point Segal seems to agree with Kranz, which is what I said and it is for saying this that Segal accuses me of not reading or writing with much discrimination or responsibility.

On the other side of the coin Segal (pp. 18-9) misrepresents my views by failing to grasp the distinction I made between the disasters referred to in *Geo.* II 479, primarily land disasters and not of regular occurrence and the normal dangers of sea-travel alluded to in the Iopas passage. Segal's point that the *Georgics* disasters are caused by the sea is irrelevant.

## II

As to methods of interpretation, there are three points. (a) I devoted a single paragraph to considering the intentions of Iopas in singing the song he did. The material is slight but there is no reason in principle why it should not be used in the same way as the more copious

<sup>4</sup> *Aen.* IX 774-7.

<sup>5</sup> Without comment and unlike the editions I have consulted Segal (p. 23) punctuates VI 171-2:

... forte caua dum personal aequora concha  
demens, et cantu uocat in certamina diuos...

The comma produces evidence for his assertion but makes nonsense of the lines.

material on other characters, though the inferences drawn will be fewer and less certain. For this reason I labelled my views 'speculative', as Segal somewhat belatedly admits (p. 22), and expressed them tentatively. Segal's 'criticism' consists partly of a series of quotations either so selected that the tentativeness disappears or where the wording has actually been altered slightly with the same effect<sup>6</sup>. For the rest there is a series of assertions which either beg the question or which can be disproved from Virgil's text, e. g. that Iopas is «an element in a narrative, not a flesh-and-blood character». I would have thought that the details Virgil gives us about him indicated an attempt to bring him alive and he is apparently enough of a character for Segal (p. 23) to regard him as contributing to the pejorative implications of Dido's banquet. But Segal has misunderstood Virgil's description of Iopas. He is an imposing figure. He has been given a prestigious teacher, an epithet elsewhere given by Virgil to Apollo and the golden lyre of Apollo and the Muses<sup>7</sup>. There is nothing to create prejudice in the golden lyre; the Italians in the later books have gold on their armour. And if the contents of Iopas' Song are to prejudice the reader against Iopas, would not the contents of Anchises' speech in Book VI prejudice the reader against Anchises?<sup>8</sup>.

(b) On p. 79 I wrote, «Iopas sings too of the origin of men and beasts, a theme which must with this background have given the audience a feeling of the unity of animate as against inanimate nature and in particular of the unity of men, whether Trojans or Carthaginians». To this Segal objects that there is little evidence of this in Virgil's text (p. 20). To spell out the evidence, we know something of the nature of the audience—both sides had recent experience of long sea-voyages—and we know the atmosphere of good-fellowship in which the Song was performed. We also know something of the nature of the Song,

<sup>6</sup> Thus my «He presumably realises the military situation. He may also have recognised... his incipient love for the queen... Iopas therefore may have devised a song...» becomes with Segal (p. 22) «But Kinsey's Iopas goes on to 'realise the military situation', to 'recognise' Aeneas' 'incipient love for the queen', and to 'have devised a song...».

<sup>7</sup> On this see R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace Odes Book II*, Oxford 1978, p. 217.

<sup>8</sup> According to Segal (p. 24), «In Anchises' prophecy to Rome's founder, astronomical lore of the kind that Iopas sings is left to others (VI 849 f.)». There is in fact some astronomical lore, as much as is relevant to Anchises purpose, in VI 724-7. And all that Anchises is saying to Aeneas, who, incidentally was not Rome's founder, in 849 f. is that others will in fact produce (better?) astronomers, just as he had said in the previous clause that others will in fact produce better bar-risters.



that it was so wide in scope that men and beasts could be lumped together and mankind treated as a whole, that it ended with an account of phenomena which would remind a seafaring audience of the perils of the sea. On this evidence I would have thought my inference about the feelings of the audience was reasonable. Segal himself says (p. 20) that the grouping of men and beasts in one clause and rain-storms and fire in another is a natural enough division. Putting men and beasts together is natural, but it only appears so in the context of a wide-ranging song of this type. The same is true of treating mankind as a whole. Segal's point that there was later disunity between the two peoples (p. 20) is irrelevant.

(c) As to symbolism in the Iopas passage, I produced a number of arguments against a symbolic interpretation<sup>9</sup>. However according to Segal (p. 24), «One would have hoped that after the work of Otis, Pöschl, Putnam, Quinn—to mention only a few major interpreters—Virgilian scholars would not find it necessary to debate whether a given passage has symbolic implications or not». Apart from the fact that the views of these scholars are not, to put it mildly, universally accepted, it would be interesting to be told how their work could possibly have the effect Segal claims for it. Segal himself (p. 25) expresses doubts about Pöschl and Quinn's views on the symbolism of the Iopas passage. Are we then permitted to doubt any particular symbolic interpretation offered but not to doubt that there is symbolism there? Other pronouncements are hardly more helpful. «The 'symbolic' significance of a passage like Iopas' song, I suggest, is more pervasive and less definable in terms of allegorical equivalents than such interpretations suggest» (p. 25). This is merely an article of faith since it is susceptible to neither proof nor disproof and its acceptance is a licence for symbolism to run riot, since objections can always be met by the claim that the symbolism is less definable. «Neither naïve literalism nor reductive allegorization can reach the heart of his poetry» (p. 25). If this means that no passage in Virgil is to be taken purely literally, it seems wrong. If it does not mean that, then the qualification 'naïve' begs the question, since a purely literal interpretation may not be naïve but right.

<sup>9</sup> Segal is misleading in his comment on them. Thus (p. 24), «It is perhaps encouraging, I suppose, that Kinsey, in sifting through the issue, finally allows that relevance to specific narrative context may not exclude the possibility of symbolic meaning». In fact I made this concession at the beginning of the discussion of symbolism (p. 82) and the conclusion to which I came (p. 84) was that it was better to drop the idea. Irony and elegance are no substitutes for getting what I said right, or, for that matter, getting what Virgil said right.

## III

Segal (p. 21) tells us, «Virgil invites us to compare Iopas' conception of the world-order directly with Anchises'» and that the two passages are «linked by verbal repetition as well as by a common subject, cosmology». The verbal repetition argument, based on *unde hominum genus et pecudes* and *inde hominum pecudumque genus* (VI 728) is weak. Granted that Virgil is going to refer twice to men and beasts, some similarity (that is all it is) of phraseology would be expected. Moreover *Arcturum pluuiasque Hyadas geminosque Triones* is an even stronger invitation to compare the passage in Book III in which it recurs. On what principle is the one invitation accepted and the other ignored? If it is because of the common subject, cosmology, Iopas and Anchises deal with different aspects of it, the only common aspect being summarised by *unde hominum genus et pecudes* in Iopas' Song. Furthermore if Virgil is inviting us to compare Iopas' conception of world-order with that of Anchises, why does he not tell us what Iopas' conception was? He tells us the subjects of Iopas' Song, not a word about his views on those subjects. As far as Virgil's text goes, Iopas might have had exactly the same views as Anchises. It is true that Iopas' Song ends with an account of certain phenomena connected with the hardships of seafarers<sup>10</sup>, but these form a suitable subject for an audience of sea-travellers taking their ease after a banquet, just as warriors in similar circumstances appear to have relished tales of battles. There is no way of extracting from these lines a different view of the cosmos from that in Anchises' speech. Yet for Segal the contrast with Anchises' speech sets off Iopas' Song as a picture of a world flawed by violence, irregularity and disorder. Are there no storms in Anchises' world? True, he does not mention any (though he does mention moral impurities) but that would be irrelevant to the question he is supposed to be answering<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> This is a more prosaic but less misleading description than that in my previous article (p. 79), «a Universe of toil and uncertainty».

<sup>11</sup> Segal states (p. 21), «The cleansing fire of purification, however, (*exurit igni*, VI 742) frees the body of its mortal accretions and allows the soul to reach Elysium until it must once more leave that pure celestial fire (*aurai simplicis ignem*, VI 747)». This appears to be based on a mistranslation of 746-7: *purumque relinquit / aetherium sensum atque aurai simplicis ignem*. Yet on the same page we have, «that immortal fiery essence which, by a process of purgation, he can attain in its pure, celestial state (VI 747)».



Nor is Segal happier with other comparisons. Thus (p. 21), «Whereas Iopas does not see beyond the coordination of men and beasts in their mortal origins, Anchises' point is the differentiation of men and beasts through man's participation in that immortal, fiery essence». But no mention is made of Iopas' views on the origins of men and beasts and right at the beginning of his speech Anchises says everything, not just men, participates in the *spiritus*. It is also odd, if he wants to differentiate between men and beasts, that he puts them into the same *genus* (728). It is true that later Anchises talks of the fate after death only of men, but that is all that is immediately relevant to Aeneas. Segal also tries to contrast the fire of Anchises' speech with that of Iopas' Song. The contrast is forced since fire takes up only one word of the Song and the purifying fire of VI 742 would appear to be ordinary fire; it is mentioned alongside ordinary wind and water and in this passage Virgil appears not to refer to the other fire by the word *ignis* alone but by *spiritus*, *igneus vigor* or *aurai simplicis ignem*<sup>12</sup>.

#### IV

Segal ends his article by telling us (p. 25) that Virgil's poetry «demands new interpretations but interpretations based on the text». The implications of this statement are curious since in my article I usually indicated the relationship of my interpretation to Virgil's text and pointed out where that relationship was tenuous, whereas Segal on occasion does neither. Thus (p. 23) «One (among many) of the functions of Iopas' song was to suggest, early in the poem, the difference between Roman character and destiny and the defeated Eastern people from whom they arose». The statement is unqualified, no supportive evidence is offered yet it is difficult to see how a passage which does not mention Romans, character, destiny or Eastern people can even suggest this. Now this does not mean that unsupported judgments should at once be rejected; the sensitive critic can contribute something to the interpretation of Virgil not attainable by the ordinary methods of scholarship. However such judgments are usually ones which command acceptance as soon as propounded and, in any case, the sensitive critic would be well-advised to advance as far as possible by the ordinary methods first. The trouble with Segal's findings is that, as far as I am concerned, they command not ready assent but incredulity, and

<sup>12</sup> *Aen.* VI 726, 730, 747.

all too often when the ordinary methods of scholarship can be applied to them they appear dubious or just wrong. The result is that when the ordinary methods of scholarship cannot be applied, there is little temptation to take Segal's interpretations on trust.

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