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THE IGNORANCE OF LOVE: *AENEID* 4.65–66 IN THE HISTORY OF VERGILIAN EXEGESIS

Sergio Casali

Abstract: At *Aen.* 4.65–66, *heu, uatum ignarae mentes! quid uota furentem, / quid delubra iuuant?* Vergil reproaches the seers for being ignorant of the power of Dido's love: religious practices are not useful to her for deciding the course of her actions. Since the phrase has been frequently misunderstood, the history of the interpretation of this passage is reviewed from Servius up to the present day.



THIS ARTICLE FOCUSES ON THE HISTORY OF THE INTERPRETATION OF TWO problematic lines from *Aeneid* 4, lines 65–66, *heu, uatum ignarae mentes! quid uota furentem, / quid delubra iuuant?* This is from the section in which Dido offers sacrifices and consults the gods about her project of marrying Aeneas and joining together the Carthaginian and the Roman people. In 1993, James O'Hara published an important article on this scene, and I will take my cue from his treatment of the issues raised by this sentence. The issues are (1) whether the exclamation *heu, uatum ignarae mentes!* means “ah, ignorant minds of prophets!” with *uatum* as possessive genitive, or “ah, minds ignorant of the prophets!” with *uatum* as objective genitive; and (2) in either of these cases, what is the exact meaning of the sentence,

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that is, what are the minds of the prophets ignorant of, or whose minds are ignorant of the prophets, and in which sense? Notwithstanding the fact that, in my view, the correct explanation goes back to Servius, these lines have given rise to a multitude of different interpretations, and I think it might be instructive to review them in order to catch a glimpse of the extraordinary richness of Vergil's exegetical tradition.

THE OUTCOME OF DIDO'S AND ANNA'S SACRIFICES

At the beginning of *Aeneid* 4, after Dido had confessed to her sister Anna that she was in love with Aeneas, Anna closed her reply by exhorting Dido to ask for the gods' "permission" (*Aen.* 4.50–51):

tu modo posce deos ueniam sacrisque litatis
indulge hospitio causasque innecte morandi ...

Just ask the gods for permission (*ueniam*), and, when your sacrifices have been accepted (*sacrisque litatis*), devote yourself to hospitality and weave together pretexts in order to make him stay.

While she performs the sacrifices, Dido's behavior oscillates between that of a responsible leader who, following Anna's sound advice, acts for the good of her city, and that of a woman desperately in love, who only seeks divine approval without any consideration of the actual outcome of her offerings.¹ This second aspect is the predominant one in Vergil's description. Until line 59 Dido is accompanied by Anna; afterwards, she is by herself. Already when Vergil said of Dido and Anna (56–57) that *principio delubra adeunt pacemque per aras / exquirunt* ("at first they visit the temples and seek for peace at every altar"), the form *exquirunt* with its intensive prefix and the phrase *per aras* ("going from altar to altar") suggest the idea of an anxious and fruitless research.²

Vergil does not tell us the outcome of the sacrifices. According to O'Hara, there is a strategic ambiguity here, and this is surely an interesting perspective. But if we insist on trying to find a definite answer, are there any signals that could make us incline in one direction or another? At line 63 it

1. For the first aspect, see Monti 1981, 31–32; for the second one, Adler 2003, 115–17.

2. See for example the note of La Penna 1971, ad loc. (That of Antonio La Penna (b. 1925) is in a school anthology of Vergil, written in collaboration with Cesare Grassi (the notes on the selected passages of *Aeneid* 4, however, are all by La Penna, but, given the stature of its author, it is always worth consulting).

is said that Dido *instaurat ... diem donis*. This is a difficult phrase. *instauro* properly means “to repeat, start afresh (a ceremony which has been wrongly performed or interrupted)” (*OLD* s.v.); cf. *Aen.* 5.94. Here Dido “renews the day with offerings,” that is “renews her offerings throughout the day,” “in her eagerness to obtain some sign of divine approval” (Page 1894, ad loc.).³ The fact that Dido “renews her gifts throughout the day,” with the use of the verb *instauro*, which refers to some problem during the ceremonies, strongly implies that Dido is obtaining negative results from her sacrifices, and that it is for that reason that she keeps on repeating her offerings.⁴ Richard Heinze on this point, makes an observation that deserves to be recalled: Vergil does not say explicitly what the outcome of the sacrifices is because on the one hand it must be negative, otherwise the gods would have deceived Dido or the priests would have made a mistake; on the other hand, however, it would be awkward to say that Juno did not accept the sacrifices when the goddess is about to carry out a plan to make Dido marry Aeneas.⁵ So the poet deliberately left the issue unresolved.⁶

THE IGNORANCE OF THE PROPHETS

There follow the lines we are interested in (65–67):

3. Goold’s translation (in Fairclough and Goold 1999) implies that an interval of more than one day is meant: “day by day renews her gifts,” (Fairclough had translated “solemnizes the day with gifts”), and so MacLennan 2007 and Gildenhard 2012; cf. Mackail 1930: “‘renews the day with gifts’ may either mean ‘repeats her gifts throughout the day’ or ‘repeats her gifts daily.’” But this seems less probable, even if the exact timing of the section 56–89 is not altogether clear. See also Irvine 1924, who inclines to take the phrase as meaning no more than “to begin the day ceremoniously.”

4. So, e.g., Ladewig 1851 (for his interpretation of 65–66 see *infra*); Pascoli 1897: “(= *sacrificiis*) = *instaurat die dona* (= *sacrificia*) ‘rinnova nello stesso giorno il sacrificio’ perché non riuscito, come si vede al 65;” “‘she renews the sacrifice in the same day’ because it was not successful, as one can see at line 65;” Pease 1935: “she kept renewing the day with offerings, that is, offered many victims one after another, in the hope of finding a favourable omen”; see esp. Gildenhard 2012, 97–98.

5. Heinze 1915, 129–30 = 1993, 101. Cartault (1926, 344 says that the sacrifice to Juno must have had a positive outcome, and then the responses must have been favorable. But what about the sacrifices to the other gods? Juno herself, in fact, has not yet actively interfered in the plot of book 4.

6. That the outcome of the sacrifices is negative is also stated by McLeish (1972, 130), and maintained by Panoussi (2009, 47–48), who gives various arguments in favor of this idea, and concludes that “[p]erhaps a reference to the outcome of the ritual is not necessary. The reader knows that the ritual extispicy foretells Dido’s own death at the pyre, as the ensuing simile of the wounded doe makes plain.”

heu, uatum ignarae mentes! quid uota furentem,
quid delubra iuuant? est mollis flamma medullas
interea et tacitum uiuit sub pectore uulnus.

Ah, ignorant minds of prophets! Of what avail are vows or shrines to one mad with love? In the meantime the flame devours her tender marrows and the wound lives silent deep in her breast.

The best way to introduce the discussion of the difficulties of this passage is to quote O'Hara's words:

Just after Dido is shown inspecting or reading the quivering entrails, the reader of the poem is presented with an insoluble problem of reading, of deciphering syntax. In line 65, the phrase *uatum ignarae mentes* can mean "ignorant mind of prophets," with *uatum* as possessive genitive with *mentes*, or "minds ignorant of prophets and prophecy," with *uatum* as objective genitive with *ignarae*. (O'Hara 1993, 110)

According to O'Hara, the reader does not have to choose between the two possible interpretations:

The ambiguity at *Aeneid* 4.65–66 is deliberate, and thematically appropriate. The reader's difficulty in handling the syntax of the genitive *uatum* is parallel or analogous to the difficulty both Dido and the reader have in interpreting the language of the entrails.⁷ (O'Hara 1993, 111–12)

The question that I would like to reconsider, however, is whether there actually is a syntactical ambiguity in line 65. I would like to approach this question by thinking back to some chapters in the history of the philological reception of these lines. There are two points that I would make in this regard: (1) the most natural interpretation of the phrase for an ancient reader is to construe *uatum* as a possessive genitive: *uatum ignarae mentes* most naturally means "the ignorant minds of prophets"; (2) what it is that the minds of the prophets are ignorant of is not immediately clear, and here is the principal problem of the passage. There is a long tradition, mainly tragic, of attacks against the prophets either because they are greedy or

7. Cf. O'Hara 1997, 251; 2011, ad loc. A possible ambiguity between taking *uatum* as a possessive or an objective genitive is also suggested (independently?) by Adler 2003, 116 and n. 12.

because they falsify the future.⁸ Of course Vergil's words, almost ironically, cannot but hint at that tradition. But the sense of Vergil's words is here quite different.

The best interpretation, one that essentially goes back (as we shall see) to the Servian commentary, is that the prophets are ignorant of the power of love, and in particular, of course, of the power of *Dido's* love, rather than of the future, as in O'Hara's interpretation of the phrase when *uatum* is taken as a possessive genitive.⁹ The phrase *heu, uatum ignarae mentes* is most naturally explained by the following question with Dido as an object: *quid uota furentem, quid delubra iuuant?* The basic sense is that the prophets do not know that vows and temples are of no avail to Dido (or to anyone else in her same condition, for that matter), because she is *furens*, she is mad with love: "The *seers* are ignorant because they do not *see* through Dido's supposedly pious gestures what truly lies behind the actions of someone infuriate" (Michael Putnam *per litt.*, his emphasis). Being ignorant of the fact that Dido is *furens*, and of what being *furens* really means, they also ignore that religious practices are not useful to her for deciding the course of her actions: whatever the response of the gods is, positive or negative, she will not consider it; in other terms, even if the gods—as we may imagine—

8. See La Penna 1971, ad loc., and in general on this theme, Scafoglio 2006, 117–22.

9. "If *vatum* here is possessive genitive with *mentes*, then the phrase should mean 'alas, ignorant minds of prophets, since prophets know nothing about the future' (O'Hara 2011, ad loc.). This is also the interpretation of Heyne 1793: "vatum ad extispicium v. sup. refer; suntque adeo extispices, sacrifici: qui h. l. fausta omina renuntiant. ignarae mentes! cuiusnam rei? infelicis puta exitus et eventus consiliorum et amoris Didonis" ("refer *uatum* to the extispicy of the preceding line; and so there are haruspices, sacrificers, who in this passage announce favorable omens. 'Oh ignorant minds!' of what? suppose, of the unhappy end and result of Dido's decisions and of her love"). (Heyne is definitely confuted by Henry 1878, 603.) E. K. F. Wunderlich (1783–1816), one of Heyne's most brilliant students, correcting his master in a school edition of Vergil that was published in 1816 shortly after his untimely death, takes the phrase *uatum ignarae mentes* as meaning that the rites performed by the seers cannot undo what is established by the fate: "sensus: sacra, vatum monitu rite oblata, a fatis destinatum irritum reddere nequeunt" ("the meaning is: the sacred rites, offered according to the custom on the order of the seers, cannot undo what is established by fate"). But it is very difficult to understand *uatum ignarae mentes* as implying (as Wunderlich apparently does) that the seers are ignorant of how to prevent the final outcome of Dido's love, and surely it is not the seers' job to *undo* the destiny, but just to predict it. Thiel 1834 thinks that the seers correctly predict that Dido's love for Aeneas will be satisfied (i.e., that they will indeed have a relationship), but do not grasp the higher plans of the gods, and so the tragic consequences of that love that they are unable to undo.

have expressed a negative opinion about her marriage prospects, Dido will continue to pursue them. Vows and temples should have helped her to decide the course of her actions: this is why Anna urged her to ask the gods' permission (*uenia*) and to verify their benevolence (*pax*). But from the sacred rites that Dido performed resulted neither the gods' permission nor their benevolence; still, her behavior is not affected by the results of her interrogation of the gods, because the fire of passion devours her even while (*interea*) she is interrogating the entrails of the victims (implying the senselessness of her religious operations), and she wanders aimless about the city like a wounded deer. Nothing is changed and nothing can change. *furentem* refers primarily to Dido, but can be applied also to everyone under the influence of *furor* (which in the *Aeneid* is often erotic in origin); this is yet another frightening formulation of the conflict between *pietas* and *furor* that animates the entire poem. Not all the art of the *uates*, even if it includes clear knowledge of the truth, can rescue a person under the influence of this lethal passion.¹⁰

SERVIUS'S AND SERVIUS DANIELIS'S INTERPRETATION

This interpretation, as I said, goes back, *in nuce*, to the Servian commentary (Harvard edition):¹¹

10. For this formulation I am especially indebted to discussion with Julia Hejduk. That Vergil's words oscillate between a specific application to Dido and a more general one to any lover is well understood by Page 1894: "alas for the ignorant minds of seers! what can vows avail frenzy (lit. one frenzied)". The rendering '*her frenzy*' is a mistake. Doubtless the special application of the words is to Dido, but beyond this they also convey a general and philosophical reflection. It is in this art of imparting to special remarks a wide and general bearing that great poets excel" (Page's emphasis). My only quibble with this formulation is that "The rendering '*her frenzy*' is a mistake" seems to me too harsh a statement, also in view of Page's immediately following words. On the Vergil "Macmillan red" commentary of T. E. Page (1850–1936), see Thomas 2016. The lasting influence of Page's commentary is demonstrated by the fact that the new Focus series of commentaries on the *Aeneid* presents itself "as tak[ing] as its starting point the notes in the valuable school edition of T. E. Page's *Vergil: Aeneid 1–6* (1894)" (O'Hara 2011, vii).

11. Stocker and Travis 1965, 277. As is well known, while the Teubner edition of Servius, published in Germany between 1878 and 1902 (Georg Thilo edited the whole Servius [vol. 1, in two parts: *Aen.* 1–3, 1878 (pp. 1–458); *Aen.* 4–5 (with a new general introduction), 1881 (pp. 459–660)]; vol. 2 [*Aen.* 6–12], 1881; vol. 3.1 [*Eclagues* and *Georgics*], 1887); Hermann Hagen, after Thilo's death, edited vol. 3.2, the so-called *Appendix Serviana*, in 1902), presents a unified text, using italics to distinguish the non-Servian scholia found in Serv. Dan., and often relegates in the apparatus the Serv. Dan. version when it offers a variant version of the Servius text, the Harvard edition,

HEV VATVM IGNARAE MENTES non sacerdotes uituperat quasi nescios futurorum, sed uim amantis exprimit, et inde uituperat sacerdotes

<p>— ignarae ergo amoris reginae — qui admonuerunt non credituram, quia illa alias causas litationis praetendebat, et ideo uota non perficiebat;</p>	<p>qui admonuerunt non credituram;</p>
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nam omnia futura a sacerdotibus praedicta esse, sequens indicat locus, ut (464) multaque praeterea uatum praedicta priorum.

“Ah, ignorant minds of the prophets”: Vergil does not blame the priests as ignorant of the future, but he expresses the power of one who loves, and so he blames the priests [Serv. Dan.: – and so their minds are ignorant of the love of the queen –] because they gave admonitions to one who will not believe them, [Serv. Dan.: since she pretends to have other causes for her libation, and so she was not fulfilling her vows;] for a passage which follows shows that everything had been predicted by the priests (464) “and furthermore many things that had been predicted by earlier prophets.”

What is Servius saying? The prophets are not ignorant of the future; the exclamation *uim amantis exprimit*: if I understand correctly, the exclamation expresses either the violent power of Dido’s love, which is so strong that the queen, as subjugated to it, does not consider at all the negative responses the priests communicate to her (*admonuerunt non credituram*). Servius deduces that the responses are negative not from the preceding description of Dido’s sacrifices, but from the reference to 464 *uatum praedicta priorum*.¹² This

vol. 2 (*Aen.* 1–2), 1946; vol. 3 (*Aen.* 3–5), 1965) distinguishes Servius and Serv. Dan. by their placement on the page: the Serv. Dan. scholia are printed on the left side of the page; the Servius scholia on the right; and the text shared by both Servius and the Serv. Dan. tradition is printed the full width of the page. For an account of the problems of presenting Servius’s text, see Murgia and Kaster 2018, xx–xxviii.

12. There is a variant *piorum* (M, Lactant. *Div. inst.* 2.17.2; Serv.: *PRIORVM legitur et ‘piorum’; sed ‘priorum’ illuc spectat ‘heu uatum ignarae mentes! quid uota furentem,’* [Serv. Dan.:] *quod superius expositum. si ‘piorum’, religiosorum, castorum* “*piorum*: there is also the reading *piorum*; but *piorum* refers to *heu uatum ignarae mentes! quid uota furentem*, [Serv. Dan.:] as explained above. If you read *piorum*, then ‘religious’, ‘sacred’”), but it is a trivialization inspired by 6.663 *pui uates*. Convincing, in defense of *piorum*, Henry 1878, 751–54, followed, e.g., by Conington (1863), Pease (1935, q.v.), and Austin (1955).

is possible, even if the formulation *uatum praedicta priorum* might seem more naturally to allude to “strange, old prophecies” (Austin 1955, ad loc.), imagined as situated in a vague and remote past, rather than to predictions going back to at most some months before, and situated in the context of the sacrifices of 56–64: “*priorum* makes Dido’s experience fit the pattern of those who understand an old prophecy only when it is too late, like Meliboeus in *Ecl.* 1.16–17, the Odyssean Cyclops (*Od.* 9.507, “prophecies of old”) or the Heracles of Sophocles, *Trach.* 1159–1173” (O’Hara 2011, ad loc.). But Servius’s suggestion cannot be ruled out, and also Pease (1935), among others, contemplates the possibility that *uatum praedicta priorum* may allude to the seers’ activity in our passage, thus confirming the idea that Dido here receives negative responses from her prophets.

Servius Danielis instead explicitly specifies that what the prophets are ignorant about is *Dido’s* love; but according to him, they are ignorant about it because Dido was not telling the truth about the real motivations of her sacrifices. Probably, the commentator thinks that Dido has adduced as a motivation a purely political and dynastic one, hiding the fact that it was love that moved her.¹³ Since the rituals that Dido performed were flawed (because they were conducted under false pretences) they were not brought to accomplishment, that is, to a correct end, to the dismay of the priests.¹⁴

It seems clear that Serv. Dan. is giving a different explanation of *uatum ignarae mentes* than the Servian one. According to Servius, the prophets’ minds are ignorant of the power of Dido’s love/of the power of love, so

13. A discrepancy between Dido’s avowed intentions in consulting the gods and her true motivations is proposed also by Kinsey (1983), who thinks that Dido has asked the gods only a general question about her remarriage, without mentioning Aeneas, and that for this reason the prophets would have referred her positive responses. But the obtainment of positive responses does not cohere with the context of the passage and with the following questions; see below.

14. This seems to be the best explanation of Serv. Dan.’s *et ideo uota non perficiebant*. In the only Vergilian occurrence of the phrase *uota perficere*, *Aen.* 3.548, *haud mora continuo perfectis ordine uotis / ... / ... suspecta ... linquimus arua*, the meaning of *uota* is defined as “vague and general” by Bailey (1935, 50), rightly, in my view (*pace* Horsfall 2006, ad loc.), if the word is thought to refer to the immediately preceding prayers to Pallas and sacrifices to Juno (543–547); hence, another instance where “*uota* cannot well mean more than prayer” (Bailey 1935, 50). Similarly, here Serv. Dan. uses *uota* to refer generally to the sacrifices and prayers (defined as *uota*, after all, at line 65 itself) Dido is engaged in. Serv. Dan. seems to think that, since Dido cheated over her true intentions, she could not bring her sacrifices and prayers to a proper end; they were flawed since the beginning, and then useless (*quid uota ... / ... iuuant?*); the minds of the seers are *ignarae* of the reason why this can happen, that is, of the fact that Dido is consulting the gods under false pretences. Rivero et al. (2011, 11 n. 42) accept Serv. Dan.’s explanation.

they waste all their art giving admonitions that she is not going to follow. According to Serv. Dan., the prophets' minds are also, and specifically, ignorant of Dido's love, but they are blamed—apparently—because they assist her in making vows that are faulty from the beginning (she pretends to have other causes than love for making vows) and are never going to be brought to completion; evidently, the priests cannot understand why this happens. In sum, the phrase *qui admonuerunt non credituram* and the phrase *quia illa alias causas litationis, et ideo uota non perficiebat* are two different interpretations that Serv. Dan. confusedly intertwines. That is why Thilo printed Serv. Dan.'s addition as a distinct sentence (between asterisks to signal the he was transposing words from the manuscripts).¹⁵

DEVELOPMENTS OF SERVIUS'S EXEGESIS: THE PROPHETS' IGNORANCE OF LOVE

Various commentators have adopted some variation or adaptation of Servius's interpretation. The Renaissance commentators usually understand

15. Thilo 1881, 475–76. Julia Hejduk would insist even more than I do on the gnomic nature of Vergil's statement about the *uatum ignarae mentes*, and on what she sees as a major distinction between Servius's and Serv. Dan.'s explanations: "Are the prophets 'ignorant of Dido's love'—that is, unaware that she is in love (Auctus)? Or are they 'ignorant of love'—that is, don't really know what love is and are therefore unaware that religion is of no use to a lover (Servius)? I think it's the second one" (Hejduk, *per litt.* I agree that there is a major difference between Servius's and Serv. Dan.'s explanations, but I think that that difference is more between an interpretation that sees the priests blamed because they do not know that the intensity of the love of Dido (or of anyone else in her same condition) is such that it is useless that they give her admonitions that she is not going to follow (Servius), and one that sees the priests blamed because they do not know that Dido is in love, and that it is for that reason (and not for unspecified other reasons) that she interrogates the gods, so that her vows are destined to go unaccomplished, whatever that exactly means (Serv. Dan.). In other terms, Servius's explanation is indeed open to the possibility of a more general application of the *uatum ignarae mentes* exclamation (similar to that at *Aen.* 10.501–502: *nescia mens hominum fati sortisque futurae / et seruare modum rebus sublata secundis!*, "O minds of men, ignorant of destiny and of their future lot, and of how to observe due measure when uplifted by favoring fortune!"), but I do not think that this explanation should exclude the meaning that the love in question is also specifically that of Dido: according to Servius, the prophets are ignorant both generally of the power of love over anyone, and specifically of the power of love as exercised, on this particular occasion, over Dido. Similarly, the following rhetorical question (*quid uota furentem, / quid delubra iuuant?*) has both a general ("You fools, what good does religion do to someone in love?," in Hejduk's words) and a specific application ("What good does religion do to Dido in love?").

that the *uates* are ignorant of the power of love.¹⁶ Considering that between the years 1469 and 1599 around 150 separate commentaries on Vergil, by at least 125 different authors, were printed, some of them appearing in thirty or more editions (see Wilson-Okamura 2010, 24–31), we will limit ourselves to a few examples. Jodocus Badius Ascensius (1462–1535), the Flemish scholar and author of the most frequently printed among the early modern commentaries on Vergil, states that, by saying *Heu uatum ignarar mentes*, etc. (1507, ad loc.),

docet (sc. Vergilius) quod comicus dicit amorem ratione regi non posse: itaque insanos fuisse vates qui sinistris ominibus et haruspiciis Didonem ab Aenea avertere volebant quia vis amoris pervincit omnia.

Virgil teaches what the comedian says [cf. Terentius, *Eun.* 57–8], that love cannot be managed with reason, and so the seers had been foolish in wanting to turn away Dido from Aeneas with unfavorable omens and predictions, because the power of love completely defeats everything.

Given for granted that the outcome of the rites is negative, the seers are blamed because they foolishly think that their art can deter Dido from her love for Aeneas.¹⁷

Along these lines is also the interpretation of the first Jesuit commentator of Vergil, Jacobus Pontanus (Jakob Spanmüller, ca. 1542–1626), whose work appeared in 1599.¹⁸ Pontanus first reproduces the note of Nascimbene Nascimbeni, a humanist and a school teacher from Ferrara persecuted by the Inquisition because of his rapport with the heretic Giorgio Siculo,¹⁹ and then adds his own interpretation:

16. For Landino's and Nannius's interpretation, see below.

17. In his following paraphrase, Ascensius reasserts this interpretation: “mentes vatum ignarar scilicet non vaticinii sed virium amoris quia volebant consilio et admonitione Didonem a nuptiis talibus avertere,” etc. (“The minds of the seers are ignorant not of prophecy, but of the power of love, since they wanted to turn away Dido from that marriage with counsel and admonition”). On Badius Ascensius, also a famous printer, as a scholar and commentator, see the fundamental study of White (2013, 61–106 and 207–33).

18. On Pontanus see most recently Leinsle 2009; Rädle 2013, 266–68.

19. In his note, Nascimbeni reworks and effectively clarifies Servius's explanation: Nascimbeni 1577: “Heu uatum ignarar mentes.] [...] sed ausim dicere nullam hic esse exclamationem, uerum potius iudicationem quandam cum irrisione in sacerdotes, qui Didonem non credituram admonuerant, maior enim est in femina amore flagrante uis amoris, quam religionis. cuius rei non ignarus poëta iudicium suum adhibuit sacerdotum inscitiam irridens: qui cum multa prænucciassent futura huic iugali

Putare illi prodesse posse sacrificia, et pro ea deos consulere, quae cum sacris, et sine sacris statuerat amori se dedere, et cui iam non ratio, sed affectus, et libido dominabatur, erat profecto longe a scopo aberrare. Frustra haec agebantur omnia, et in speciem tantummodo.

Thinking that sacrifices could do her any good, and consulting the gods on behalf of one who had decided to give herself to love with or without sacred rites, and who already was dominated not by reason, but by passion and wantonness, meant to wander a long way off from the goal indeed. All these things were accomplished in vain, and only for a show.

Nowadays, commentators have forgotten notes such as those of Ascensius, Nascimbeni, and Pontanus. In the history of the Vergil commentary tradition there is a strong caesura at the end of the eighteenth century with the commentary of Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812), whose first edition appeared, in four volumes, between 1767 and 1775.²⁰ Only one pre-Heyne commentary survives in the bibliographies of the most recent commentaries on Vergil, namely, the three-volume commentary of the Spanish Jesuit Juan Luis de la Cerda (ca. 1558–1643), published in 1608 (*Eclogues* and *Georgics*), 1612 (*Aeneid* 1–6), and 1617 (*Aeneid* 7–12).²¹ But, as far as the exegesis of our passage is concerned, both La Cerda and Heyne, besides not citing any predecessors, only contribute to muddy the waters.²² Furthermore, the publication of Servius Danielis by Pierre Daniel in 1600,

copulae contraria, non tamen uiderant, Didonem nimio amore Aeneae flagrantem minime uerbis ipsorum fidem adhibituram,” “But I would dare to say that here there is no exclamation, but rather a sort of judgment with mockery of the priests who had given admonitions to a Dido who will not believe them; for in a woman burning with love the power of love is greater than that of religion. Knowing this, the poet added his own judgment, mocking the stupidity of the priests: for they, although they had predicted many things that were against this marriage, however had not seen that Dido, burning as she was with unrestrained love for Aeneas, would not have believed at all to their words.” On Nascimbeni and his relationship with the cult of Giorgio Siculo, see Prosperi 2000, esp. 322–40; on his activity as rector of the public school at Dubrovnik in the 1560s, see Seferović 2010.

20. On the figure of Heyne, see most conveniently Fornaro 2016, with many further references, and, specifically on Heyne’s Vergil commentary, Döpp 2014 and Conte forthcoming.

21. On La Cerda’s place in the Vergil commentary tradition, see most recently Casali and Stok in press with further references.

22. As we have seen above (n. 9), Heyne thinks that the *uates* are ignorant because, as they give Dido favorable responses, they show themselves as unable to correctly predict the future. For La Cerda’s exegesis see below and n. 33.

as we have seen, far from helping the understanding of our passage, merely served to confuse still further the issue.

This does not mean, however, that the “right” explanation went forgotten. After all, all of Vergil commentators had their Servius before their eyes. In post-Heyne times, for example, a very sound comment, in its brevity, is that of Friedrich Dübner:

Vates (magis proprie extispices) jubente Didone operam dabant ut explorarent voluntatem deorum, bona illi fide, sed ignorantes vim amoris quae reginam potenter agitabat, non obsecuram responsis extorum.²³

The prophets (more properly, the extispices), following Dido’s order, were engaged in the exploration of the gods’ will, in good faith, but ignorant of the power of the love that tormented the queen, who was not going to obey their responses.

The most elaborate explanation, a few years before Dübner, is typically given by James Henry, the Irish poet, physician, and Vergilian scholar whose massive and very idiosyncratic “commentary” on the whole *Aeneid*, entitled *Aeneidea*, has recently been reprinted by Cambridge University Press (2013):

These words [vv. 65–67] cast no reproach either upon soothsaying generally or upon the soothsayers engaged on this special occasion, their simple meaning being, that Dido’s soothsayers little knew the state of Dido’s mind—that she was beyond all help—that hers was no case for sacrifice or propitiation of the gods—that their art was thrown away upon her. So little good is she likely to derive from sacrificing, that,

23. Dübner 1858, approved by Benoist 1869. ([Johann] Friedrich Dübner [also spelled Dubner, 1802–1867] was a German philologist, naturalized a Frenchman. He was mainly a Hellenist; his commentary on Vergil à la John Bond [1550–1612, the English classicist and physician especially known for his commentaries on Horace and Persius] is a collection of brief exegetical notes, mainly explicative paraphrases of the text, sometimes, as in the present case, pointed and effective.) La Penna (1971, ad loc.) well combines the idea that the seers are ignorant of Dido’s true motivation in asking their responses (she is in love with Aeneas, and not very interested in dynastical and political issues) with the idea that they are ignorant of Dido’s devastating passion.

even *while* she is sacrificing, the internal flame is consuming her (*est mollis flamma medullas / interea*).²⁴

To support his interpretation, Henry cites, for the very first time, a decisive Apollonian intertext, which confirms that what is reproached is the seers' inability to understand love: in Apollonius, *Arg.* 3.932–937 a crow (inspired by Hera) warns the seer Mopsus to allow Jason to go alone to his rendezvous with Medea in the temple saying that he knows nothing of love:²⁵

“Ακλειῆς ὄδε μάντις, ὃς οὐδ’ ὅσα παῖδες ἴσασι
οἶδε νόῳ φράσσασθαι, ὀθούνεκεν οὔτε τι λαρὸν
οὔτ’ ἐρατὸν κούρη κεν ἔπος προτιμυθήσαιο
ἠιθέῳ, εὔτ’ ἂν σφιν ἐπήλυδες ἄλλοι ἔπωνται.
ἔρροις, ὦ κακόμαντι, κακοφραδές: οὔτε σε Κύπρις,
οὔτ’ ἀγανοὶ φιλέοντες ἐπιπνεῖουσιν Ἔρωτες.”

“What an inglorious seer is this, who cannot figure out in his mind even what children know, that no girl would speak a word of sweetness or love to a young man when strangers accompany them. Off with you, bad seer, bad advisor! Neither Cypris nor the gentle Loves inspire you with their favor.”²⁶

24. Henry 1853, 16–17 (sc. of the part on book 4; the numbering of pages restarts at every book of the poem), reprinted in Henry 1878, 601–2, where, however, he adds also a different interpretation (see below); 1857, 252–53 (in German). James Henry (1798–1876), after his classical education at Trinity College, Dublin, practiced as a doctor for more than twenty years until in 1845 a large inheritance allowed him to concentrate on the study of Vergil; from 1846 to 1869 he travelled extensively across Europe first with his wife and their only surviving daughter, Katherine Olivia, and then, after his wife's death in 1849, with his daughter alone; they returned to Ireland in 1869, where they continued to work on Vergil until their deaths (Henry's daughter predeceased him in 1872). The first volume of *Aeneidea* appeared, in three parts, in 1873 and 1877 (*Aen.* 1, 864 pp.), the remaining ones only after Henry's death: volume 2 in 1878 (*Aen.* 2–4, 861 pp.), published by his literary executor, J. F. Davies, volume 3 (*Aen.* 5–9, 954 pp.), and 4 (*Aen.* 10–12, 330 pp.) in 1889, and the *Indices* (118 pp.) in 1892, all issued by Arthur Palmer and L. C. Purser. On Henry's interesting biography and his Vergilian scholarship see Briggs 2014, 602–3 and the bibliography there cited, to which add Richmond 2004 and Talbot 2010.

25. Other commentators who, after Henry, give due importance to this Apollonian intertext include Conington 1863; Forbiger 1873; Lejay 1919; Pease 1935 (with little enthusiasm: “probably”); and La Penna 1971.

26. Henry also compares another important intertext, that is the passage of Apuleius, *Met.* 10.2.7–8 that has been cited on our passage since La Cerda (1612): *heu medicorum ignarae mentes! quid uenae pulsus, quid coloris intemperantia* etc.

As Damien Nelis remarks, Vergil introduces his apostrophe to the clueless seers at a narrative stage that coincides with that of the crow's apostrophe to Mopsus in one of the multiple Apollonian intertextual "plots" of *Aeneid* 4, that is, between the meeting of Dido and Anna (which corresponds to the meeting of Medea and Chalcioppe at *Arg.* 3.664–739) and the meeting of Dido and Aeneas in the cave (which corresponds, among many other things, to the meeting of Medea and Jason in the temple of Juno at *Arg.* 3.948–1162). Most importantly, "again ignorance of love is the crucial point" (Nelis 2001, 140).

Of course, Vergil gives Mopsus's cluelessness about how flirtation works a much darker turn: the minds of the seers are ignorant because Dido's disease is hidden and frightening, her *furor* is a mysterious and sinister force (so La Penna 1971, ad loc.). Mopsus, moreover, is ready to take the crow's advice, while in Vergil the apostrophe is just an aside on the narrator's part, the seers do not receive any advice from anyone, and remain inexorably kept in the dark.

A CURE FOR DIDO'S WOUND?

This is essentially approved by many interpreters,²⁷ including John Conington (1825–1869), in the first complete English-language commentary on

("ah, ignorant minds of the physicians! what does it mean the beating of her veins, the variability of her complexion...": the physicians ignore that their patient is actually in love): this demonstrates beyond any doubt that Apuleius interpreted *Aen.* 4.65–66 as a reproach to the seers who are unable to recognize Dido's love. Another obvious imitation, quoted by commentators at least since Burman (1746), is Silius 8.100 (Anna speaks to Aeneas) *heu, sacri uatum errores!* ("But, out upon wizards and their accursed delusions!" transl. Duff) where again, of course, there cannot be any doubt that *uatum* is a possessive genitive: Silius's Anna is reproaching the Massylian seers who convinced Dido to engage in magical rites in order to free herself from her passion.

27. See, e.g., the note in H. M. Stephenson's elementary, and very popular (it was still in print in 1962), Macmillan school commentary (1888): "If the soothsayers who assisted Dido had possessed any real insight they would have seen that their art was of no use in her case." Only slightly different is the explanation of the abbé Paul Lejay, the pupil of Louis Havet, priest and professor at the Institut Catholique of Paris especially known for his edition of Horace's *Satires* (Paris 1911; his 1919 Vergil commentary is sometimes cited as "Plessis-Lejay," but it must be remembered that Frédéric Plessis edited only the *Eclogues*): "La suite prouve que l'égarement de Didon (*furentem*) l'empêchera de voir la vérité annoncée par les dieux; elle tournera tous les présages dans le sens de sa passion. C'est ce qu'ignorent les devins" ("What follows proves that Dido's bewilderment (*furentem*) will prevent her from seeing the truth the gods announced; she will turn every omen into the meaning dictated by her passion. This is what the seers are ignorant of"); see more recently Gutting 2006, 271: "Whatever

Vergil,²⁸ and also Richard Heinze (1867–1929), in his fundamental *Virgils epische Technik* (1915):

It does not matter what the *uates* announce; they have no idea what is really agitating Dido's mind, and they no doubt believe that prayers and vows can calm her down, when in fact she has been seized by the frenzy of love, and the flames of love are consuming the marrow of her bones (65–67).²⁹

In fact, Heinze's explanation at first seems to follow the "Servian" approach ("It does not matter what the *uates* announce"), but then it introduces a new element: the prophets, ignorant of Dido's love, thought that their religious practices would have *calmed* the queen, but this does not happen. This notion resurfaces in various commentaries; for example in that of A. S. Pease, who refers with apparent approbation to the observations of Cartault, according to whom the prophets would have given positive responses to Dido, but, not knowing about her love, would not have been able to calm her down:

In 4.50 Anna had advised Dido to proceed with her love only after securing good omens (*sacris ... litatis*) and Cartault [(1926, 344)] remarks that the diviners have done their part and apparently secured favorable omens, yet Dido's heart is not at rest, since her desires have not been attained. She has not really taken the haruspices into her

the sacrifices tell her, she will pay attention only insofar as she can twist what is said to suit her erotic desires." From the irritating farrago of Buscaroli 1932 (a commentary inexplicably welcomed by almost enthusiastic reviews when it came on, but then immediately obliterated by the appearance of Pease 1935) emerges the following explanation: the prophets give negative responses, but they are ignorant of Dido's love, otherwise they would have falsified the responses in order to please their queen (!). Knorr 1898, 21–23, criticizing Brosin 1895, insists that the sacrifices must have had a negative outcome, but does not clarify the meaning of *uatum ignarae mentes*.

28. Conington's note, in which he refers with approval to Henry's explanation, does not change from the first (1863) to the fourth (1884) edition of volume 2 of his commentary. The first edition of volume 1 (*Eclogues* and *Georgics*) came out in 1858 (5th ed., revised by his pupil Henry Nettleship (1839–1893) and further revised by the ancient historian and archaeologist Francis Haverfield, 1898); that of volume 2 (*Aen.* 1–6) in 1863 (4th ed., revised by Nettleship, 1884); that of volume 3 (*Aen.* 7–12) in 1871, completed by Nettleship (3rd ed., 1883). On Conington's Vergilian scholarship, see Hardie 2007 and, especially on his commentary on the *Aeneid*, Rogerson 2007a and 2007b. On his life and character see Smail 2004.

29. Heinze 1915, 130 and n. 1 = 1993, 101 and 112 n. 25. On the importance of Heinze's book see especially Hardie 1995 and Conte 2007.

confidence and told them the symptoms of her malady, hence they, in their ignorance of these facts, are unable to give her the real assistance which she needs.³⁰

Similarly also Deryck Williams in the two-volume edition of the *Aeneid* that Macmillan published in 1972–1973 to replace that of Page (Williams 1972, ad loc.):

The implication here is that the priests imagine that the sacred rites which they prescribe and interpret will ensure Dido's happiness, unaware as they are of the destructive nature of Dido's frenzied love (*furentem*), unaware that her "wound" is not to be cured.

This kind of approach is not completely convincing. It is not the prophets' job to calm Dido down; surely it is not their job to "cure" Dido's wound. It is necessary, in fact, to distinguish two aspects. On the one hand, the idea that the priests should "cure" Dido of her love for Aeneas is surely wrong and goes back to the Renaissance. Cristoforo Landino (1424–1498) must be among the first commentators who contemplate this interpretation. According to him, here Vergil "fortasse reprehendit vates qui putent amorem aliquibus sacris pelli posse" ("perhaps reproaches the seers who think that love can be dispelled with some sacred rites").³¹

The Dutch humanist Petrus Nannius (1496–1557), in the first separate commentary on *Aeneid* 4 of the exegetical tradition (1544), thinks that Vergil is mocking the ignorance of seers in predicting the future, and also, apparently, the uselessness of haruspicy in securing her "soundness of mind," that is, presumably, in freeing her mind from the passion of love:

30. Pease 1935, ad loc. In this note the sentence beginning with "She has not really taken ..." is Pease's own elaboration on Cartault's observations. Cartault thinks that the responses of the seers must have been positive, since the marriage of Dido and Aeneas is part of Juno's plan; the seers do their job and tell Dido that her sacrifices are well received by the gods; but they are unable to penetrate the depths of the soul of Dido, who is not appeased by their intervention, and "they do not give her desires the concrete realization to which she aspires"—but how could the seers have given realization to Dido's desires? They are no go-betweens. Cartault's conclusion is a logical non sequitur.

31. Landino is nowadays best known, as a Vergilian scholar, for the allegorizing interpretation he gave of *Aeneid* 1–6 in the last two books of his *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (ca. 1473), but more influential, at his time, was his line-by-line commentary on the whole of Vergil published at Florence in 1487–88, which was printed in more than thirty editions in sixty years (Wilson-Okamura 2010, 36). On Landino's Vergilian criticism see Kallendorf 1989, 129–65.

Cum Catone, cum Hannibale, Iulio Caesare aliisque philosophis uanitatem aruspicum ridet, quamtumcumque dissentiat Servius. Vult autem Virgilius sanitatem animi aliunde petendam esse quam e uictimis, “With Cato, Hannibal, Julius Caesar, and other philosophers, he laughs at the foolishness of the haruspices, though Servius disagree. But Vergil wants soundness of mind to be sought from a different thing than from haruspicy.”³²

This notion resurfaces in La Cerda (1612, ad loc.): Reprehendit vates et aruspices, qui putent mederi se posse amori, verius furori Didonis. Deinde furorem hunc comparatione illustrat cervae a venatore percussae, “Vergil blames seers and haruspices, who think they can cure Dido from her love, or rather folly.”³³

Heyne effectively refuted this approach:³⁴

Vide enim ne de amoris medela deos aditos esse existimes: quod alienum esset a loco et more; ab amore solvunt sacra magica: ad quae Dido recurrit inf. 478 sqq.³⁵

32. On Nannius, see most recently Laureys 2014, esp. 92–94, with further references.

33. So in the “Argumentum”; in the “Explicatio,” La Cerda adds: “Exclamatio in superstitionem aruspicum, et vatium, qui omnes vani, ubi amor in praecipitium rapit. Ergo, *quid iuuant furentem vota*, nam praecesserunt sacrificia, *quid delubra*, nam iam, *principio delubra adeunt*. Ratio, cur ignari vates, cur ista nihil prosint, quia *flamma est medullas*,” etc. (“An exclamation against the superstition of haruspices and seers, who are all useless, when love drives someone off a cliff. Accordingly, *quid iuuant furentem uota*, since sacrifices preceded, *quid delubra*, since just now, *principio delubra adeunt*. The reason why seers are ignorant, why all these things are of no avail, is because *flamma est medullas*”). In the “Notae,” La Cerda attacks the critics who had reproached Vergil for his personal intrusion into the narrative, and says that even the ancients were aware of the unreliability of their seers, citing Cicero, *Div.* 1.132 with Ennius, *Telamo* F 117 Manuwald.

34. According to Heyne, the prophets, ignorant of the future, gave Dido favorable responses (see supra, n. 9). Peerlkamp (1843, ad loc.) and Schüller (1883, 25) think that the meaning of 65–66 requires *necessarily* that Dido wants to be cured from love; since this is impossible in the context (she goes to the temples for other reasons), Peerlkamp, typically (he is by far the most wildly interventionist among Vergil’s editors), secludes the passage (he also conjectures *fati* for *uatium*; already Cuninghame 1743 had proposed *fatium*); Schüller sees in this supposed contradiction evidence of different compositional stages of Book 4. (Dietsch 1853, 26 n. 196 secludes the words from *pecudumque* to *mentes*.)

35. Heyne 1832, ad loc. The formulation in Heyne’s third edition (1793) was slightly different, but the concept was the same. The prophets would like to calm Dido down, but they fail, not knowing the cause of her disease, also according to Kvičala 1881, 82–83; cf. Butler 1935: “How little priests know how to heal a lover’s woes!” It is impossible to understand what T. L. Papillon had exactly in his mind when he wrote,

Pay attention not to think that the gods are visited in order to find a remedy for love; this would be alien to place and custom: it is magical rites that free from love, and Dido will resort to them below at 478 ff.

As we have seen, Dido goes to the temples in order to ask the gods for their permission and to verify their benevolence, not in order to be “cured” from the love for Aeneas. The task of the seers is that of verifying whether the gods approve Dido’s project or not. *Pace* Austin, it is not their task that of “diagnos[ing] and heal[ing] [Dido’s] mental disorder.”³⁶

On the other hand, however, it seems possible to think that the sacrifices, having had a bad outcome, do not help her not only because she does not draw any indications from them for her behavior, but also because they do not bring her tranquillity of mind. This does not sound absurd. Nonetheless, if this idea is present here, it is only a secondary overtone: the prophets ignore the cause of Dido’s agitation, they do not know that their work is not going to help her in taking decisions about her future; only secondarily it might be suggested that prayers and temples do not help Dido to reach the tranquility of mind typical of those who see their projects approved by the will of the gods.³⁷

in his most brief school commentary (1882), that *ignarae* means “‘blind’ to the real state of Dido, who is already beyond their help” (no changes in Papillon and Haigh 1892).

36. The “Oxford red” commentary of Roland Austin (1901–1974) is still the most widely used commentary on *Aeneid* 4, but his note on our passage is faulty from multiple points of view: “Virgil means that nothing could really help Dido, for her offerings were no more than lip-service to the gods, and her soothsayers (*uates*) were powerless to diagnose and heal her mental disorder (*furentem*). We are not told what the omens were; presumably the *uates* were satisfied, or perhaps they deliberately produced the favorable signs that Dido so plainly desired; but at least she had formally expiated her fault (cf. 56 n.), and that was the main thing.” In fact, (1) it does not seem that Vergil presents Dido’s offerings as mere “lip-service to the gods”: otherwise, one would not understand why she is so anxious about the outcome of her rites (cf. lines 60–64, and esp. 63–64, and see Kinsey 1983, 300); (2) as we have already said, the seers are not psychotherapists; (3) if it is improbable that the results of the sacrifices and of the extispicy were favorable, it is almost senseless to imagine that the seers deliberately falsified those results in order to please Dido (“Virgil describes them as ignorant, not as frauds,” again Kinsey 1983, 300); and (4) the rites described at lines 56–64 are not meant to “expiate” Dido’s fault: she is asking the gods’ permission before launching onto her plan of marrying Aeneas; see definitely O’Hara 1993, 107. On Austin’s commentaries on *Aeneid* IV, II, I and VI, see Henderson 2006, 37–69; specifically on Austin on *Aen.* 4 see Thomas 2016, 65–68.

37. This presupposes that the responses are negative: if we imagine that the responses are positive (Heyne, Cartault), it becomes more difficult to understand why

DIDO'S POINT OF VIEW?

Also advanced is the hypothesis that the exclamation *heu uatum ignarae mentes* is focalized through Dido: Dido would get angry with the priests, and would blame them because they keep on communicating to her negative responses: so Theodor Ladewig, since the first edition of his exceedingly popular school commentary (1851),³⁸ followed (but not cited) by Augusto Rostagni in his school commentary (1942), in his turn approved by Ettore Paratore (1947; cf. 1978). In this case, however, the following rhetorical question should also be seen as expressing *Dido's* point of view, and not that of the poet (as instead both Rostagni and Paratore maintain; Ladewig is not clear on this point): the question should be read as *quid uota (me) furentem ... iuuant?*³⁹ This interpretation might seem *prima facie* attractive,

prayers and temples should be said to be not helpful to Dido: the queen *should* derive some benefit from the gods' approbation.

38. "Perverse," according to Ribbeck 1860, ad loc. See more fully Ladewig 1871, 253. The commentary of Theodor Ladewig (1812–1878) will go through many editions and it will be reworked by various hands (Carl Schaper, Paul Deuticke, and [volumes 1–2 only] Paul Jahn) until its 13th edition, 1912 (as to vol. 2, covering *Aen.* 1–6; as to the other volumes: vol. 1, *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, 9th edition, 1915; vol. 3, *Aen.* 7–12, 9th edition, 1904). It is not necessary here to follow the development of Ladewig's commentary in its various editions; suffice it to say that in its last incarnation (1912, repr. 1973), this passage is read as meaning that the seers do not give Dido "the relief she was longing for" ("den gewünschten Trost"), since no sign is given her of the gods' approbation—a further example of the cure-for-Dido's-wound explanation.

39. The fact that the *quid uota iuuant* question, at least at first sight, seems very much expressed from the poet's point of view, and not from that of Dido, has often been noticed by those who object against Ladewig's interpretation: see, e.g., Conington 1863: "an exceedingly ingenious view, but one which an attentive consideration of the context will, I think, scarcely warrant"; Kvičala 1881, 82: "Man könnte den Ausruf *heu uatum ignarae mentes* als aus dem Sinne der Dido gesagt betrachten (wie Ladewig urtheilte). Doch ist dies nicht wahrscheinlich, weil gleich darauf der *Dichter* selbst spricht *quid uota furentem* cet," "One could take the exclamation *heu uatum ignarae mentes* as said from Dido's point of view (as Ladewig sustained). However this is not probable, because immediately after the *poet* says *quid uota furentem* etc." (Kvičala's emphasis). Notice also La Penna 1971: "Certamente la riflessione è di Virgilio (e non di Didone: altrimenti non si capirebbe perché consulta i vati, aruspici o indovini in genere)" ("certainly the reflection is of Virgil, not of Dido (otherwise one would not understand why she should consult the seers, haruspices or prophets in general)"); according to Ladewig, the explanation would be that Dido blames the seers because they keep on giving her negative responses; but Ladewig does not clarify of what precisely Dido would think the seers to be ignorant of: of her love? of her supposed true interests? of her real motivation?

but would imply a sort of “direct” quotation of Dido’s words which would be rather extraordinary in the text of the *Aeneid*.

DIDO AND ANNA AS THE PROPHETS?

Finally, Gottfried Wilhelm Gossrau (1810–1888), a teacher at the Gymnasium of Quedlinburg from 1835 to 1875, in a school commentary that is always worth consulting for its critical acumen and independence of judgment, suggests that no “professional” prophets or haruspices are present at the ceremony: the *uates* are Dido and Anna themselves; their minds are “ignorant,” because they do not understand that, when inspecting the entrails, they only see what they want, namely, favorable signs (instead of the negative ones they should see if they were not blinded by their desire of having their project approved by the gods); so the consultation of the gods is of no avail to Dido, since she is not going to listen to their admonitions.⁴⁰ The major flaw of this interpretation, of course, is that in this context the *uates* mentioned at line 65 *must* be professional prophets or haruspices: there is no way any reader would ever think of them as being Dido and Anna. Another flaw in this interpretation is the involvement of Anna that it presupposes: Dido’s sister is by now offstage; what follows (*furentem*) also refers only to Dido; and it might seem rather inappropriate to merge the motivations of the two sisters attributing them the same *cupido* of seeing what they want to see.⁴¹ A refinement of Gossrau’s view is given by another German school commentator, Karl Kappes: it is not necessary to see “the minds of seers” as referring to both Dido and Anna; *heu, uatum ignarar mentes* is a kind of generalization that applies only to Dido herself: she is the *uates*, and she is ignorant, since she disregards the negative outcome of the ceremony, seeing only what she wants to see.⁴² Again, it is too much to ask the reader of not thinking of actual *uates* when the poet explicitly refers to their ignorant minds.

40. Gossrau 1846; more briefly in Gossrau 1876: “*Vatum* i.e. Didonis et Annae *ignarae* sunt *mentes*, non quod nesciunt artem haruspicinam, sed quia cupiditate abripiuntur, ut nolint intelligere deos monitis suis ab amore revocare” (“*Vatum*, namely, of Dido and Anna; their *mentes* are *ignarae* not because they do not know the art of extispicy, but because they are carried away by passion, so that they cannot understand that the gods with their admonitions are trying to deter them from love”).

41. For criticism of Gossrau’s view on these terms see Dietsch 1853, 26 n. 196; La Penna 1971, ad loc.

42. Kappes 1874. Prescott 1927, 274–75 does not quote either Gossrau or Kappes, but substantially agrees with the latter’s view; *contra* see Pease 1935, ad loc.

IGNORING THE PROPHETS: *VATUM* AS OBJECTIVE GENITIVE

The interpretation of *uatum* as objective genitive goes back, as far as I know, to the third edition of the school commentary of Philipp Wagner, the pupil of Heyne who had also edited the fourth edition of his master's Vergil commentary:

65 sq. Noli iungere *mentes vatum*, sed *ignarae vatum*, quippe non videntes, quae tali cupiditate obstricta sit, ei non esse opus vatibus atque extispicio, nihil igitur prodesse suscepta vota, nihil adita delubra: “sua cuique deus fit dira cupido” 9, 185. – *vatum ignarus* 8, 627, sed non eodem sensu.⁴³

65f. Let's not join *mentes uatum*, but instead *ignarae vatum*, for they were not seeing that she was bound by such a great passion that she did not need prophets and extispicy, and that neither the vows she took nor the temples she visited were useful to her: “his own violent desire becomes a god to each man” (9.185). – *uatum ignarus* 8.627, but not in the same sense.

His note however is obscure to me. Notwithstanding that he clearly says that he takes *uatum* as objective genitive (see also his reference to 8.627), his paraphrase seems to be more consistent with a reading of *uatum* as possessive genitive.⁴⁴ It is not clear to whom the minds ignorant of the prophets belong. They should probably be the minds of Dido and Anna; *ignarae uatum (mentes)*, however, cannot mean “(minds) which do not see that Dido does not need prophets,” as Wagner seems to think.⁴⁵

43. Wagner 1861, ad loc. Henry's confutation of Wagner does not help clarifying the latter's position (Henry 1878, 603–4).

44. Cf. the criticism of Wagner in Forbiger 1873. Albert Forbiger (1798–1878), for nearly forty years a teacher at the Nicolai School at Leipzig, had the misfortune to incur the ferocious criticism of Lachmann for his edition of Lucretius (Leipzig 1828), and this bad repute somehow rubbed off on his Vergil commentary too (cf., e.g., Sandys 1908, 127), but, if it may be true that his commentary does not stand out for its originality, neither it deserves to be forgotten. It was first published between 1836 and 1839 and has been constantly updated and revised since then (the first edition of volume 1 [*Eclogues* and *Georgics*] came out in 1836 [4th ed., 1872]; that of volume 2 [*Aen.* 1–6] in 1837 [4th ed., 1873]; that of volume 3 [*Aen.* 7–12] in 1839 [4th ed., 1875]).

45. *Contra* Wagner, cf. also Häckermann 1865, 115–16; Ladewig 1871, 253. Kraz (1870, 17–20), also takes *uatum* as an objective genitive: he understands *uatum* at 65 as metonymic for *fata*, and *ignarus* as meaning *immemor*, or even *incuriosus*,

A more extensive defense of the interpretation of *uatum* as objective genitive comes from James Henry, who in his *Aeneidea* changes his mind, and adds a new reading to his old one (Henry 1878, 601–5). According to Henry’s new idea, *heu, uatum ignarae mentes* would be a reflection, expressed from the point of view of the poet, about the way in which “passion warps our judgment.” The minds would be those of men in general, and they would be said “ignorant of divination” (“*Vatum*, not = *vaticiniorum*, but = *vaticinationis*, h.e. *artis vaticinandi*, the *divining* or *soothsaying art* (μαντικῆς τέχνης), p. 605) in the sense, if I correctly understand Henry’s typically verbose paraphrase, that men know little about divination, are bad divines, since “[o]ur passion blinds us, and, however plainly indicated the will of the heaven, we interpret it our own way” (p. 604).

This is all very complicated, and above all it does not seem possible that *ignarae uatum* could be an acceptable way of saying “ignorant of divination.” At 8.627 we have Vulcan *haud uatum ignarus uenturique inscius aevi*, “not ignorant of prophets,” namely, of the prophecies expressed by the seers, not “not ignorant of the soothsaying art.”

After Henry, the interpretation of *uatum* as objective genitive has had a limited success in the history of Vergilian exegesis. See however the note of the great Italian poet and classical scholar Giovanni Pascoli in his school anthology of Latin epic poetry (1897):

uatum: si riferisce all'*extispicium* e forse alle preghiere fatte a Phoebō (58); ma l'idea è fatta generale. Però è difficile ammettere nel P[oeta] questo disprezzo per la divinazione, e difficilissimo intendere *uatum* = *Didonis et Annae*. Meglio intendere *ignarae uatum* “che non sapevano o non credevano ai vati” (cf. 464 *Multaque praeterea uatum praedicta piorum Terribili monitu horrificant*), e prendere per *uates* gli aruspici e i sacerdoti che a mano a mano avvertivano Didone, che il sacrificio non era accetto e che i segni erano minacciosi.

uatum: it refers to the extispicy and perhaps to the prayers to Phoebus (58); but the idea becomes general. However it is difficult to admit in the Poet such a contempt for divination, and very difficult to take

neglegens: the exclamation *heu, uatum ignarae mentes* would express the poet’s regret that Dido, in her frenzy, would not want to listen not to predictions made by seers in this occasion, but to what she already knew from Aeneas’s tale, namely, that he was destined to reach Italy; *contra*, see Ladewig 1871, 253, who notices that, in the context of this passage, one can only see in *uates* either the priests who were flanking her in the sacrifices, or, if we were to take *uates* metonymically, the things that were announced to her as the will of the *fatum*.

uatum = ‘of Dido and Anna’. It is better to understand *ignarae uatum* as ‘which do not know or believe the prophets’ (cf. 464), and take *uates* as referring to the haruspices and the priests who one after the other admonished Dido that the sacrifice was not accepted and that the omens were threatening.

According to him, one should have to take *ignarae uatum* as meaning “which do not know or believe the prophets,” that is the haruspices and the priests who were warning Dido that the sacrifices had not been accepted and that the signs were menacing. The prophets gave negative responses, but Dido did not want to believe them. But *ignarae uatum* can hardly mean “which do not *believe* the prophets.”⁴⁶

Vatum as objective genitive has been recently revived by Ingo Gildenhard in his school commentary on *Aen.* 4.1–299 (2012, 100–103). Gildenhard gives a lot of importance to two issues: (1) until now Vergil has not mentioned either *uates* or haruspices as Dido’s attendants; (2) the *uates* are not the same thing as the *haruspices*: the first ones see the future by divine inspiration, the others interpret the divine signs that they find in the entrails of the victims.⁴⁷ In the *Aeneid* there are *uates*-figures who are capable of reading the *fatum*, and the most important ones are Apollo, the Sibyl, and the narrator himself, who calls himself *uates* in *Aen.* 7.41. The *mentes* would be those of Anna and Dido, who would be “ignorant of *fatum* and the poet-prophets who pronounce it”:

Vergil steps back from this scene and comments with a tragic exclamation on the ignorant mind of the two sisters: they could only embark upon this course of action and they could only harbour the hope of receiving divine benediction because they are ignorant of *fatum* and the poet-prophets (*uates*) who pronounce it.

The line of thought then would be: Dido sacrifices and consults the entrails of the victims to obtain the permission and the benediction of the gods (which—as Gildenhard maintains—they do not receive); but she and Anna

46. Similar to that of Pascoli is the reading of Pöschl 1977, 102 and n. 131.

47. But for *uates* “applied loosely to diviners in general” (*OLD* s.v.) cf., e.g., Liv. 2.42.10 *moti ... numinis causam nullam aliam uates canebant publice priuatimque nunc extis, nunc per aues consulti, quam haud rite sacra fieri*, “For this expression of divine wrath no other reason was alleged by the soothsayers, when they had enquired into it both officially and privately, sometimes by inspecting entrails and sometimes by observing the flight of birds, than the failure duly to observe the rites of religion,” transl. Foster.

ignore the prophecies of the poet-prophets; prayers and temples are of no help to her while she is wild for passion. With this reconstruction it is difficult to understand well the connection between the exclamation and the following rhetorical question. Furthermore, there are other difficulties:

(1) Who these poet-prophets should be? While it is true that Vergil has not mentioned so far any prophet, it is also true that he has not mentioned poet-prophets either. In the context of sacrifices and exstispicy it would be very strange not to understand the *uates* of the exclamation as referring to priests actually present on the stage. (2) If these poet-prophets are those prophetic figures about which Aeneas spoke in his speech of *Aeneid* 2–3, then it would be strange if Dido and Anna would be said to be “ignorant of the poet-prophets who pronounce the fate,” since they have listened to Aeneas’s speech: they are not “ignorant of poet-prophets,” but if anything they deliberately choose not to attach importance to the prophecies they have heard; while Dido was aptly called *nescia fati* in 1.299, an explicit definition of Dido and Anna as “ignorant of the poet-prophets” does not seem appropriate at this point. (3) Furthermore, as I mentioned before, at this point Vergil seems to have forgotten Anna: in 56–59 Dido and Anna together *delubra adeunt pacemque ... exquirunt, and mactant lectas ... bidentes*; but from line 60 on (*ipsa tenens pateram dextra ...*) the attention is focused on Dido only; Anna is by now off stage: it would be strange if she would come back again in this plural *mentes*. Besides, Anna is not *furens*: she would be inappropriately assimilated to Dido at this point if the sense would be the one supposed by Gildenhard.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the interpretation of *uatum* as objective genitive does not carry conviction; it appears to be more an erudite contrivance than a real possibility of the text; it is better to understand that the prophets are ignorant both of Dido’s love and of the power of love, and do not know that all their work is useless since Dido, wild with passion, does not consider their warnings and the negative outcome of the sacrifices.

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