

DIDO'S BURNING EFFIGY: AENEID 4.508

*super exuvias ensemq̄ relictum
effigiemq̄ toro locat haud ignara futuri.*
(Aen. 4.507–508)

Pease, Austin, and Williams (*ad loc.*) all see the *effigies* as having connections with sympathetic magic, an interpretation which dates from Servius auctus¹). There are, however, two serious objections to this view. First of all, one has to explain the curious fact (which seems to have caused only Austin some unease) that the *effigies* is introduced (508) without explanation, whereas the other items here listed have been previously mentioned in 495–6: *exuvias* (507) also occurs in 496; *ensem* (507) corresponds to *arma* in 495; the *lectum* of 496 is surely the *toro* of 508.

Secondly, the parallels inevitably cited by the commentators to support this interpretation are Theocritus 2.28 f., where Simaetha's wax-melting is an attempt to bring back her former lover, Delphis²), and Virgil's own imitation of it in Ecl. 8.80 f. (cited indeed by Servius auctus on Aen. 4.507³). There are, however, very important differences between our passage and these. In the first place, Dido places the *effigies* on a *torus*. Secondly, the *torus* is in turn placed on a pyre. Third, Dido wreathes the place *fronde . . . funerea* (506–7). It is difficult to see what significance these three activities have for a magical ceremony, and the whole rite is obviously very different from the activities of the lovers in Theocritus 2 and *Eclogue* 8.

The explanation is surely that Servius auctus got it wrong and modern commentators have followed him into error. Dido is building her own funeral pyre, but she must convince her sister that her activity has some other purpose. Thus she claims (478–9) that it is designed either to bring back Aeneas (which would in fact suggest sympathetic magic such as that in Theocritus 2 or *Eclogue* 8) or rid her of her love for him. But after Dido calls on Anna and the gods to witness her unwillingness to be involved in magic (492–3) she concentrates almost entirely upon the idea of ridding herself of her love for him, by a symbolic cremation of the absent Aeneas. So, in closing her address to Anna in which she tells her sister to build the pyre she says "*abolere nefandi / cuncta viri monumenta iuvat monstratque sacerdos.*" (497–8). All thought of restoring Aeneas to Dido by magic has been abandoned. The averred motive for the pyre-building, now, is to erase the memory of Aeneas by a symbolic funeral. Dido makes this perfectly clear on the following day when the time comes for her to mount the pyre and she must again deceive Anna: *perficere est animus finemq̄ imponere curis / Dardaniq̄ue rogam capitis permittere flammae* (639–40).

Surely the *exuviae*, *ensis*, *effigies*, and *torus* are all part of this symbolic funeral and have nothing to do with sympathetic magic. Indeed only the *effigies*

1) The authors wish to thank Professor G. W. Williams who read and criticised an earlier draft of this note.

2) Gow (*ad loc.*) notes: "It is possible that the wax is, in Simaetha's rite, not an image at all but a symbol, like the bay and barley groats," but it seems much more likely to be a wax image.

3) On *effigiemq̄ toro locat* Servius remarks: *imaginem scilicet Aeneae, quia solent magi effigies eorum facere propter quos carmen instituunt, ut in Bucolicis (VIII 80) 'limus ut hic durescit et haec cera liquescit' et (E.VIII 74) 'terque haec altaria circum effigiem duco'; Horatius 'lanea effigies erat, altera cerea'.*

could have ever been part of such a ceremony. But most importantly, Virgil's audience would certainly have known that an *effigies* on a *torus*, placed on a pyre garlanded *fronde* . . . *funerea* was a common feature of the cremation of a Roman noble. They would have realized that Virgil had effected a subtle transition from considerations of magic to a very Roman funeral rite, with the *effigies* being pivotal in this transition. This is why the poet introduces it without explanation.

References to images on funeral pyres are numerous in the historians. Apian tells us that a wax image of Julius Caesar was raised above the couch on which the corpse lay and was turned about by means of a mechanical device (B. C. 2.147). The funeral couch, corpse, and image together with many military gifts were placed on a pyre and burnt. At the funeral of Augustus, according to Dio (56.34.1), the body lay out of sight on the couch, but a wax image, dressed in triumphal garb, was visible. Again, many gifts which Augustus had given to individuals were cast upon his pyre. In these two instances, of course, a body is present, which is not the case in our passage where we are dealing with a symbolic funeral. But in fact we can point to instances where a funeral ceremony did take place with a wax image on a couch on a pyre, and without the body. In the second century Septimius Severus conducted a funeral to an image of Pertinax since the body was no longer available, an event reported both by Dio (75.4.2 ff.) and the *HA* (Sev. 7.8). A wax image was used which 'lay in state' for seven days and was finally carried out, eulogised, placed on the pyre and cremated⁴). The antiquity of this practice is clear from Tacitus' description of the funeral of Germanicus. Tacitus describes public reaction to the funeral, the pomp of which in no way equalled that accorded to his father Drusus. Where, people asked, were the *soliti quidem et cuicumque nobili debiti honores*. He was being denied, they claimed, the traditional observances of their ancestors (*illa veterum instituta*); among these was *praepositam toro effigiem* which was clearly expected even though his body had had to be cremated *externis terris* (Ann. 3.5)⁵). This is the only use of *torus* in this sense in Tacitus, surely a Virgilian echo.

4) Herodian 4.2 gives a very similar description of the funeral of Septimius Severus himself. Indeed, Herodian's account seems to be a conscious imitation of Dio's description of Pertinax's funeral.

5) *at Germanico ne solitos quidem et cuicumque nobili debitos honores contigisse. sane corpus ob longinquitatem itinerum externis terris quoquo modo crematum: sed tanto plura decora mox tribui par fuisse quanto prima fors negavisset. non fratrem nisi unius diei via, non patrum saltem porta tenus obvium. ubi illa veterum instituta, praepositam toro effigiem, meditata ad memoriam virtutis carmina et laudationes et lacrimas vel doloris imitamenta?* The meaning of this passage has been obscured by modern editors' acceptance of Muretus' *propositam* for the MS *praepositam*. Furneaux, who accepts the emendation remarks: "The MS text . . . would rather describe such an arrangement as that at the funeral of Augustus (Dio 56.34.1), where the position of a waxen effigy on the couch has to be contrasted with that of the real body; whereas in such a case no real body could have been present." But the preposition implies only that the effigy is "on show" (see Nisbet and Hubbard on Horace *Odes* 1.7.7), not necessarily that it is being contrasted with the body. In fact in his description of the funeral of Pertinax, where no body was present, Dio uses the verb ἀνατιθέναι (εἰδωλὸν τι τοῦ Περτινάκως κήρυνον . . . ἀνετέθη) which is the equivalent of *praeponere*. Cf. also 56.34.1 (the funeral of Julius Caesar where, however, the body was also present): εἰκὼν δὲ δὴ τις αὐτοῦ κηρίῳ ἐν ἐπινακίῳ στολῇ ἔξεφαίνετο. Moreover, as Furneaux observes, *toro* is difficult in this passage unless *praepositam* is retained.

In *Aeneid* 4.508 everything conforms to this pattern. In this symbolic funeral of Aeneas the body is not available and so an image, presumably wax, is placed on the couch on the pyre. Furthermore, gifts to Dido from Aeneas, namely *exuviasque ensemque relictum*, are placed on the pyre indicating clearly Dido's intention, or pretence, of consigning the Trojan's *rogum* to the flames.

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