

Since 1965 scholars have developed and elaborated a theory that Vergil derived inspiration and imagery for his *Heldenschau*—the congregation of Roman heroes seen by Aeneas in the underworld (*Aeneid* 6.752 – 892)—from aristocratic funeral processions (Skard 1965:53-65) and the ancestor masks worn by actors in such processions (Novara 1987; Flower 1996: 109-10; cf. Habinek 1989: 236; Bettini 1991: 142-50). Additional connections between *Heldenschau* and aristocratic funeral processions (as described by Polybius and Dionysius) have been postulated: just as any Roman father might teach his son history as represented by the ‘ancestors’ at a state funeral, so Anchises explains to Aeneas, in colloquial terms, the history of the Roman state as represented by his various descendants-to-be (Flower 1996: 110-14).

Naturally, the eschatological nature of *Aeneid* VI would lead one to consider the Roman aristocratic funeral procession and ancestor masks as primary models for Vergil's *Heldenschau*, but a closer examination of details in the passage indicates that Vergil probably drew as much, if not more, inspiration from literary portraits, statues, coins (depicting statues) and other visual sources. Indeed, he does not describe, *e.g.*, Romulus or Numa as clothed in the magisterial garb worn by actors to represent ancestors at a funeral (Polyb. 6.53.7); rather, he describes Romulus in battle gear (*Aen.* 6.779), which corresponds to various statues around the city (Dion. Hal. 2.54.2; Plin. *NH* 33.9, 34.22; Plut. *Rom.* 16), and Numa in priestly robes offering sacrifice (*Aen.* 6.808-9), as seen on coins that almost surely represent a statue group (Crawford 1974: 334/1, 97 B.C., cf. 446/1, 49 B.C.). While it is possible that his descriptions represent an otherwise unattested development of costumed drama and theatricality in funerals of the Late Republic (Flower 1996: 114), the simpler solution is that Vergil was recalling for his readers individual and idiosyncratic statues or, in some cases, groups of statues, *e.g.*, the seven kings, Caesar and Brutus on the Capitol (*Aen.* 6.777-820; Dio 43.45.3-4) with which they would have been familiar due to their residency in Rome.

While connecting Vergil's descriptions of heroes to known or plausibly-conjectured art sources is not a new idea (Delaruelle 1914; Austin 1986: 232-4), addressing the problem anew with a wider array of literary and material evidence than previously examined yields new and interesting results. Looking at the evidence holistically, Vergil's arrangement of the heroes, and the apparent movement of Aeneas' group in, around and through the heroic concourse—as indicated by several of the verbs, participles and pronouns in the passage—together seem to represent an imaginary, didactic “city walk” through Rome's historic center, an area known to be heavily populated by statues of Roman kings, heroes and magistrates. It is as if Vergil has taken a layer of Rome's monumental topography, the one inhabited by statues, peeled it away from its normal space and time and transposed it onto the unbuilt landscape of the underworld.

In sum, this examination posits a richer, more complicated interweaving of visual sources and literary allusions underlying the *Heldenschau* passage; it also supports the theory that Vergil conceived of Rome as a multi-dimensional, transtemporal entity whose layers of historical time and physical space, although overlapping, intersecting and intermingling, could, nevertheless, be detached for individual consideration and manipulation / exploitation in building up different (poetic) landscapes.