

The *Columbeis* of Giulio Cesare Stella (1564-1624) is a Vergilian treatment of the European discovery of the New World (Hofmann ed., 1993). Originally designed to be a four-book short epic or *epyllion*, it has come down to us unfinished, in only two books. Yet even in its incomplete state, *Columbeis* stands out as an unusual testament to the power of the Vergilian view of human history to influence the art and politics of a world separated from Augustan Rome by more than 1500 years and newly doubled in physical scope (Hofmann, 1988). Anyone who reads *Columbeis* must wonder what effect it might have had, had it been completed. This paper will show that by using internal evidence it is possible to give a dependable reconstruction of the missing conclusion of the poem.

Scholars of Latin Columbus-epic consider *Columbeis* a landmark of its genre, for Stella was first to recast the historical facts of Christopher Columbus' voyage in fictitious, mythic terms according to the example of the *Aeneid* (Hofmann, 1994). In so doing, he established a pattern observed by all subsequent writers who treated the theme of Columbus and his exploits in Latin hexameters. The poem was still only half-finished when, in 1585, it was pirated by a London publisher in an atmosphere of high political tension as the Protestant England of Elizabeth I sought to challenge Catholic Spain's hegemony in the New World. The poem's fundamental message — that the story of Columbus is the story of Aeneas and that Spain had inherited the *imperium sine fine* once promised to Rome — was inflammatory stuff to individuals at Elizabeth's court who were desperate to stake an English claim in the New World before Spain's dominance became unshakeable (Llewellyn, 2006). Once Stella learned of the pirate edition, he subjected the existing Books I and II to drastic, propagandistic revisions and hustled them both into print, still incomplete, in the 1589 edition that turned out to be the poem's last until modern times.

Of the several mysteries that still surround *Columbeis*, the most tantalizing is still the most obvious: *what would Stella have put in Books III and IV?* A reader might at first glance think himself permanently cheated of a conclusion, but this is by no means necessarily so. Close examination of three aspects of the work — *Columbeis'* relationship to its major model *Aeneid*, analysis of the poem's treatment of its historical sources, and careful tracking of its own internal logic — reveals a distinct pattern. This pattern, if followed to its conclusion, permits one to reconstruct not what the author *might* have intended, but rather, what he *must* have intended for the last two books, assuming fidelity to the poetic rationale established in the first two. This paper will present a summary of my findings in these three areas and offer a reconstruction in outline form. Heretofore, no such pattern has been identified, nor any reconstruction attempted, by any scholar who has published on this work.