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The Symbolic Number 3 : its Role in the *Aeneid*

"Six is a number perfect in itself, and not because God created all things in 6 days ; rather the converse is true ; God created all things in 6 days because the number 6 is perfect, and it would have been perfect even if the work of the 6 days did not exist ... We should not underestimate the significance of numbers, since, in many passages of Sacred Scriptures, numbers have a meaning for the conscientious interpreter. Not without reason has it been said in praise of God : 'Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight'" (St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 11, 30).

I believe that the same situation is true for the number 17 in many areas and especially as the key mystical number (i.e. the golden number) in the *Aeneid*. There is conclusive evidence that Vergil was intimately concerned with mystical numbers both explicitly and implicitly (1) and that he followed a very detailed, exact overall mystical numerical scheme in writing the *Aeneid*. However, as a true Pythagorean he kept his intentions secret and did not confide his mystical numerical designs to anyone. Yet a close analysis of the text reveals numerous examples of mystical numerical usage based on a master plan which he followed in his two earlier works. In addition to 17 there are 3 other key mystical numbers in the *Aeneid* : 3, 7, and 13. However, in many cases their influence is only implicit. For example, Vergil never cites either 13 or 17 in the *Aeneid* but their influence is undeniable. In this case Vergil's behavior reveals the powerful influence of the ancient concept of the "Evil Eye" which stipulated that it was bad luck and undesirable to know or state the exact number involved in any situation especially in the case of mystical numbers. The ancients believed that the envious could bring misfortune upon a person or thing only if they knew the exact number involved and so the safest course of action was to avoid stating any exact number. This popular superstition is still widespread among many eastern nations and curious traces of this belief survive in many countries. At the root of this superstition is the notion that numbers must not be misused since they contain an unknown power and, in fact, they are more powerful than words. Thus from very early times it was believed that a spell could be surely based only on some mathematically exact enumeration of particulars and so it has been considered taboo (*nefas*) to tell, or even to know, certain details about one's creations or precious possessions, e.g. the exact number of one's children, oxen, or age.

(1) Cf. LAROCHE (article forthcoming in *Phoenix*) for the evidence.

This prohibition does not extend to impersonal matters ⁽²⁾.

In the *Aeneid* Vergil cites 17 numbers, always excluding 1 and 2 which are of no consequence in such an investigation. In fact, the Pythagoreans did not consider 2, the dyad, a number but only as the principle of the even, as 1, the unit, was the principle of number. The 17 numbers cited occur 237 times which is very significant since there are exactly 237 citations of Aeneas in the *Aeneid*. In addition, Vergil's use of these 17 numbers is not haphazard but rather based on mystical numerical considerations. Vergil cites 13 different numbers in Books I-VI (Part I of the *Aeneid*) and then 4 numbers occur for the first time in Books VII-XII (Part II of the *Aeneid*) with all 17 numbers occurring in the last 6 books (cf. Appendix I). Perhaps Vergil decided to divide his mystically significant total of 12 books into 2 halves of 6 books each because of influence from the number 6, the first perfect number (discussed below) ⁽³⁾. Of the 4 numbers cited for the first time in Books VII-XII only one, the number 5, occurs more than once.

Similarly, Vergil advances 13 even numbers in the *Aeneid*: 4, 10, 12, 14, 20, 30, 50, 100, 200, 300, 500, 600, and 1,000; and 4 odd numbers: 3, 5, 7, and 9. The number 9 is the only odd number in this work which is not also a prime number and it seems to have been included because of its great mystical power since it represents the triplication of the triple, i.e. 3×3 . Significantly, there are 119 citations of odd numbers and 118 citations of even numbers but I believe that Vergil consciously omitted one citation of 100 (discussed below) and thus there would also be 119 citations of even numbers. A total of 119 is very significant and mystical since it represents the product of 7×17 (in fact, 7 and 17 are the only aliquot factors of 119). Also $2 \times 119 = 238$ but for some reason Vergil decided to advance only 237 numerical citations which correspond to the 237 citations of Aeneas. Perhaps this anomaly can be traced to Vergil's (and the

(2) Cf. LAROCHE who has treated this topic in articles on Greek and Roman literature and chronology [cf. e.g. (1972, p. 1-512); (1977, p. 358-368); (1982, p. 112-120); (1983, p. 5-25); (1986, p. 31-43); (1995, p. 568-576); and (1998, p. 145-156)].

This article is based on an examination of the primary evidence, i.e. the *Aeneid*, with limited reliance on secondary sources dealing with the *Aeneid* which are, of course, very numerous. For the secondary bibliography, cf. R. D. WILLIAMS (1967), DONLAN (1978), and reviews in *Vergilius*. I have made free use of the standard Vergilian commentators and I am enormously indebted, directly or indirectly, to them: viz. Servius, Henry, Paige, Mackail, Clausen, Conway, Austin, Mynors, Thomas, R. D. Williams, and especially John Conington. This constitutes my acknowledgement of indebtedness to them. The Vergilian text which I have followed is that of Mynors (OCT, 1969) and all translations are from the LCL series. I have also relied on WARWICK (1975) whose work is based on Mynors' text which for numbers is the same as the LCL text. In fact, there is no alternate reading in either the OCT or the LCL text for a number in the *Aeneid*.

(3) The number 6 is not cited explicitly in the *Aeneid* or, for that matter, in Vergil, but only as a factor of 12 (as *bis sex* or a form of *bis septi*) on 7 occasions and so perhaps this is the third number that is hidden in the text of the *Aeneid*: viz. 6, 13, and 17. However, influence from 6 is not extensive in the *Aeneid*: 1) the 12 books are divided into 2 sections of 6 books each; and 2) Book VI, a key book and a focal point of the *Aeneid*, has 901 verses = 17×53 (both prime numbers).

ancients') belief in the superiority of odd numbers and so there are 119 citations of odd numbers but only 118 citations of even numbers which yields an odd total of citations — 237. For example, Vergil states (*Ecl.* 8, 73-78) that "Three threads here I first tie around thee, marked with three different hues, and three times around these shrines I draw thy image. In an uneven number heaven delights (*numero deus impare gaudet*). Bring Daphnis home from town, bring him, my songs! Weave, Amaryllis, three hues in three knots; weave them, Amaryllis, I beg, and say, 'Chains of love (*Veneris*) I weave!'" A very similar passage, including the statement *numero deus impare gaudet*, occurs at *Ciris* 369-373. I believe that in referring to an uneven number Vergil had in mind not only 3 but such numbers as 7, 13, and 17. Servius' comment on this passage in the *Eclogues* is that according to some superstition odd numbers are immortal because they cannot be divided into 2 equal parts and even numbers are mortal. Thus the ancients attributed special power to odd numbers and especially to odd numbers that are also prime numbers: e.g. 3, 7, 13, and 17.

The number 1,000, the largest number cited in the *Aeneid*, seems to have been especially mystical since it represents the triplication of 10, i.e. 10 cubed, which as the *tetraktys* was the perfect number for Pythagoras and his followers. Significantly, 1,000 is cited 13 times in Books I-VI and 17 times in Books VII-XII — a situation which corresponds exactly to the overall distribution of numbers in the *Aeneid* since 13 numbers occur in Books I-VI and 17 in Books VII-XII. Also the largest and the smallest numbers in this work, 3 and 1,000, are cited the most often while 100, i.e. 10×10 , is 3rd in frequency.

Furthermore, 13 symbolical totals (3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 20, 30, 50, 100, 300, and 1,000) are cited 4 times or more in the *Aeneid* while 4 numbers (14, 200, 500, and 600), with limited symbolic significance, are advanced only once or twice. The pervasive influence of 17, schematically disguised as the sum of 13 and 4 ⁽⁴⁾, is noticeable in at least 3 cases and the combined influence of 13 and 17 is present in at least 2 cases. Additionally, the mystical total 119 reveals influence from 17 and this total occurs in at least 3 cases: 1) there are 119 citations of odd numbers in the *Aeneid*; 2) excluding the 13 citations of 1,000, the other 12 numbers advanced in Books I-VI are cited 119 times (cf. the number 7 is also cited 13 times in Books I-VI; thus 7 and 1,000 are each cited 13 times in these books and there are 13 numbers advanced in Books I-VI providing 3 instances which reveal influence from the number 13); and 3) there are 90 citations of 3 in all and 29 of 100 for a combined total of 119 citations while the

(4) The division of 17 into units of 13 and 4 could reveal influence from Greek and Pythagorean musical theory in which 4, 5, and 8 represent the 3 harmonies (*συμμενίαι*) of ancient Greek music: the fourth, fifth, and octave [cf. KRAUS (1943, p. 207-209) for further information on this topic]. In this case, the numbers 4, 5, and 8 are combined as follows: $4 + 4 = 8$ and $5 + 8 = 13$. However, these 3 numbers were more often combined as follows: $4 + 5 = 9$ and $8 + 8 = 16$ which yields the ratio 9:8.

other 15 numbers are cited 118 times (of course, an even neater arrangement would involve 90 citations of 3, the smallest number, and 29 citations of 1,000, the largest number, since then the total number of citations for the largest and the smallest number would be 119).

The Number 17

In the religious epics of the Anatolian Turks and in the Islamic tradition the number 17 has an almost magical quality. In fact, the mystical Shiites from a very early time worshipped the number 17⁽⁵⁾. They believed that the shape or form (*sura*) of everything in the world was 17. Some believe that this veneration among the Shiites stems from the ancient Pythagorean speculations based on the letters of the ancient Greek alphabet since there are 17 consonants and 7 vowels in this alphabet⁽⁶⁾. However, I believe that most probably there are 17 consonants and 7 vowels in the ancient Greek alphabet because of influence from the mystical numbers 7 and 17 and not vice-versa.

The number 17 has many mystical aspects: 1) it represents the sum of 2 very important mystical numbers — 7 and 10; 2) it is the 7th prime number according to the following classification which I believe existed at some time in antiquity although there is no surviving documentation of this fact: 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, and 17; later Aristotle and Euclid replaced 1 by 2 as the first, and only, even prime number; 3) the decimal system of counting had a mysterious importance for the Pythagoreans and they believed that the numbers over 10 were simply a repetition of the first 10 numbers and so $17 = 7 + 10$; 4) according to the Pythagoreans only 17 souls would be resurrected at the end of the world and each soul would receive one of the 17 letters (the 17 consonants?) of the ancient Greek alphabet which spelled out the perfect name of God; and 5) the Pythagoreans attributed special importance to 17 since it represents the sum of $4 + 5 (= 9) + 8$, the 3 key numbers in their music theory and in their theory about the harmony of the spheres — the ratio 9:8 constantly recurs in ancient Pythagorean and Greek arithmetical speculations on grammatical, musical, and cosmological questions.

Apparently the fear of such mystically powerful numbers as 13 (cf. the superstition labeled "triskaidekaphobia") and 17 influenced Vergil not to cite them explicitly in the *Aeneid* but their implicit influence is unquestionable. The only reference to 17 in Vergil, be it veiled, occurs at *Georgics* 1, 284 where the Moon herself is said to have ordained that the 17th day of the month be lucky for planting the vine (*septima post decimam*: the choice of terms is significant: the 7th day after the 10th rather than simply stating the 17th, *septendecim*, day of the month; admittedly *septendecim* is a rare term in Latin; cf. also the similar

(5) Cf. MELIKOFF (1962, p. 435-445) for the documentation.

(6) Cf. CHEVALIER et GHEERBRANT (1973, II, p. 203-204), s.v. "*dix-sept*".

language in Hesiod's *Works and Days* — in the same context)⁽⁷⁾. The number 13 is not cited explicitly by Vergil. Both 13 and 17 had ambivalent connotations in antiquity. In Roman times 17 was often feared because XVII could also be interpreted as *VIXI = mortuus sum* and 13, representing $12 + 1$, often had a negative connotation. However, at times both 13 and 17 were considered to be auspicious numbers evidently because they represent the sum of $10 + 3$ and $10 + 7$ respectively.

At this point a brief overview of important symbolic/mystical numbers in antiquity and especially of Pythagoras and his influence on ancient number theory is appropriate.

A symbolic/mystical number is one which suggests something in addition to the number per se by reason of association, convention, etc. Such a number makes no specific reference to the actual quantity involved. Rather it is the visible sign of something invisible, such as an idea or a quality, and, in fact, it is a symbol. It is necessary to distinguish between the arithmetical and the symbolic number; the former defines an object by its quantity but says nothing about its nature, whereas the latter expresses an inner link with the object it defines by virtue of a mystic relationship between what is enumerated and the number itself. Religious numerical values vary with longitude and latitude and it is possible to identify many different numbers which were, and in many cases still are, invested with occult significance in different places and at different times.

From very ancient times numbers have represented symbolic ideas and the interpretation of numbers is one of the oldest symbolical science. Also "the peculiar fascination which numbers as individuals have exerted on the mind of man from time immemorial was the main obstacle in the way of developing a collective theory of numbers, i.e. an arithmetic"⁽⁸⁾. For example, the Pythagoreans and the Greeks were very much preoccupied with the symbolism of numbers and Plato regarded number as the essence of harmony, and harmony as the basis of

(7) Cf. HESIOD (*Works and Days*, 805) who assigns such activities to the 7th day of midmonth (*μέσση δ' ἑβδομάτῃ*), i.e. the 7th day after the 10th. Such usage is due to the Greek practice of dividing each month into 3 "weeks", i.e. periods, of 10 days. The present citation is as close as Vergil ever comes to citing the number 17, which implicitly is, I believe, the most important, i.e. his signature, number in the *Aeneid*, but he chooses in this case to specify that total in terms of 2 other very important mystical numbers: 7 and 10. Such circumlocution graphically illustrates Vergil's great preoccupation with mystical numbers in general and especially with the number 17. In fact, there is no other example in Vergil of such numerical circumlocution and this citation is very important in helping us understand his overall numerical philosophy.

(8) Cf. DANTZIG (1954, p. 56 and in general Chapter III "Number-Lore"). The reader should consult any standard work on symbolism for additional information and illustrative examples of statements made in this paper about symbols, including symbolic numbers. In the present investigation I have especially relied on the following sources: HOPPER (1938); ALLENDY (1948); GUENON (1949); DIEL (1952); ELIADE (1952); GHYKA (1952); PANETH (1953); JUNG (1954); BRACH (1994); and especially CIRLOT (1962) and CHEVALIER and GHEERBRANT (1973).

the cosmos and of man. Plato was particularly interested in the mysticism of numbers and in the *Republic* (8, 546) he speaks in an obscure fashion of a certain mystical number but he does not explicitly state what this number is. The solutions proposed to date for this mystical Platonic number, e.g. 60 to the 4th power, are unsatisfactory. According to Cicero in the *Tusculan Disputations* (1, 17) Plato traveled to Italy to become acquainted with the Pythagoreans and there he met Archytas and Timaeus from whom he learned all the tenets of the Pythagoreans. Some commentators believe that the mystical Platonic number played an important part in the mysticism of the Hindus and the Babylonians and that perhaps Pythagoras found it on the banks of the Euphrates, if he really studied there, and that he took it with him to Crotona, passing it along to his disciples who finally revealed it to Plato and his followers⁽⁹⁾. Additionally, Plato states in the *Republic* (7, 525f.) that the study of numbers has a great and elevating effect since it compels the mind to reason about abstract numbers and that a philosopher should also be an arithmetician.

Pythagoras was especially interested in the mystical quality of numbers and professed a mysticism of numbers that is very similar to that found earlier in Babylon. He maintained that everything is disposed according to number and that number is the universal measure of everything. Pythagoras believed that the essence of everything is number and that number rules the universe and is the key to fully understanding the world. The mystic number worship of the Pythagoreans with all its magic and superstition was the forerunner of the theory of numbers and number worship found its supreme expression in the mathematical philosophy of the Pythagoreans whose whole system was cosmological in nature and who believed that the real world was composed of numbers. They maintained that the nature of the universe could only be grasped through number and form. Their mystic philosophy classified all numbers in a variety of ways including perfect and prime numbers⁽¹⁰⁾. Thus the theory of integers was born in religious mysticism and it passed through an erratic period of puzzle-solving before it acquired the status of a science. Gradually, over the course of centuries, the natural numbers lost their association with mysticism. Pythagorean number speculations created many strange notions about numbers as, for example, the fact that 1 is not a number but simply the source of numbers and that even numbers are feminine and thus soluble and ephemeral but odd numbers are masculine and so indissoluble and celestial. The golden number, the divine proportion, the golden section, i.e. 618, was very important to the Pythagoreans⁽¹¹⁾.

(9) Cf. SMITH (1958, I, p. 89).

(10) For a clear explanation of these categories and illustrative examples, cf. DANTZIG (1954, p. 40-45); also THOMAS (1957, I, p. 67-141).

(11) Some, e.g. DUCKWORTH (1962, p. 1f.), have proposed that the *Aeneid* has a mathematical structure based on the Pythagorean golden section.

Pythagoras (fl. 540-510 B.C.; born at Samos and then settled at Crotona in southern Italy) was similar to the philosophers of the Ionic school who undertook to solve by means of a single primordial principle the problem of the origin and the constitution of the universe as a whole. His predilection for mathematical studies led him to trace the origin of everything to numbers⁽¹²⁾ and his theory was suggested and confirmed by his observation of various numerical relationships in the phenomena of the universe (cf. especially the recurring presence of the golden number). Mathematical, especially numerical, relations were essential in mystical speculations and in the interpretation of the world. As a result, there was extensive Pythagorean influence on Platonic doctrines and on later literature.

Musical principles played almost as important a role in the Pythagorean system as did mathematical and numerical concepts. Running throughout the system is the belief that order, or harmony of relation, is the regulating principle of the whole universe. For example, the intervals between the heavenly bodies were said to have been determined according to the laws and relations of musical harmony — hence the doctrine of the harmony of the spheres. Pythagorean scientific theory was intimately connected with their number theory.

The religious element was the predominant one in the character of Pythagoras and he chiefly labored to obtain religious ascendancy in connection with a mystic religious system. It was this religious element which profoundly influenced his contemporaries, and later ages as well, and so they considered him to be very closely related to the gods. Some, e.g. the Crotonians, even identified him with Apollo. By practicing divination and prophecy he revealed a way of life to his followers that was calculated to raise them above the level of mankind. At Crotona he had a brotherhood of 300 (evidently 300, i.e. 3×100 , was a special Pythagorean number) who were bound to him and to each other by a vow to devote themselves to religious and ascetic matters. Everything that was done or taught among the 300 was kept a profound secret. It was a Pythagorean maxim that everything was not to be revealed equally to everyone and so even within the brotherhood there were gradations to distinguish the mere listeners from the more advanced esoteric students. Members of the brotherhood were very closely devoted to each other and they held in contempt those who were not in their ranks. They had secret symbols, e.g. the pentagram, by which members of the brotherhood could recognize each other even if they were from different clubs since brotherhoods of 300 were also established in Tarentum, Metapontum, etc. They shared common meals in companies of 10 (30 groups of 10 — both

(12) The following is a list of the main mystical/symbolical numbers favored in antiquity and in most cases Greek and Roman authors favored Pythagorean mystical numbers: i.e. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17, and 30. For a detailed discussion of these Greek and Roman mystical numbers, cf. LAROCHE (1995, p. 568-576).

important Pythagorean mystical numbers). If Pythagoras ever wrote anything, his writings perished with him or not long after. But in all probability he wrote nothing and relied on the oral tradition. His disciple Philolaus was the first to publish the Pythagorean doctrines.

Significantly, most of the 17 numbers cited in the *Aeneid* occur a mystically significant number of times: e.g. 9, 12, and 30 are each cited 7 times; the expression "3 times" and the number 1,000 are advanced 30 times but 100 only occurs 29 times (this discrepancy is discussed below); 5, 20, and 50 occur 4 times. All in all, Vergil's use of numbers in the *Aeneid* is very deliberate and schematic and I am convinced that he had an overall plan in mind concerning his use of numbers in his 3 works as I have argued elsewhere concerning his use of numbers in the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics* (13). There is no random, haphazard citation of numbers in Vergil and, in fact, at times he changes a numerical total found in another author, Homer for example, in order to suit his own specific numerical scheme. Also in many cases Vergil's repetition of a numerical total reveals influence from the literary technique of ring-composition which in an epic poem is simply thematic anticipation used for structural purposes (14). I believe that thematic numerical anticipation is an important structural element in Vergil, especially in the *Aeneid*, and that its importance has not been noticed to date. This important Vergilian stylistic trait frequently serves to foreshadow events. In other words, most of the numbers advanced in Vergil's works are neither historical, nor random, figures but rather arbitrary, schematic totals selected according to his overall numerical plan.

Implicit influence from mystical numbers can often be detected in the *Aeneid*. For example, it is certainly not fortuitous that Vergil cites the name of Aeneas 237 times and that there are exactly 237 numerical citations in this masterpiece. Also the magical expression "3 times" occurs 30 times, 3 times in each of the first 4 books, and there are 3 expressions that specify how many times something happens: 3, 4, and 9. Furthermore, the number 3, including the expression "3 times", occurs 90, i.e. 3×30 , times. The number 7 is the 7th number cited, it occurs in 7 books, and it is the last number advanced in the *Aeneid* (cf. the first number cited is 14, i.e. 2×7 , thus revealing influence from 7). Also many, if not all, of the books of the *Aeneid* are divided into 3 parts, a person is often accompanied by 3 attendants (cf. e.g. Camilla at 12, 655-656), 7 heroines are named (6, 445f.) before Dido's introduction, 7 contestants are mentioned (5, 294f.) by name followed by the expression *multi praeterea*, etc. Often the number of enemy killed by a hero/heroine, though not cited explicitly, is significant (often 3): Camilla kills 12 men (11, 666f.), Turnus slays 18 opponents (9, 696f.),

(13) Cf. LAROCHE (article forthcoming in *Phoenix*) for the evidence.

(14) Cf. WILLIAMS (1983, p. 75f.).

Aeneas kills 27, i.e. 3 cubed, Latins and significantly Turnus is the 27th victim (10, 312f. and 12, 505f.), etc.

In the following pages I will analyze the role of the symbolic number 3 in the *Aeneid* while pointing out evidence of both explicit and implicit symbolical numerical influence.

The number 3 is cited 90 times

As would be expected, by far the most common symbolical number cited in the *Aeneid* is 3 — a universal magical number. In fact, it occurs 90 times and so accounts for nearly 40% of all numerical citations. Significantly, the magical expression 3 times occurs 30 times and the number 3, including the expression 3 times, occurs 90 times, i.e. 3×30 . The number 3 is the only figure (always excluding 1 and 2) which is advanced in every book of the *Aeneid* — 56 times in Books I-VI and 34 times in Books VII-XII (always as a form of *tres*, *tria*; *tertius*, *a*, *um*; *tridens*; or *triula*).

The number 3 is advanced 10 times in Book I and 9 of the first 14 numerical citations involve 3: 1-10: 1, 94; 1, 108; 1, 110; 1, 184; 1, 116; 1, 265; 1, 226; 1, 483; 1, 138; and 1, 145: the very first words spoken by Aeneas in the *Aeneid*, which contain the 2nd and 3rd numerical citations in this work, are "O thrice and four times blest, whose lot it was ..."; a set, formulaic expression of great antiquity with definite Homeric overtones which is fittingly cited 3 times by Vergil at key spots in the narrative and always in connection with death and twice the impending death of a main character — Dido (4, 589) and Turnus (12, 155). This expression is simply synonymous for "O very happy are those ...". It should be noted that a climax is usually expressed in many languages by thrice, but Greek and Latin authors sometimes added the expression 4 times for still greater emphasis. Aeneas speaks the aforementioned words in a 7 1/2 verse address while mourning for himself and his comrades at the onset of the fierce Aeolian storm. He states that the Trojan heroes who died before the eyes of the fathers beneath the walls of Troy were very fortunate indeed (cf. *Odyssey* 5, 306-312 for a similar 7-verse speech by Ulysses: "three times and four times blessed are the Danaans who perished in broad Troy then, doing the pleasure of the sons of Atreus").

During the great cosmic storm at sea, 3 ships are driven on the rocks and subsequently 3 other ships crash on the shoals — both magical references which serve as thematic numerical anticipation for the following reference to 3 stags grazing, i.e. one stag per ship in either group. In fact, in Book I in at least 6 cases there is a specific numerical correspondence between a group of animals and either people or various objects such as ships. The ship of Orontes is whirled around 3 times before disappearing in the sea-evidently because it was the unlucky 13th ship in the group. The malevolent associations of the number 13

would seem to have influenced the placing of the first citation of *Karthago* as the first word in verse 13 whereas *Roma* is cited for the first time as the last word in verse 7 and the next reference to *Roma* under the form *Romanam gentem* occurs in verse 33.

Aeneas is destined to found a city, Lavinium, 3 years, i.e. 3 summers, after landing in Italy — a magical total similar to the reference to the 7th summer to specify the duration of Aeneas' wanderings before landing in Carthage. According to Vergilian mystical chronology, which is not the standard one, the first settlement of the Trojans in Italy, i.e. in their armed camp, lasted for 3 years, then Lavinium lasted for 30 years before the founding of Alba Longa, and finally Alba Longa existed for 300 years before the founding of Rome — overall a period of 333 years. But Vergilian chronology is nebulous and sketchy at best and, in fact, Vergil is much more concerned with individual, discrete, non-cumulative mystical periods of time rather than with a consistent chronology that is mathematically correct. For example, he tends to telescope the 3-year period that the Trojans spent in their fortified camp and the 30-year period spent in Lavinium. For emphasis, Vergil states that after defeating the Rutuli the Trojans spent 3 winters in camp before founding Lavinium — so they spent 3 winters and 3 summers in Italy before founding Lavinium. There is a neat progression in Book I from 3 ships, to 3 stags, to 3 years and similarly from 7 ships, to 7 stags, to 7 years — quite a striking arrangement which certainly is not fortuitous.

According to Vergil, Achilles dragged Hector's body 3 times around the walls of Troy — a magical number of times with heightened effect because of the concomitant use of concentric circles. However, more exactly according to Homer (*Iliad* 24, 478f.), Hector was chased around the walls but his body was dragged around the tomb of Patroclus. Therefore, the magical expression 3 times is cited 3 times in Book I, also in Books II, III, and IV, for a combined total of 12 citations in the first 4 books — definitely a schematic, deliberate arrangement by Vergil.

There are 2 references to a trident in Book I — a magical symbol because of its 3 points. The trident with its 3 prongs can either bring help or destruction and so it has some of the same attributes as Mercury's *caduceus*, his magical wand. Evidently, anything with 3 prongs, whether natural or man-made, is endowed with magical power. In fact, many infernal beings that are base counterparts of the ternary are 3-headed like Cerberus or Hecate, or else they wield 3-pronged weapons such as the trident. The final 2 references to a trident in the *Aeneid* occur at 2, 418 and 2, 610 and in 3 cases it is a question of Neptune's trident and once that of Nereus (2.418).

11-16 : 2, 174 ; 2, 475 ; 2, 792 ; 2, 793 ; 2, 418 ; and 2, 610 : the Palladium leaps (*emicuit*) from the ground 3 times — a magical event as indicated by the expression *mirabile dictu*. For the early agricultural Romans the ritualistic act of jumping over the crops was done in sympathetic magic and closely associated

with Mars (an early agricultural deity) and later traces of this practice survived in the ritualistic jumpings of the *Salii*, especially over bridges. In the present case, the special significance of the leaping is intensified by the presence of the magical number 3. The mention of the 3-forked tongue (*trisulcis linguis*) of a snake is certainly reminiscent of the 3-pronged trident but, in fact, snakes only have a 2-forked tongue. Subsequently, Aeneas tries 3 times to embrace the phantom of Creusa and 3 times the form escapes from his hands — cf. the magical significance of repeating an action 3 times with the clear expectation that the 3rd time will be the charm, that the 3rd time never fails, but this is not always so since the 3rd event can also be negative. These 2 verses (2, 792-2, 793) are repeated verbatim at 6, 700-6, 701 when Aeneas tries unsuccessfully to grasp the shade of Anchises and they have definite Homeric overtones since Odysseus (*Odyssey* 11, 204f.) grasping at the shade of his mother says : "3 times I sprang towards her and my heart bade me to clasp her, and 3 times she flitted from my arms like a shadow or a dream". The expression 3 times is cited at the beginning of each of the verses mentioned and, as is often the case, Vergil advances a very close Latin translation of the corresponding Greek Homeric passage. The 2 references to a trident in this book are discussed above.

17-24 : 3, 421 ; 3, 566 ; 3, 567 ; 3, 37 ; 3, 117 ; 3, 645 ; 3, 203 ; and 3, 467 : Charybdis is said to suck in the vast waves 3 times into her abyss and then to cast them upward again — cf. the magical power of repeating an action 3 times. Once again Vergil is following Homer very closely and he even adopts the expression 3 times from him — cf. *Odyssey* 12, 73f. for the statement that "Charybdis does this (i.e. suck in the water) 3 times a day" ; also at 12, 105 "3 times a day Charybdis belches forth the water and 3 times she sucks it down". Subsequently, Vergil mentions that the cliffs of Charybdis utter a cry 3 times as Aeneas and his men mount up to heaven and then sink down to the depths of Hell with the receding wave and that the followers of Aeneas see the spray and the dripping stars 3 times. Once again *ter* is cited as the first word in both verses (566-567). Some commentators believe that *ter* in this case has no reference to the 3 ingurgitations of Charybdis at 3, 421 but I disagree. Apparently, Aeneas and his men were sent up to the sky 3 times by Charybdis after descending 3 times to the depths of Hell — cf. the popular belief that a person drowns after going down 3 times.

Also on 3 occasion in Book III it is a question of the occurrence of a 3rd event. First, Aeneas pulls on a 3rd cluster of shafts, i.e. shoots, and this time a groan is heard from the ground, i.e. from Polydorus. This magical event is appropriately flagged by the expression *mirabile dictu* (3, 26) and it provides further evidence that the 3rd time never fails. Next, the 3rd dawn brings Aeneas and his men to Crete — a sacred, magical period of time as found in a *triduum* for religious purposes and ultimately revealing Homeric influence (cf. e.g. *Iliad* 9, 363 for "on the 3rd day we might reach Phthia"). Finally, Achaemenides states that the horns of the

moon are now filling with the 3rd light (*tertia lumine*) since he has been living among the Cyclopes, i.e. it has been a period of 3 months — another sacred period of time expressed poetically.

Aeneas and his men wander on the deep for 3 days (*soles*) and as many nights (*totidem*) — a period similar to the sacred biblical interval of 3 days and 3 nights — and they sight land on the 4th day. Therefore, it is almost as if they rose from the dead after a period of 3 days and 3 nights — a stock, traditional concept. In one case Helenus orders a 3-threaded (*trilicem*) breastplate with hooks of gold to be brought to the ships of the Trojans. *Trilix* refers to a kind of armor, perhaps chain mail, which no doubt resembled the pattern of cloth which was designated by the same term. Cloth was called either *bilix* or *trilix* according to the number of leashes employed in weaving it. The expression *trilicem*, cited 3 times in the *Aeneid*, has a magical connotation because it has 3 parts.

25-30 : 4, 511 ; 4, 511 ; 4, 589 ; 4, 609 ; 4, 690 ; and 4, 691 : after mentioning 300, i.e. 3×100 , gods Vergil then refers to 3-fold (*tergeminam*) Hecate and to triple-faced (*tria hora*) Diana. Thus the idea of tripleness, which is fitting in such a magical, ritualistic ceremony, occurs 3 times in successive verses (4, 510-4, 511). In fact, Hecate, Diana, and Artemis are but 3 aspects of the same divinity (cf. 6, 247). Similarly, Geryon is called *tergeminus* (6, 287).

Following the report that Dido struck her breast 3 and 4 times — symbolic, I believe, of her impending death and a traditional sign of mourning — Dido readily admits that she is about to die (4, 604 : *quem metui moritura*). Then there is a notice that Hecate is invoked at night at the crossroads of the city (*triuiis*) — the only citation of *triuiis* in the *Aeneid* but Hecate is invoked as the goddess *Triuia* on 9 occasions. It is appropriate that a 3-fold goddess be invoked at the juncture of 3 roads since there is a certain magical connotation associated with crossroads which represent a strange, mysterious location (cf. e.g. *Oedipus Rex* ; also Cirlot, s.v. "crossroads").

Finally, Dido, after throwing herself on a sword, 3 times tries to lift herself and 3 times she rolls back on the couch — cf. the magical quality associated with the triple repetition of an action (cf. 2, 792-2, 793 ; and 6, 700-6, 701). In this case, the 3rd time is the end and not the charm. Once again, *ter* is cited as the first word in each verse.

31-45 : 5, 119 ; 5, 120 ; 5, 143 ; 5, 247 ; 5, 259 ; 5, 266 ; 5, 308 ; 5, 314 ; 5, 322 ; 5, 337 ; 5, 495 ; 5, 560 ; 5, 560 ; 5, 580 ; and 5, 772 : the *Chimaera* is manned by Dardan youths in triple tier (for *uersus* = a tier of oars, cf. Livy, A.V.C. 23, 30) with oars rising in triple rank. However, in this case Vergil is guilty of an anachronism since triremes were not invented until approximately 700 B.C. Undoubtedly, he selected a 3-tiered ship because of the magical qualities of 3. Similarly, he later mentions the triple-pointed beaks of the ships.

Cloanthus is told to choose and take away 3 bullocks as a gift for each ship (evidently only for the first 3 to finish since the 4th was presumed lost ; so it is a

matter of $3 \times 3 = 9$). Once again the number of animals corresponds to the number of ships (cf. Book I for similar examples). Also one of the prizes is a coat of chain mail with hooks of triple (*trilicem*) gold and then the 3rd prize is mentioned — a pair of brazen cauldrons.

In the 2nd contest, a foot race, Aeneas declares that the first 3 finishers will receive a prize. This is the same arrangement specified for the ship race and evidently the custom of rewarding only the first 3 finishers in a contest is very ancient and once again reflects the strong pervasive influence of such magical numbers as 3. Subsequently, Aeneas announces that the 3rd place finisher will receive an Argive helmet and at one point in the race Euryalus is in 3rd place but he eventually wins the race with Helymus second and Dioreas 3rd.

In the archery contest, Eurytion is selected as the 3rd participant to shoot. Then 3 troops of horses are mentioned with their 3 riding captains (cf. the 3 centuries of *equites* mentioned by Livy, A.V.C. 1, 13, 8) and the 3 troops break up the columns for a manoeuvre. Finally, Aeneas orders 3 steers to be sacrificed to Eryx — a magical number to ensure a safe trip. Noticeably, there is no citation of the expression 3 times in this book.

46-56 : 6, 229 ; 6, 289 ; 6, 417 ; 6, 421 ; 6, 355 ; 6, 484 ; 6, 506 ; 6, 549 ; 6, 700 ; 6, 701 ; and 6, 859 : Corynaeus performs a lustration by encircling his companions 3 times to cleanse them — combining the mystical power of 3 and of concentric circles as part of a religious, ritualistic act. Circumambulation is a universal magical ritual especially associated with lustrations and death ceremonies. Vergil was certainly familiar with the special magical power of 3 (cf. e.g. his statement, discussed above, at G. 8, 73-78 that "three threads here I first tie around thee, marked with three different hues, and three times round these shrines I draw thy image. In an uneven number heaven delights"). The reference to triple-bodied Geryon and to Cerberus with his 3 throats (*trifaux* — a *hapax legomenon*) reveal the strong magical power of triplication. A more standard reference to Cerberus occurs when he is described as having 3 mouths (*tria guttura*). However, according to Hesiod (*Theog.* 312) Cerberus had 50 heads.

Palinurus is driven along for 3 nights on the ocean (cf. Odysseus at *Odyssey* 5, 388f. who reportedly floats for 2 days and nights and then sights land on the 3rd day), i.e. for a sacred period of time. This is but one example of a magical, traditional sacred period of time similar to periods of 3 months, 3 years, etc. Subsequently, the 3 sons of Antenor are mentioned — again a mystical number of sons (cf. *Iliad* 11, 59 ; also *Aen.* 10, 351 for references to 3 sons ; 10, 518 for 4 sons ; 12, 270 for 9 sons ; and 10, 329 for 7 sons). Aeneas calls the spirit of Deiphobus 3 times — the stock, traditional, magical number of invocations necessary to insure that a person was in fact dead and a practice at least as old as Homer (cf. *Odyssey* 9, 65 where Odysseus calls the spirits of his dead companions 3 times ; cf. also 6, 229 and 3, 68 in the *Aen.* which are discussed above). In fact, most of the rituals associated with death involve some form of triplica-

tion as, for example, the necessity of throwing 3 handfuls of dirt on a corpse to guarantee a proper burial.

In the Underworld, Aeneas sees a castle surrounded by a triple wall, a concept which combines the magical connotations of 3 and of concentric circles, and such an arrangement occurs earlier in Hesiod (cf. *Theog.* 726). The 3 walls surrounding the castle represent the same basic idea as the act of circumambulation: a circle is a magical concept and 3 circles are that much more effective and powerful.

Aeneas tries 3 times to hug his father's phantom and 3 times he fails. Such an action is analogous to the triple invocation made to attempt to recapture a dead person's spirit and it should be compared to Dido's behavior at 4, 690-691 and to Aeneas' earlier action at 2, 792-793. The final numerical citation in this book occurs when a 3rd set of arms is hung up to Father Quirinus, i.e. deified Romulus. According to Roman tradition the *spolia opima*, i.e. the spoils captured by a Roman general upon slaying the general of the enemy, had been won on only 3 occasions (evidently reflection the magical power of 3): by Romulus, Cossus, and now Marcellus. This detail should be compared to the so-called triple triumph of Augustus at 8, 715.

In Book VI the expression 3 times is cited 4 times for a total of 16 citations in Books I-VI — noticeably, one additional citation of *ter* in these books and one fewer in Books VII-XII would yield yet a 3rd example of a 17-13 distribution pattern in the *Aeneid*.

57-59: 7, 141; 7, 699; and 7, 785: ominous thunder is heard 3 times in a clear sky — a portent. The triple repetition of the thunder greatly intensifies the preternatural character of this natural phenomenon. There is a 3rd and final reference to a coat-of-mail triple-linked with gold. As in Book VI, the last number cited in this book is 3 when Turnus' helmet is described as being triple-plumed — evidently 3 for good luck.

60-71: 8, 202; 8, 230; 8, 231; 8, 232; 8, 429; 8, 429; 8, 430; 8, 564; 8, 565; 8, 566; 8, 690; and 8, 715: there is a 3rd and final reference to triple-bodied Geryon and then 3 consecutive citations of the expression 3 times when Hercules crosses the Aventine Hill 3 times, he tries 3 times to open the cave of Cacus, and 3 times he sinks in weariness. Such deliberate triple repetition of *ter*, cited once in each verse, greatly intensifies the magical aspect of Hercules' actions. This is an unusual and striking usage of *ter*. In an other case there are 3 consecutive citations of 3 when the Cyclopes add 3 rays of twisted hail, 3 of watery cloud, and 3 of ruddy flame to a thunderbolt which they are forging (cf. 7, 141) — apparently Vergil intends to represent the thunderbolt as being composed of 3 different elements of a storm. Again the triple repetition of 3 heightens the overall magical effect of the scene which is modeled on an episode in Apollonius Rhodius (cf. 1, 731f.).

In one case there are 6 consecutive citations of 3 with 3 references occurring in 3 consecutive verses when it is reported that King Erulus received from his

mother at birth (*horrendum dictu*) 3 lives and 3-fold armor to wear meaning that he had to be killed 3 times and on that day Turnus stripped him of his armor 3 times (*totidem*). According to Aeschylus (*Agam.* 869f.) Geryon had a separate life for each of his bodies and evidently he served as the prototype for Erulus (cf. influence from folktales, for example the popular belief that cats have 9 lives).

Following a second reference to the triple-pointed beaks of the ships (cf. 5, 143 for the same verse), Augustus is said to enter Rome in triple triumph: viz. for his victories in Dalmatia, at Actium, and at Alexandria — definitely a schematic, deliberate arrangement reflecting the strong attraction of the mystical number 3 (cf. the 3 *spolia opima* discussed above).

72-73: 9, 329 and 9, 587: Nisus kills 3 attendants and Mezentius whirls his sling 3 times around his head before shooting — a magical act as is the killing of 3 soldiers. However, slingers were advised (cf. Veget. 2, 23) to whirl the sling only once since the repetition of the movement consumed too much time and thus a slinger had to learn to put as much force as possible into a single whirl. Therefore, the use of 3 in this context does not reflect standard usage but is rather an anomaly reflecting the great power of 3 and especially of the expression 3 times — 3 is the last number advanced in this book as it is in Books 6 and 7.

74-84: 10, 175; 10, 202; 10, 350; 10, 351; 10, 685; 10, 685; 10, 784; 10, 784; 10, 873; 10, 885; and 10, 886: Asilas is named as the 3rd leader of the Etruscan forces followed by a reference to the 3 clans of Mantua. Subsequently, Clausus kills 3 Thracians and the 3 sons of Ias are cited — simply magical totals (cf. the tendency to have triplets fight as representatives of the entire group, as, for example, the legendary 3 Horatii and 3 Curiatii; also the attraction of citing a magical number of sons).

Turnus tries 3 times to commit suicide and 3 times Juno intervenes (cf. *Iliad* 1, 188f. and especially 8, 169 for Diomedes). Aeneas reportedly hurls a spear through a shield of 3-fold brass and through the inwoven work of triple bull hides — cf. the similar magical use of 7 at 8, 448 and 12, 925.

Mezentius calls Aeneas 3 times in loud tones — a magical act usually reserved for death invocations (cf. e.g. 6, 506). Then he rides 3 times around him, a magical circumambulation generally associated with death rituals, and finally 3 times Aeneas carries around with him the spears on his shield. Therefore, the expression 3 times occurs 5 times in this book, including 3 successive citations at the end of the book, and 7 of the last 8 numerical citations involve 3, the last number cited in this book.

85-88: 11, 188; 11, 189; 11, 210; and 11, 631: Aeneas and Tarchon run around the blazing funeral pyres 3 times — another example of circumambulation as part of a death ritual — and then they circle the funeral fire 3 times on horseback while wailing thus revealing combined magical influence from the act of circumambulation and from the custom of shouting a dead person's name 3

times to ensure that that person is really dead. In the present case there is an unusual double circumambulation, i.e. 3 times on foot and 3 times on horseback, and this practice has definite Homeric overtones (cf. e.g. *Iliad* 23, 13; also the Roman custom of having soldiers march around the general's pile). Then the bones are removed from the pyres at the 3rd dawn, i.e. after a suitable magical period of time (cf. Servius' comment: *mos enim tertia die ossa crematorum legi*). As is the case with a 9-day period of mourning, i.e. 3×3 , a 3-day interval also represents a sacred period of time. It is noteworthy that there are once again 3 consecutive citations of the number 3 and that the only number advanced in verses 398-915 is 3 when there is a reference to a 3rd encounter between the Etruscans and the Rutulians. Therefore, once again 3 is the last number cited in this book as it is in Books 6, 7, 9, and 10.

89-90: 12, 155 and 12, 514: Juturna strikes her breast 3 and 4 times (discussed above) — a ritualistic, formulaic expression. Finally, Aeneas kills 3 Latins — a magical total.

Conclusions

Very little in the *Aeneid* is left to chance and, to paraphrase Pythagoras, I believe that "Number rules the *Aeneid*" and that mystical numbers provide the underpinning, the foundation for this masterpiece. Vergil was very much influenced by Pythagorean numerical mysticism as is clearly indicated by an analysis of his use of numbers, both explicitly and implicitly, in the *Aeneid* as well as in the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*.

During the Renaissance Vergil was venerated as the classical exemplar of perfect artistic form. With good reason since the *Aeneid*, and indeed his entire opus, represents an harmonious whole based on a detailed, precise mystical numerical plan which encompasses the numbers cited, the chronology, etc. The most important mystical numbers in his overall plan are 3, 7, 13, and 17. The single most important mystical number overall is 17, although 3 is also very influential, but 17 is never cited explicitly (nor is 13). This previously undetected dimension of the *Aeneid* helps to reveal starkly Vergil's genius and his very great degree of originality based on his own mystical numerical scheme. The *Aeneid* is thus quintessentially Roman.

The *Aeneid*, which has 55 incomplete verses (but in only one case, at 3, 340, is the meaning also incomplete) and some stop-gap passages, at the time of Vergil's death was undergoing continuous revision and rewriting. It is possible that one of Vergil's main concerns was the difficulty that he was experiencing in fully implementing his very ambitious mystical numerical scheme which permeates every aspect of this masterpiece. Perhaps he was encountering nearly insurmountable obstacles in his endeavor and thus he declared that he needed 3 more years to complete this epic. There are undoubtedly many other mystical

numerical designs in the *Aeneid* that Vergil either implemented or was in the process of implementing at the time of his death that presently escape us. However, we can make a start by analyzing his work as it now stands while keeping in mind that it is not in its final form.

The present investigation, which is part of a more extensive work in progress which examines all the numbers cited in the *Aeneid*, offers the reader valuable insight into Vergil's literary technique and the opportunity to examine the *Aeneid* from a fresh perspective. It also provides guidelines to help interpret problematic passages in this work that involve numerical citations (cf. e.g. 2, 263) according to Vergilian numerical practice. Such a study has serious implications for textual criticism involving the use of numbers, both implicitly and explicitly, in the *Aeneid* as well as numerical questions in general.

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Appendix I

Numbers Cited in the *Aeneid*

Number	Found in Book(s)	Citations in Books I-VI	Citations in Books VII-XII	Total Citations
3	In all books	56	34	90
4	In I-VIII, X, XII	12	10	22
5	In VII and XII	0	4	4
7	In I, V, VI, VIII-X, XII	13	5	18
9	In I, V, VI, XII	6	1	7
10	In II, VIII, IX, XI	2	3	5
12	In I, V, IX, XI, XII	2	5	7
14	In I and IX	1	1	2
20	In I, IX, XI	2	2	4
30	In I, III, VIII	2	3	5
50	In I, II, VI, X	3	1	4
100	In I-IV, VI, VII, IX-XI	18	11	29
200	In VIII	0	1	1
300	In I, IV, VII-IX	2	5	7
500	In X	0	1	1
600	In X	0	1	1
1,000	In I-II, IV-XII	13	17	30

Total number of citations: 237

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IN : HOMMAGES À CARL DEROUX
I POÉSIE