Establishing Rome with the Sword: Condere in the Aeneid

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ESTABLISHING ROME WITH THE SWORD:  
CONDERE IN THE AENEID

that humble Italy . . . for whom Camilla, Euryalus, and Turnus and Ni-
sus . . . died of wounds

—Dante, Inferno 1.106–8

It is, in Jane Austen’s words, a truth universally acknowledged
that the Aeneid is concerned with the founding of Rome, an event com-
monly described by the verb condere. This word is so crucial to the
poem that it appears conspicuously at both beginning and end: dum
condere urbem (1.5) and ferrum adverso sub pectore condit (12.950). 1
But these two acts are so different—the one a slow, constructive strug-
gle to settle down and build a civilization, the other a swift, destructive
act of enraged killing—that by placing them in such prominent symm-
etry and using the same word of them, Vergil calls attention to the rela-
tionship between them. Marking this link is the poem’s hero, who is the
subject of both verbs. Although the first usage, “found” or “establish,”
is standard, the final one, “bury the sword,” is nowhere attested before
Aeneid 9.348, when Euryalus stabs Rhoetus. It recurs in this sense four
more times (9.443, 10.387, 10.816, 12.950); significantly, in each case the
man killed by a weapon buried in his breast is Italian, and the man
wielding the weapon is a Trojan or an ally of Aeneas, the only survivor
of the entire group. The emphatic burial of Aeneas’ sword at 12.950
raises questions about the justification of his act and the final disposi-
tion of Turnus’ body, issues related to the morality of the founding of
Rome, 2 for beneath the struggle to establish Rome lies another—that of
a young Italian defending his land and way of life.

Vergil’s innovations with condere 3 reveal a set of themes that shed
not light but shadow on the interpretation of the Aeneid: it is associated

1 All citations of Vergil are from the 1969 Oxford text of R. A. B. Mynors.
2 For a review of this problem see Burnell, “Death of Turnus” and, contra, Stahl,
“Death of Turnus.” Stahl deals with many of the passages and characters that I discuss
here, to virtually opposite interpretive results.
3 On Vergil’s linguistic inventiveness, Harrison (Aeneid 10 287) comments that
Vergil’s “most noted development of poetic language consisted not in new words but
daring new phrases constructed from known words.” Here, using condere to describe a
stabbing constitutes a daring new usage of a very well–known word.
not only with the establishment of Roman imperium and weapons buried in living men but also with young men defending their father or nation, youths whose burials become an issue, especially to their fathers. As is typical of Vergil, these themes are suggestive rather than declarative; they appear to suggest the personal cost, in private life, for public glory, conquest, and empire. The new meaning of condere underscores and tightens the connection between the establishment of empire and the loss of Italian lives, for it is at odds with the other usages of condere, which do not include violent acts. In linking the slow founding of Rome to the swift stabbing of Turnus, Vergil suggests that the former rests on the latter. Thus he shows the violence and fury beneath the founding of Rome.

The reciprocal placement of condere at the opening and closing of the poem has aroused little critical notice. J. W. Hunt remarks: “Before the city can be built, a sword is buried in the heart of its opponent; building and burial are curiously fused in the closing scene.” Ralph Hexter also notices Vergil’s “strategic and programmatic employment” of condere at both ends of the poem: “To explain how the semantic range ofondo can extend from ‘to found’ to ‘to bury’ is not difficult:condo can mean both ‘to hide’ and ‘to build’ because the latter involves ‘burying the foundation’ or ‘hiding it in the ground.’” Hunt’s and Hexter’s perceptions of the duplicity inherent in the concealing dimension of condere and the link between the buried sword and the established

4 There is an enormous bibliography on the private losses incurred in the pursuit of the establishment of Rome and Roman empire (both rule of Rome over other lands or rule of Rome itself by one man) and how they relate to Vergil’s attitude toward Augustus. I do not rehearse here the debates over the so-called “Harvard” and “European” (or pessimist and optimist) schools: although my own sympathies lean toward the former, my argument here is limited to the ways in which Vergil’s innovations on the word condere complicate his readers’ views of the establishment of Rome.

5 In the prophecies of Jupiter at 1.257–96 and Anchises at 6.756–892, Vergil emphasizes how long it will take for Rome to be founded. Jupiter says at 1.269 that Ascanius will rule at Alba Longa for thirty years; at 272–74 he says three hundred years more will pass there before Ilius gives birth to Romulus and Remus. Anchises lists a good number of figures from Roman history and then goes on: Anchises natum per singula duxit (6.888). Presumably this exhaustive process itself is time-consuming; certainly Anchises leads Aeneas through centuries of Roman history. In any case, Vergil makes clear that the struggle to found the Roman people (molis . . . Romanam condere gentem, 1.33) will last for centuries.

6 Hunt. Forms of Glory 5.
7 Hexter. “Sidonian Dido” 359.
city lay a base for understanding the way condere works in the Aeneid. As I shall argue, however, the extension of condere from founding civilization to stabbing a man is far from simple. The idiom “to bury a weapon in an opponent” is common both in English and in Latin after the Aeneid, but since this usage of condere is nowhere previously evidenced, its appearance there constitutes not mere extension of semantic range, but the addition of another dimension entirely. This new dimension is linked, moreover, with passionate rage. Thus Vergil’s alteration of condere brings together the associated themes mentioned earlier, all of which fall, as it were, under one roof: establishment of Rome, stabbing of an opponent, and burial of a young man fallen in battle. The final act of the Aeneid links forever the foundation of Rome and the enraged, murderous passion that has previously characterized not the city’s founder and the poem’s hero, but his chief opponent, Juno.

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8See also Reckford, “Latent Tragedy” 255: “The two spheres of meaning of condere, ‘to bury’ and ‘to found,’ interpenetrate each other throughout the Aeneid: conduntur alveo [7.303] calls to mind the Greek warriors hidden in the womb of the Trojan horse, which gives birth through them to the destruction of Troy; this destruction in turn is parent to the greatness of Rome (condere urbem).”

9That this dimension was recognized as new and striking is perhaps evidenced by Ovid, who, as W. S. Anderson has pointed out to me, gleefully, almost insistently uses condere to mean both “establish cities” and “stab to death,” especially in Metamorphoses, where four times it means “to stab” (12.295, 12.482, 13.392, 13.459) and three times “to establish” (14.459, 14.775, 15.57). These usages may suggest that Ovid is trying to emphasize the new, violent Vergilian meaning of condere.

10Vergil links these themes so subtly that their connections have not been previously explicated; hence we may even see the fourth meaning of condere—“conceal”—called into play as covering them over and, ultimately, as hiding the sword stabbed into the breast of a young man, who may go without burial, beneath the very founding of Rome. The first and last meanings of the word—“conceal” and “establish”—are the two most prominent usages of condere in the poem; see note 12, below. On the importance of condere to mean “found,” and particularly its noun form, conditor, see Stefan Weinstock’s discussion of the use of conditor, before the Aeneid, to describe Julius Caesar; he concludes that its application to a founder of Rome was relatively new at the time, but logical because “the verb condere was always used for founding” (Divus Julius 183–84). And since the original founder of Rome, Romulus, killed his brother in a struggle for power that is sometimes (see, e.g., Livy 1.7) associated quite literally with the walls of the city that he is building, the act of founding is in a sense associated from the beginning with violent killing. As I shall presently argue here, Vergil’s alteration of condere makes that link linguistic as well as historical.

11The monimenta saevi doloris of 12.945 recall saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram (1.4). It is as though, at the end of the poem, the remembering anger that Juno gave up (mentem laetata retorsit, 12.841) has infected Aeneas.
CONDERE IN AENEID 9, 10, AND 12: A NEW MEANING

According to the available evidence, condere was historically applied to rather slow, time-consuming acts, which usually occur in peacetime settings, rather than to swift, violent acts of war.\textsuperscript{12} It first appears in the latter sense in Aeneid 9 and becomes common only thereafter. Forms of condere are used of plunging a weapon into an opponent’s body five times in the Aeneid: condidat at 9.348 and 9.443, recondit at 10.387 and 10.816,\textsuperscript{13} and condit at 12.950. As noted above, Aeneas (10.816 and 12.950) or an ally (Nisus, Euryalus, and Pallas) is its subject, an Italian is its object, and all but Aeneas die shortly after, thus becoming victims of the Aeneid’s march toward empire. The new usage of condere first occurs when Euryalus stabs Rhoetus: pectore in adverso totum cui comminus ensem / condidit adsurgenti (9.347–48). As if to emphasize his innovation, Vergil repeats it ninety-five lines later, when Nisus stabs a Rutulian: ensem / . . . Rutuli clamantis in ore / condidit adverso (9.441–43). At 10.385–87, Pallas kills Hisbo: Pallas . . . ruentem [Hisbonem], / dum furit, incautam crudeli morte sodalis / excipit atque ensem . . . in pulmone recondit. At 10.815–16 Aeneas runs Lausus through with his sword: ensem / per medium Aeneas iuvenem totumque recondit. Finally, at 12.950, Aeneas kills Turnus: ferrum adverso sub pectore condit.

\textsuperscript{12}TLL s.v. condо divides meanings into two groups: (I) “in locum conferre, colligere, abscondere,” and (II) “facere, efficere, constituere, autorem esse.” The act of stabbing comes under abscondere; no source previous to Vergil is cited. This is the only usage describing a quick, violent action. In the Eclogues and the Georgics, condere functions peacefully; at G. 3.558 it describes a burial. In the Aeneid condere is used 50 times, mostly referring either to founding or hiding, five times to stabbing. Only at 2.24 and 2.401, when the Greeks conceal themselves, and at 7.570, describing the hidden Erinyes, does the poet use condere to imply danger. This association led Putnam (Poetry 21) to identify a “distinctly sinister side” to it. But as I shall argue, what makes condere truly dangerous is not its ability to conceal—which can be good as well as bad—but its eventual conflation of murderous rage and the establishment of civilization. In Livy’s account of early history, published before the Aeneid (Miles, “Cycle of Roman History” 18, suggests 27 or 25 B.C.E. for the first pentad; Woodman, Rhetoric 134–35, argues that it and the preface both predate Actium), condere applies mostly to the act of founding cities and is never associated with a single violent act; in 1.19.1 Livy describes Rome as conditam vi et armis but says Numa planned to give the city a second start based on law and religion.

\textsuperscript{13}There appears to be no difference between condere and recondere when they describe a fatal stabbing.
Each of these deaths occurs in a social context, for those who bury the weapon or those in whom it is buried are fighting with or on behalf of another man—a friend, a comrade, a lover, or a father. Nisus and Euryalus are lovers on a rampage for joint glory (Nisus’ death is essentially a love-suicide); Hisbo and Lagus are sodales; Lausus dies seeking both to avenge his father’s wound and to protect him; and Turnus dies after begging for mercy toward his father. In all cases, condere is used of an act of war, the killing of an Italian. Further, the significant young men are connected to political dynasty in Italy, either by being the sole son of an aged king (Pallas, Lausus, Turnus) or by receiving an association with it from the poet (Euryalus, Nisus). Finally, as I shall argue, the disposition of their bodies is a significant issue as well.

NON TE OPTIMA MATER CONDET HUMI:
LOSS OF BURIAL AND POLITICAL DYNASTY

To begin with, burial, or loss of burial, is an issue throughout the poem; in virtually every book, a burial or funeral ritual is prominent either by description or by absence. Condere is a regular term for

14 Of Hisbo’s devotion to Lagus, Harrison notes (ad loc.) that “the pathetic tone of mors crudelis is matched by the colloquial and familiar sodalis, found only here in Vergil and suggesting a closer companionship than socius or amicus.” Although Hisbo and Lagus may, like Nisus and Euryalus, be lovers, the salient factor about Hisbo’s death is not his sexuality but his rage at the death of his companion.

15 As Gary B. Miles has pointed out to me, there is a further social context to Turnus’ death: Aeneas’ own guilt, anger, and sorrow over Pallas’ death. See James, Parents and Children 123, for the view that Aeneas’ reaction to Pallas’ death arises more from his emotional attachment to Evander rather than from a genuinely deep relationship to Pallas. Aeneas himself points out, just before he stabs Turnus, the social context in which he does so: “tune . . . spoliis indute meorum,” Hardie (Epic Successors 33) associates this remark with that of Achilles at Iliad 22.270–72 and sees in the plural form of meorum an echo of Achilles’ “my companions” (22.272). As Hardie notes, Aeneas’ use of Pallas’ name recalls Achilles’ claim that Pallas Athena will kill Hector. Meorum also acts in the standard Roman usage to mean family members and thus implies a familial relationship felt by Aeneas toward the house of Evander; as the plural form suggests, that relationship extends beyond Pallas, to include at least his father.

16 Orontes and his men go unburied in book 1, Priam in book 2, and Palinurus in book 5; Polydorus and Misenus receive late burial in books 3 and 6; at 4.620 Dido wishes that Aeneas will go unburied; there are lengthy funeral preparations for Dido and Pallas in books 4 and 11; the memorial games for Anchises take up a good deal of book 5: Mezen-
burial and is so used four times in the *Aeneid* (3.68, 5.48, 6.152, 10.558); but, strikingly, the only time it is so used in the second half of the poem is at 10.558, when Aeneas denies burial to Tarquitious. After the funeral for Misenus in book 6, *condere* is used prominently of stabblings but never of an actual burial. Thus in the second half of the poem, as *condere* takes on a new and lethal dimension, in which it becomes the means of death, it loses its usage as the proper conclusion for death, that is, burial, at precisely the point when burial begins to be increasingly important.\(^{17}\) That meaning remains, however, attached by absence, as it were, to each of the fatal stabblings described by a usage of *condere* and not least because, of the nine men involved, only Aeneas survives and only Pallas is known to receive a proper burial. The fates of Volcens, the unnamed Rutulian stabbed by Nisus, and Hisbo are

\(^{17}\) Thus this common usage of *condere* disappears from the second half of the poem, except for what is not only a refusal of burial but a denial that it can even happen. Vergil’s avoidance of *condere* in describing burial is striking, especially given how much burial is at issue in this half of the poem—for instance, the funeral for Caieta (7.1–6), Nisus’ request for burial or funeral rite (9.213–15), the lament of Euryalus’ mother that she cannot bury him (9.485–91), the returns of the bodies of Pallas and Lausus to their families (10.492–94; 10.827–28), Mezentius’ request to share a grave with Lausus (10.904–6), the truce (100–105) and funerals of book 11 (2.22–23, 182–202, 203–224), the elaborate preparations and funeral ritual for Pallas (11.29–99, 11.139–81), the rescue of Camilla’s body (11.593–94), and Turnus’ request to be returned either alive or dead to his father (12.931–36). This strategy requires periphrases and elliptical constructions (e.g., 10.827–28, *teque parentum / manibus et cineri . . . remitto*; 10.906, *me consortem nati concede sepulcro*; 11.22–23, *interea socios inhumataque corpora terrae / mandemus*; 11.102–3, *corpora, per campos ferro quae fusa iacebant, / redderet ac tumulo sineret succedere terrae*).
unstated. Lausus is sent home to his family’s ancestral plot, but the form of his burial is unknown; 18 Nisus and Euryalus are mutilated precisely to prevent proper burial. Turnus asks for return to his father, either living or dead, but the poet does not tell us if Aeneas grants his request. In virtually all these deaths, burial is explicitly at issue and, except for Nisus and Euryalus, is linked to the feelings of their fathers. 19

Long before his funeral, Pallas’ death is linked to his father’s love for him: Evander asks the gods to kill him first if Pallas is not to survive (8.572–883). Pallas’ death, however, is designed explicitly to punish Evander: *cuperem ipse pares spectator adesset*, says Turnus at 10.443. To ensure that Evander receives his message, he sends a further punitive remark as the Arcadians carry Pallas’ body off the field: “Arcades, haec inquit “memores mea dicta referte / Evandro: qualem meruit, Pallanta remitto. / . . . haud illi stabunt Aeneia parvo / hospitia” (10.491–95). When Aeneas first hears of Pallas’ death, he thinks immediately of Evander as well as Pallas: *Pallas, Evander, in ipsis / omnia sunt oculis* (10.515–16), and he speaks at length of Evander’s feelings when he sends Pallas back for burial in book 11 (11.42–57). Further, he himself makes burial, or loss of burial, an issue immediately, during his rampage: twice he denies pleas to filial–parental ties in his own family. To Magus, pleading for mercy with an appeal to Aeneas’ own paternal and filial ties (10.524–25), he responds that Ascanius and Anchises support him in refusing mercy (10.534); to Lucagus, who pleads for mercy in the name of Aeneas’ parents, he responds brutally: *morere et fratrem ne*

18 Although Aeneas kills Lausus’ father, Mezentius, shortly after killing Lausus, it is never clear whether or not Lausus and Mezentius receive joint burial, as Mezentius requests; cf. discussion below. See Quint, “Painful Memories” 34, on Vergil’s “melancholy variations on the theme of the death of a son and the end of a genealogical line which stand for the end of a whole civilization.” “Burying the Trojan past,” in Quint’s term (31), not only includes burying the various towns mistakenly founded by Aeneas on the way to Italy but extends also to the deaths of the two men remaining from Troy who, because of their homosexuality, would not participate in a Trojan–Italian settlement by marrying Italian women and fathering children.

19 For another set of close and suggestive associations between Aeneas, Euryalus’ mother, and all these young men see Hardie, *Epic Successors* 49–50. This brilliant, concise analysis of substitution and sacrifice shows yet another way in which Vergil has connected all these characters. For a detailed analysis of connections between Euryalus and Lausus, and between their parents, see Egan, “Euryalus’ Mother” 161–63.
He taunts the dead body of Tarquitus, whom he has beheaded, precisely with loss of burial by his family: “istic nunc, metuende, iace. non te optima mater / condet humi patrioque onerabit membra sepulcro” (10.557–58). Strikingly, these are the only speeches Aeneas makes until 10.811–12, when he taunts Lausus for his deceptive pietas toward Mezentius. Thus burial of young men killed by Aeneas in vengeance for Pallas’ death is very much at issue as Aeneas comes up to meet Lausus and, later, Turnus. For he has explicitly denied to some, and implicitly to many more, return to their parents for burial, thus refusing them that minimal but crucial comfort, which even Turnus granted to Evander (10.493–94: “quisquis honos tumuli, quidquid sola-
men humandi est, / largior”). Aeneas’ rage abates, at least temporarily, once he looks upon Lausus, who died protecting and avenging his father, and whose pietas Aeneas had derided. Recalling the pietas of his own father, he returns Lausus not, significantly, to Lausus’ father, Mezentius, but to his ancestors: “teque parentum / manibus et cineri, si qua
est ea cura, remitto” (10.827–28).

The problem of the disposal of Mezentius’ body links and underscores the same problem for Lausus and Turnus. Although Mezentius neither kills nor is killed by an action described with condere, he is closely linked with the last two Italian youths who die thus: he is the father of one and the ally of the other, and like them he dies at Aeneas’ hands. Mezentius’ death recalls that of Lausus, because he dies to avenge it and asks to be buried with Lausus; it also anticipates that of Turnus, who asks to be returned to his father for burial. Mezentius is further associated with Turnus in several ways, not the least of which is structural, in that his death at the end of book 10 is almost a rehearsal

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20 In this whole aristeia Aeneas resembles Agamemnon in Iliad 11, killing three sets of brothers and denying ransom to Adrestos and Amphimachos, rather more than Achilles at any point in his rampage.

21 An anonymous referee for AJP has pointed out the especially ugly nature of these lines: unlike the other descriptions of burial that use condere (3.68, 5.48, 6.152), 10.557–58 represent the denied burial as sparing the earth and family tomb a burden.

22 Especially the eight sons of Ufens and Sulmo, whom he takes for sacrifice.

23 This turns out to be a crucial point, for Aeneas has promised Evander that he will hand Mezentius over to the Etruscans. Since Mezentius fears that he will not be buried, that his enemies will abuse his body, he asks to be returned for burial with his son: “unum hoc per si qua est victis venia hostibus oro: / corpus humo patiare tegi, scio acerba meorum / circumstare odia: hunc, oro, defende furorem / et me consortem nati concede sepulcro” (10.903–6).
for Turnus’ death at the end of book 12. 24 They are native–born Italian kings who exercise imperium in a hereditary patriarchy; when Turnus takes in the ousted Mezentius, they become associated physically and politically. In war, they share a military association. Their general pride, arrogance, and violence further link them. Aeneas first hears of each by name from Evander, who, unable because of age to take action against them, 25 asks him first in book 8 and then in book 11 to take on those jobs. Both die at the hands of Aeneas, one asking to be reunited, in death, with his son, and the other asking to be returned to his father, either dead or alive. 26

Thus even in death Turnus and Mezentius are associated: the Etruscans and Evander, unable to exact revenge on the bodies of their living enemies, may want to increase the suffering of their souls by denying them burial. The question arising from these circumstances is the same for both men: does Aeneas ultimately grant the requests of Mezentius and Turnus that he return their bodies to their families? Vergil himself never answers this question. Harrison comments on 10.904–05 that Mezentius “fears the mutilation and exposure of his corpse; that the Etruscans do at least vent their hatred on it seems to be confirmed by the twelve perforations in his cuirass seen at 11.9–10.” He refers to R. O. A. M. Lyne’s discussion of 11.10, in which Lyne comments that “this damage was not done to Mezentius’ breastplate during the battle, so far as we can judge (10.783–86, 856, 893ff.). It is presumably due to posthumous mutilation. Aeneas did not therefore comply with Mezentius’ request at 10.904f.” 27 On the matter of Mezentius’ burial, Harrison assumes otherwise: “Mezentius’ request to Aeneas to ensure his burial, a benefit crucial for the ancients, recalls that of the

24 This is especially so because, as DiCesare points out (Altar 216), in book 10 Mezentius is a stand–in for Turnus. In addition, Aeneas’ emotional state and his responses to conflicting claims of pietas in the end of book 12 repeat almost exactly, although in condensed fashion, his behavior at the end of book 10.

25 He was asked by the Etruscans to help them gain possession of Mezentius (8.505–9) and violently wants revenge against Turnus (11.177–79).

26 For another link between Mezentius and Turnus cf. Putnam, “Pius Aeneas” 324: “Our growing sympathy for prideful Turnus now suffering humiliation is not unlike our response to savage Mezentius at the moment his vulnerability is shielded by his loving son.” Thus the reaction of readers to their deaths further associates them.

27 Lyne, Words and the Poet 113. Lyne credits this observation to D. P. Fowler and contrasts the comment of R. D. Williams that Mezentius “fears that his body may be found and maltreated by those who had cause to hate him. Virgil does not tell us whether Mezentius’ request was granted” (Williams, Aeneid 7–12 379).
dying Hector to Achilles to be ransomed back to his family for the same purpose (II. 22.338ff.). Mezentius’ request seems to be fulfilled in the general burial–amnesty of 11.100ff., although Aeneas does not here reply to it.”

The precedent of book 10 for the matter of Turnus’ body at the end of the poem is silence on Vergil’s part. If he had wanted his readers to be certain of the fate of Mezentius’ body, he would have mentioned it—not in book 10, but in book 11, where Mezentius’ armor takes up Aeneas’ attention from lines 2 to 16. Nothing is said there of what has been done with its former owner. The silence of books 10 and 11 recurs at the end of book 12, where once again Vergil focuses not on his hero but on the Italian opponent he is killing—an opponent asking to be returned to his father, as Mezentius asks to be returned to his son. In his alliance with Evander, Aeneas has either implicitly or explicitly acknowledged that the right of disposition of their corpses belongs respectively to the Etruscans and to Evander: thus, once Mezentius and Turnus are dead they may have to pay for the crimes they committed while alive. The poet’s failure or refusal to erase doubt on this issue (by mentioning or even describing the return of their bodies for burial) suggests that he wants to maintain a mysterious silence about it, thus leaving open the possibility that they receive no burial. Denial of burial constitutes not only a personal act of revenge but a political act, a sign

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28Harrison. Aeneid 10 on 10.903–4. Note that Achilles not only denies Hector’s request but then commits appalling abuses of his body; Mezentius’ fear of his subjects may allude to those scenes in the Iliad. For a later analogue see Ariosto’s Magonorore (Orlando Furioso, canto 37). Mezentius is the model for Magonorore, among whose notable traits is his abuse of the dead bodies of people he considers his enemies. After his capture, his people take similar revenge on him. Toynbee remarks that the Etruscans attended more to the disposition of dead bodies, because of a greater concern with the afterlife, than any other culture (Death and Burial 11); if so (or if the Romans also thought so), then the degree and particular nature of Mezentius’ sadism would intensify his people’s hatred of him. Certainly the details about his abuse of the dead initiate the motif, in the poem’s second half, of concern over proper and improper treatment of dead bodies.

29Gotoff (“Transformation” 206–7) notes that to let Aeneas answer there would break off the “brilliant spotlight Virgil has been training on Mezentius.”

30That Mezentius’ body may be handed over to his enemies would be particularly appropriate, since prominent among his crimes against them was his habit of tying living people to dead bodies (8.485–88); Evander’s demands on Aeneas at 11.177–79 (“quod vitam moror invisam Pallante perempto / dextera causa tua est, Turnum natoque patrique / quam debere vides”) leave open the possibility that Turnus’ death will not be enough—he may want Turnus’ body as well.
of conquest, as well. Aeneas, the victor in single battle with each of them and in the war to take over their kingdoms, ousts them in the most permanent fashion: in killing Mezentius, Mezentius’ son, and Turnus, he overrules their claims for pietas, removes them from rule, and wipes out their political dynasty.

**FERRUM ADVERSO SUB PECTORE CONDIT:**
STABBING THE ITALIAN PRINCE,
ESTABLISHING THE EMPIRE

Lausus and Turnus die because they stand between Aeneas and his marriage; Pallas’ death, although not strictly necessary for Roman victory, leads to Aeneas’ anger and requires him to keep his promises to Evander, which are necessary for his reaction to Turnus at the end of the poem. Each dies in the immediate context of pietas toward, and consciousness of, his father: just before casting his weapon at Turnus, Pallas proclaims that Evander is prepared for his death (10.449–51); the last words spoken before Lausus dies are Aeneas’ taunts about his pietas overruling his martial inadequacy (10.811–12); and Turnus’ last request is that Aeneas pity his aged father, Daunus, and either spare him or return his body for burial. As noted above, Turnus releases Pallas’ body to Evander, and Aeneas returns Lausus’ body not to his father but to his dead ancestors (10.827–28). The poet does not state what Aeneas decides to do with Turnus’ body. Given the importance of proper burial, the disposition of his body becomes an issue that hangs over the end of the poem, further clouding its potential resolution.

When Aeneas kills Turnus, he does so despite his young opponent’s plea for mercy toward his father (12.930–36). The mutual devotion of fathers and sons is well established in the *Aeneid*: Daunus is only the last in a long line of fathers and kings who fear for their sons. As for Mezentius, Evander, and Daunus, the loss of their sons means also the end of their dynasties. Turnus acknowledges that his defeat in battle signifies the practical end of his dynasty (12.936–37); for the purposes of the foundation of Rome, however, that is not enough: his lineage must be obliterated as well. Thus Aeneas’ anger at the death of one Italian prince causes him to kill another, in what Roger Hornsby calls

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31 It is worth noting here that Priam’s lost burial operates the same way: his abandoned headless corpse on the shore signifies the total destruction of Troy.
his “first and necessary act of statesmanship.” Hornsby further remarks that “the final witness of Aeneas’ completeness as heroic statesman and bearer of civilization occurs only when Aeneas finally slays Turnus,” but does not note the ironies inherent in Vergil’s application of the same verb to both the civilizing and the killing.

The fate of Turnus’ body is relevant because of the way he dies: by describing his death with condere, Vergil establishes a link between the manner of his death and the character of Rome itself, and thus the patriotic identity of contemporary Romans. The question is not “is this a moral or immoral beginning to a nation?”—that is, a good or bad thing—but “what kind of beginning was this and how is it relevant, centuries later, to individual Romans?” Although Vergil does not compel readers to redefine themselves through his poem, he does allow that the identity of an individual Roman, as it relates to the moral status of Rome, might be altered at least with respect to nations and people non–Roman, and he does so, in part, by altering the word used of the founding of Rome. As Philip Hardie remarks:

The killing of Turnus is the act on which the Roman cultural order is founded; Virgil narrates a senseless vengeance–killing which is masked,

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32Hornsby, Patterns of Action 140 and 138. DiCesare uses similar vocabulary in discussing the end of the poem: killing Turnus, he remarks, is an “act appropriate to the Chief of Staff” (Altar 238). The poem seems less sure about the appropriateness of obeying violent emotion in matters civic, political, and even military; Aeneas himself proclaims, when the truce is broken in book 12, “quo ruitis? quaeev ista repens discordia surgit? / o cohibete iras!” (12.313–14).

33These ironies multiply with Aeneas’ claims that Pallas, not he, is killing Turnus, in a sacrifice of sorts: “Pallas te hoc vulnere, Pallas / immolat et poenam secelerato ex sanguine sumit” (948–49). The holiness that Aeneas invokes here is dubious at best, particularly because his claim of sacrifice in Pallas’ name recalls 10.517–20, where he takes the young men for sacrifice, which he performs at 11.81–82. The language of these three scenes is striking: at 10.519–20 Aeneas seizes them—viventis rapit, inferias quos immolet umbris / captivoque rogii perfundat sanguine flavmus. Here viventis is emphatic; rapit describes swift, violent action. At 11.81–82 he fulfills his intention, as stated in immolet: vinxerat et post terga manus, quos mitteret umbris / inferias. Both 10.519–20 and 11.81–82 look ahead to 12.951, in which Aeneas, burning with rage (fervidus), stabs Turnus in a so–called sacrifice (Pallas immolat), and sends his shade to the underworld: vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras (12.952). (On Aeneas’ sacrifice of the young men, as well as the general pitiless cruelty of his rampage of book 10, see Gaskin, “Turnus, Mezentius,” and Wiltshire, “War and Peace.”) Thus immolat (12.949) recalls Aeneas’ previous sacrifice for Pallas and associates this act of stabbing, which both literally and linguistically ends the war and initiates the Trojan, proto–Roman settlement, with the worst kind of unthinking rage seen in either the Iliad or the Aeneid.
in the words of the killer, as a sacrifice, but whose true nature many readers experience as quite other. As “sacrifice” the death of Turnus represents a reimposition of order; but as uncontrolled rage, revenge pure and simple rather than the judicial retribution envisaged by the terms of the treaty, it retains its potential to repeat itself in fresh outbursts of chaotic anger (the dreary catalogue of vengeance—killings of Roman civil war). 34

For contemporary readers of the Aeneid, the problem of reconsidering communal origin as it relates to an individual’s identity would have been complicated by two factors in the poem: (1) Jupiter agrees to Juno’s request that all the Trojan character be eliminated from the Romans, so that their national identity is to be derived purely from the Italians (12.830–36); and (2) the person killed at the end of the poem is not a foreigner but a native Italian and thus one of their national ancestors. 35 Since Augustus was in the process of reviving and revising Rome’s ancient past, with a view to reshaping contemporary Roman culture, a review of the conditions of the establishment of Rome arose in the cultural life of the time. 36 By focusing on the way its Italian opponents died, Vergil evokes moral conflict for his reader. He uses the new violent meaning of condere to create a reminder for his readers of

34 Hardie. Epic Successors 21. Hardie is here drawing on Girard, Violence and the Sacred; his illuminating second chapter, “Sacrifice and Substitute,” treats some of the characters and relationships I have been discussing here but from the perspective of religion, ritual, and anthropology. My focus here is political and imperial rather than religious (although these concerns are often fused, particularly for the Romans): where Hardie discusses Turnus in terms of substitution and sacrifice, I am examining political strife and imperialist conquest by destruction of a rival dynasty.

35 That all these young men die without issue does not mean that they cannot be considered national ancestors of Rome. The family figured here is metaphorical rather than biological, so the usual need for descendants does not apply. George Washington, for example, had no children, but he is traditionally considered the “father” of his country. At Inferno 1.106–8 Dante identifies both Camilla and Turnus—as well as Nisus and Euryalus—as having died for their country and thus as being ancestors of the later inhabitants of Italy: “quella umile Italia . . . per cui mori . . . la vergine Camilla, Eurialo e Turno e Niso di ferute.”

36 Octavian’s desire to take the name Romulus (Dio 53.16.7; Suet. Aug. 7.2) overtly marks his plan to link the ancient past of Rome with its present. On Augustus’ building program, part of creating the res publica restituta, see Zanker, Power of Images. On Augustus as relevant, for readers of the Aeneid, to these issues, Hardie remarks (Epic Successors 34): “the epic will set about defining . . . its hero, but ends only by placing his identity in doubt. ‘Who is Augustus and what does he stand for, and what indeed is his name?’ were the questions that pressed on Virgil’s contemporary audience, and the definition of the emperor was to remain problematical.”
the cost of the establishment of Rome. Each time condere is used of a fatal stabbing, Vergil shows Rome’s founding as partly accomplished by and dependent upon the violent death of one of Rome’s ancestors, who then may not receive proper burial. Worse, the killer is another of Rome’s ancestors, so that each death incurred by a usage of condere to mean “stab” shows the readers their cultural progenitors in a form of civil conflict. Ultimately, the final two such uses of condere show the original conditor of the Roman people stabbing a young man whose final thoughts and words are of concern and love for his father—the kind of pietas formerly so typical of Aeneas that he once called his father’s death his worst struggle (labor extremus, 3.714). The Aeneid shows Rome as founded partly on the bodies of Italians who died in the war—Italians who are just as much ancestors of the Romans as the Trojans are (if not more so, because of Jupiter’s promise to Juno). The end of the poem enforces on its readers the awareness that Rome was established with the sword—the sword that took the life of a young Italian, who was pleading for mercy, whose body may not have been given burial. After finishing the poem, the reader should remember him whenever Rome’s foundations are celebrated.37

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