

Roman Epic

Interpreting and Creating Traditions

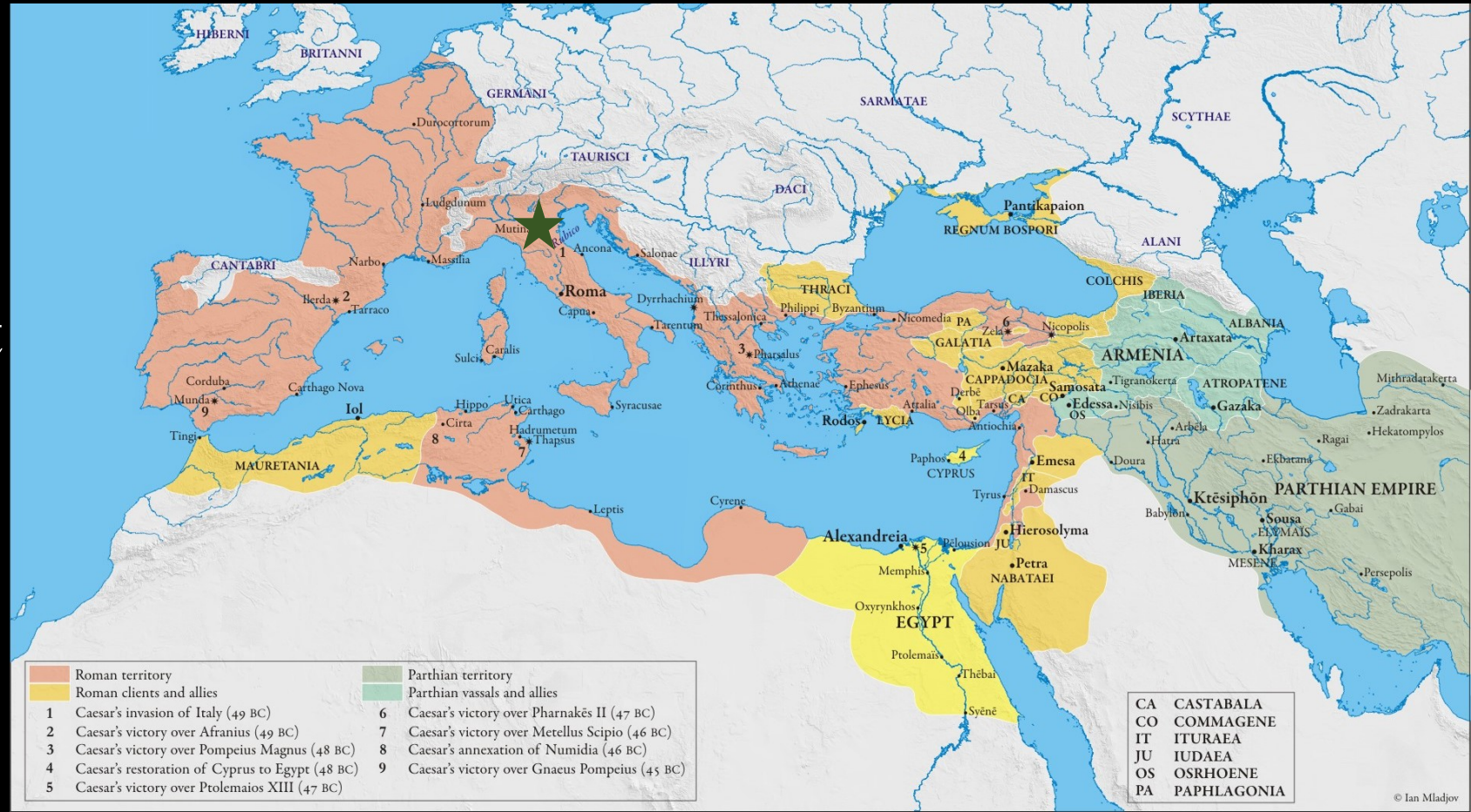
Virgil, *Aeneid* Book 4

Discussion

- We'll skip this today...

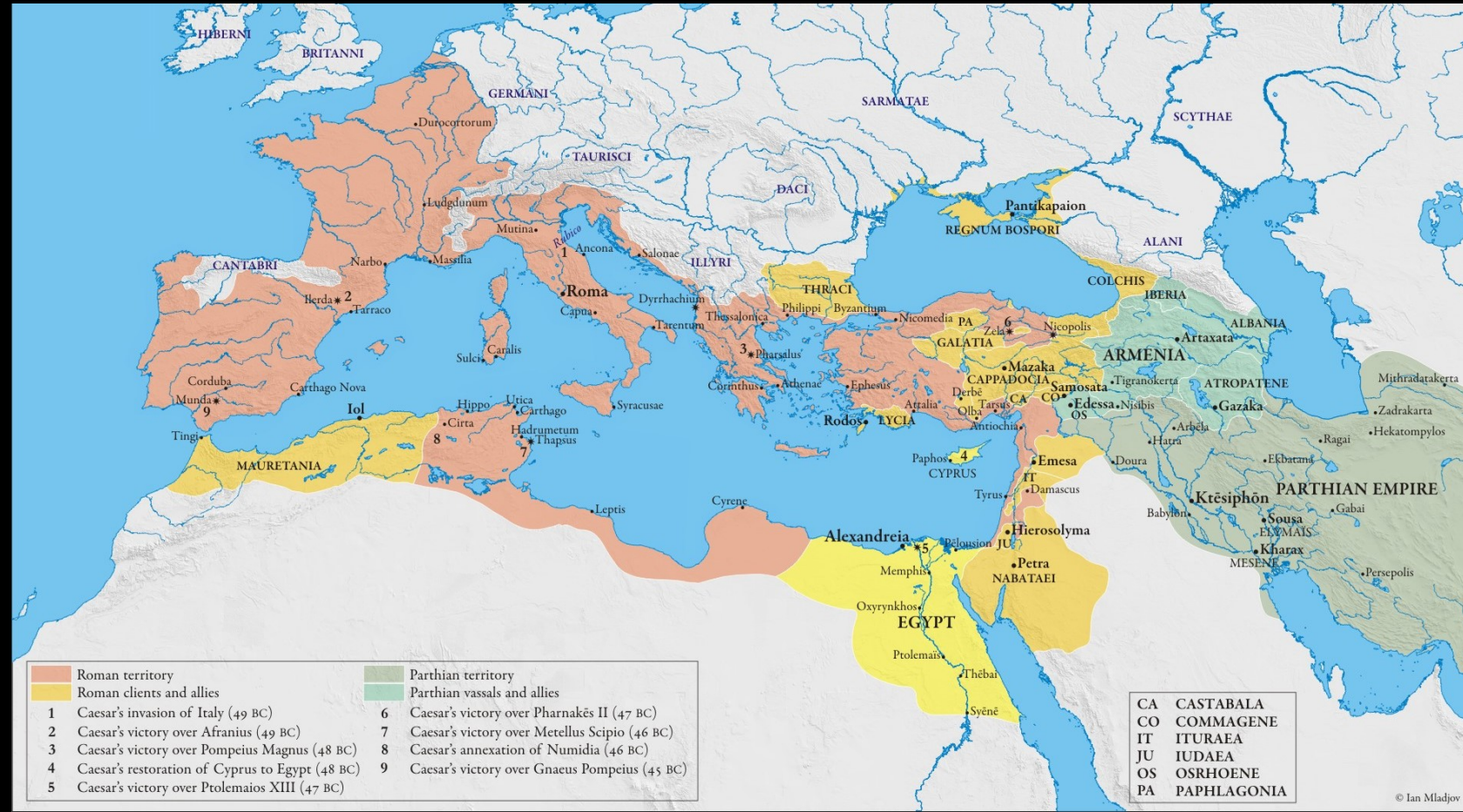
Vergil and Roman Life

- Born in Andes in Cisalpine Gaul (c. 70 BCE)
- Highly educated throughout Italy, moved to Rome
- Recognized as a poet while still young



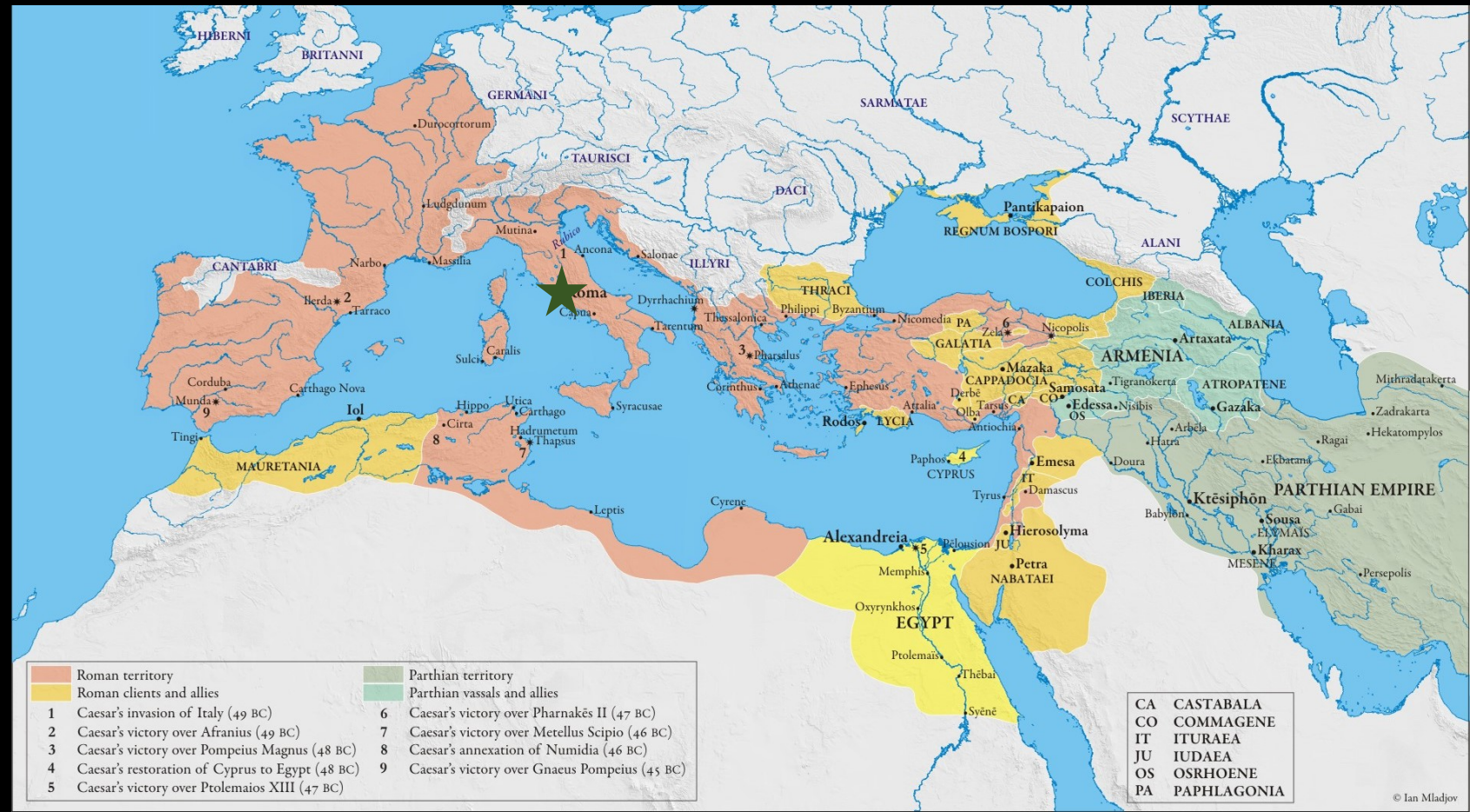
Augustus and Roman Life

- Same tumultuous period as we saw with Catullus (civil wars: 49-45; 43-42; 32-30 BCE)
- Same pervasive idea that Roman society was in decline
- War: Octavian vs. Antony (32-30)



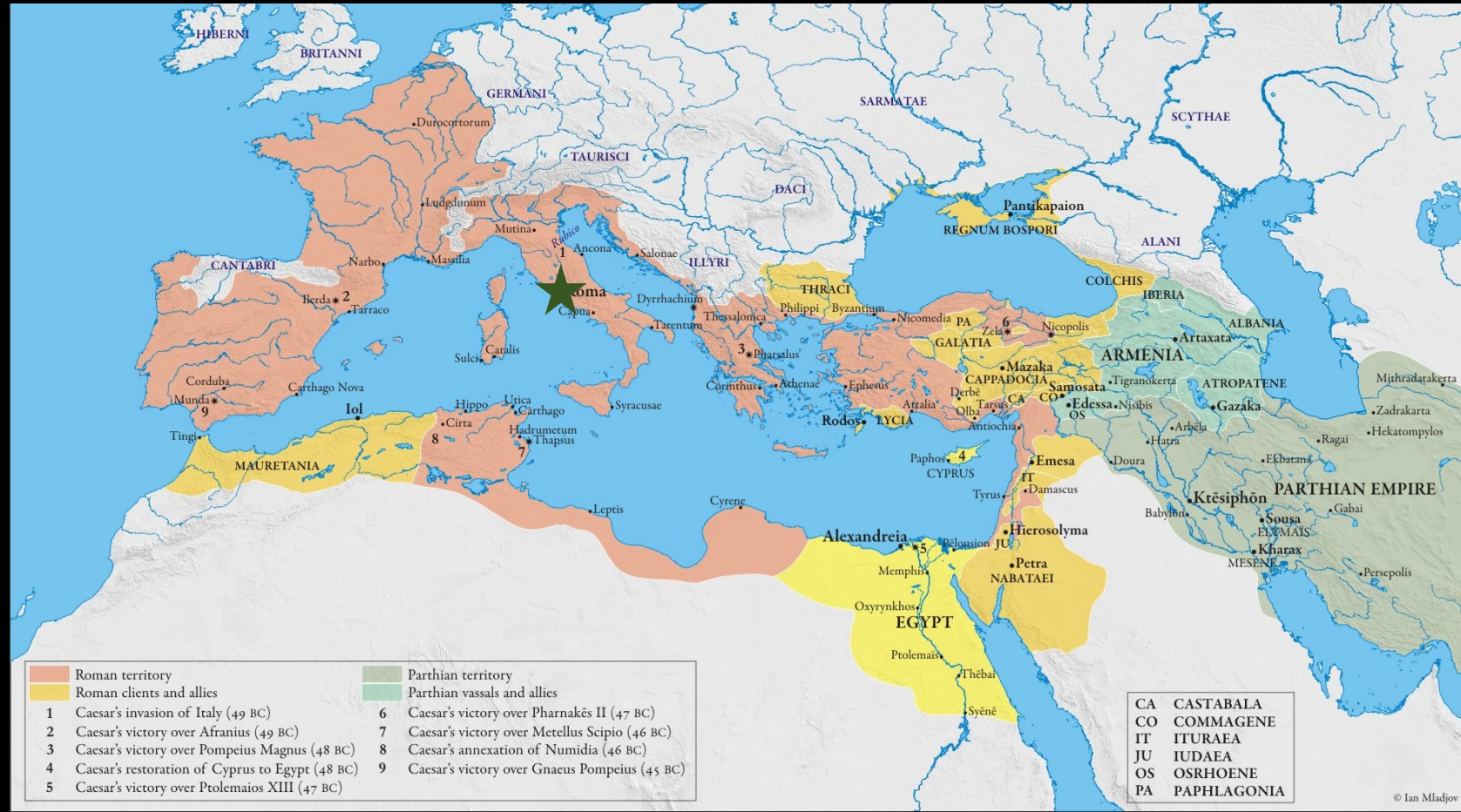
Vergil and Roman Life

- Gained the attention of Maecenas, advisor to Octavian (the future emperor)
 - Maecenas wanted to counter popular support for Antony
 - After Octavian became Augustus, Vergil started the *Aeneid*
- 



Vergil and Roman Life

- We think of Augustus coming to power as the end of the civil wars, no one knew that then
- Augustus needed a symbol to connect people, something for everyone to use to assert their Roman-ness



Aeneid and Roman Life

- Fully in the tradition of Roman epic: political
- Drew on earlier examples, especially Naevius' *Bellum Punicum*
 - But inverted: myth in the foreground with modern politics as the subtext
 - Subtext: implied or metaphorical meaning in a text (“reading between the lines,” literally the sub-text in a palimpsest)
 - Also drew on *Iliad* and *Odyssey*
- “Unfinished” and took 10 years to write, only stopped because Vergil died in 19 BCE
 - 9896 lines = 2-3 lines per day average (very referential, intentionally)
 - Virgil's will stated burn all copies if unfinished, Augustus countered this desire and ordered it published with little editing

Aeneid and Roman Life

Written before
the *Aeneid*
was published

- Enormously popular almost instantly
 - “For Vergil the power to tell of Actium’s shores
in Phoebus’ guard and Caesar’s gallant ships,
Who now wakes to life the arms of Troy’s Aeneas
And walls cast down on Lavinian shores.
Surrender, writers of Rome, surrender Greeks!
Something greater than *Iliad* is born.”
- Propertius 2.34.61-66
- Effectively propaganda, but everyone knew that and was ok with it because they could find themselves in it

Aeneid: Structures

- Bipartite:
 - Books 1-6 = Aeneas' *Odyssey* travelling to find a home
 - Books 7-12 = Aeneas' *Iliad* fighting to win a home
- Tripartite:
 - Books 1-4 = Dido and the Tragedy of Love
 - Books 5-8 = the destiny of Rome
 - Books 9-12 = Turnus and the tragedy of war
- Ring structures and Parallel structures throughout both systems



“Ringed” by
enemies

Aeneid: Narrative

- Book 1:
 - Begins *in medias res* with Aeneas and the Trojans already fleeing Troy; Juno hates the Trojans and favors Carthage so wants to destroy Aeneas' fleet, storm nearly kills them all; fleet puts in at Carthage for repairs; Venus (Aeneas' mother) sends Cupid to weaken Dido (queen of Carthage) and her oath
- Book 2:
 - Aeneas tells Dido about the fall of Troy (post-*Iliad*); recounts destruction and loss of wife whose ghost tells him to flee to Hesperia where a kingdom and a royal wife await



Aeneid: Narrative

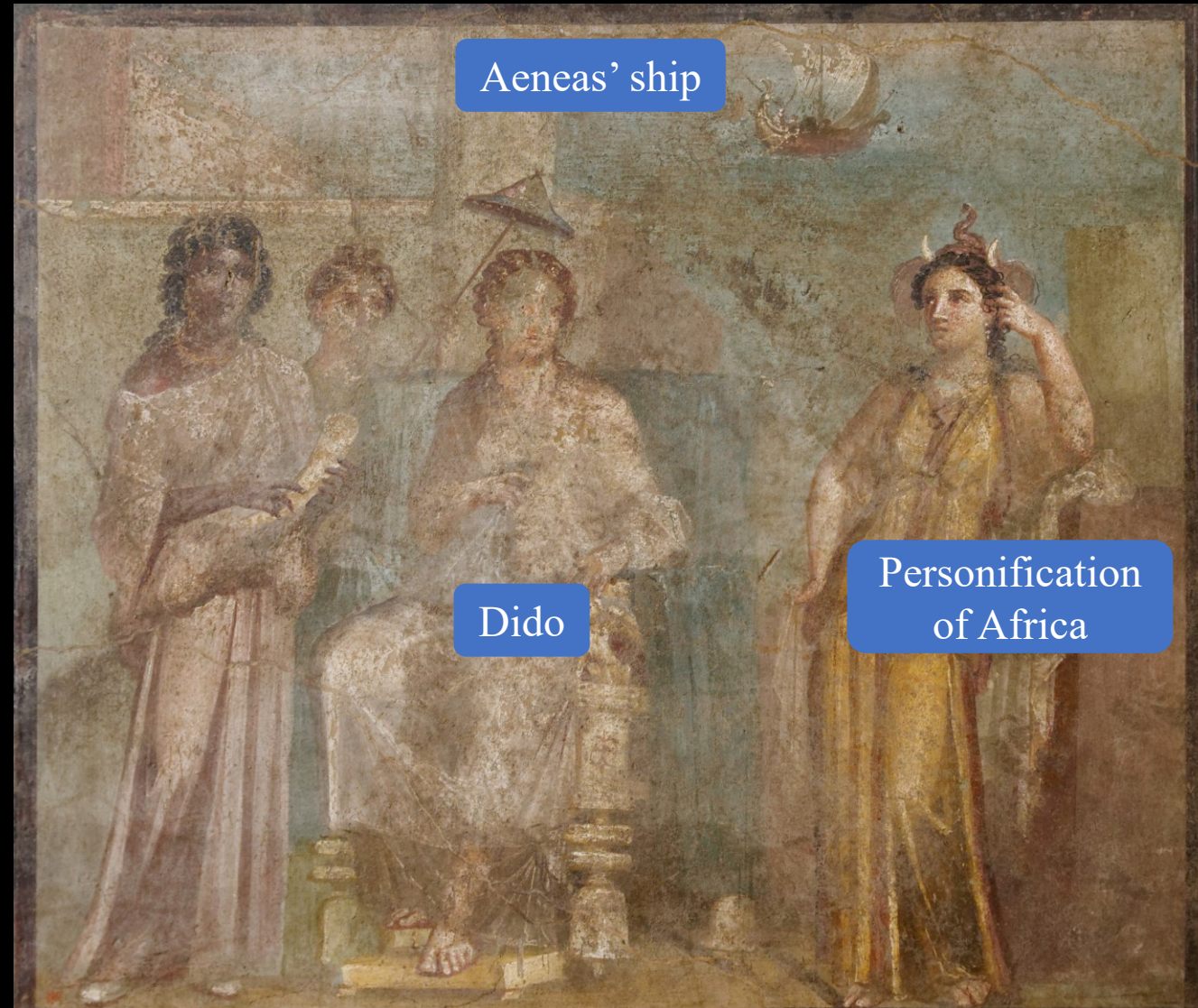
- Book 3:
 - Aeneas rallies the survivors and tries to find a new home, without luck; meets other Trojans in Illyria (!) and learns of prophecy to found a “*race*” of people that will rule the world; wandering, encounter Charybdis, Polyphemus; Aeneas’ father Anchises dies; storm



Aeneid: Narrative

- Book 4:
 - Scene of sisters
 - Venus' / Juno's plan for unity
 - Cinematic hunt, marriage
 - Jupiter, Fate, and memory
 - ROMA > AMOR
 - Dido becomes a Fury
 - Aeneas leaves in the night
 - Dido's curse, sanctified by her sacrifice

Pompeii, Casa di Meleagro, VI,9,2, atrium 2



The Analysis

- The Narrator's Voice
 - He's there, but he's along for the ride, asking questions
 - Just like the narrators of Old Greek epics
 - But also narrating inner-most thoughts and providing own soliloquies (Aeneas pondering Mercury's orders 312 ff.)

The Analysis

- Language and Performance
 - Verbs in the historical present (“the Queen... nurses her heart’s deep wound”—line 1-2)
 - Not an epic convention, common when writing histories
- Formulas
 - Kind of, some patronymics (“Saturnian”, “Agamemnonius”)
 - The last night described as peaceful (610-6)
 - But not a strict formula so much as a “formulaic” kind of description

The Analysis

- Language and Performance
 - Language can be very broken, staccato, impressionistic
 - Focuses on vivid descriptions and vignettes
 - Cinematic even
 - the hunt, rain, and cave-wedding (173 ff.) starts with an “establishing shot” of the hills and valleys before zooming in on the humans
 - But does Ascanius catch anything?

The Analysis

- The Literary Background
 - Epic similes
 - Used for added imagery like in Old Greek epics
 - Type Scenes
 - Animal hunt but no animals are hunted (149 ff.)
 - Prayer/Sacrifice but magical (592-609)
 - Drama
 - Generally fairly dramatic, cinematic even
 - Openly refers to a stage (545)
 - Surprisingly sympathetic portrayal of Dido (Carthaginian)

The Analysis

- The Literary Background
 - Callimachus's *Aitia*
 - Digression on the birth of Rumor (198 ff.)
 - Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*
 - One sister in an ill-fated romance, the other providing doomed help
 - Juno and Venus (Hera and Aphrodite) conspiring with Cupid (Eros) (106 ff.)
 - Catullus 64
 - Dido (Ariadne) wakes to find Aeneas' (Theseus') ships sailing away (682 ff.)

The Analysis

- The Literary Background
 - History
 - Carthaginian
 - Dido = Elissa; Sychaeus = Acerbas/Sycharbas;
 - Brother = Pygmalion/Pumayyaton, king of Tyre
 - Roman
 - Dido's people called enemies/hostile (Jupiter: 267)
 - Dido's curse is an aetiology for the 3 Punic Wars (723 ff.)
 - Sychaeus' nurse Barce references Carthaginian royal Barcid family (i.e., Hannibal Barca)

The Analysis

- The Social Background
 - Religious rites are symbolic
 - Dido inspecting entrails = Roman haruspicy (70 ff.)
 - Final prayers and sacrifices more magical/twisted (591 ff.)
 - Not much else, focus on individual people rather than society

This is how she knows
this is the will of the
gods, not her fault

The Analysis

- The Idea of the Hero
 - Human and fallible
 - Subject to Fate
 - ROMA > AMOR
- Exactly the kind of hero we talked about last time:
 - David Konstan (71): [traditional] heroes show a “callous indifference... towards outsiders that accompanies a dedication to great deeds...”
 - We see Aeneas learning how to put himself beneath the idea of service to a greater cause

Aeneid and Roman Life

- In chaotic times, Fate can be comforting
 - There's a reason every bad thing has happened
- Aeneas is driven by duty, but also by Fate
- Early books show Aeneas distracted and tempted by AMOR, the literal inversion of ROMA and his later destiny



Aeneid and Roman Life

- Fate becomes an aetiology for modern Rome
- Venus > Aeneas > Ascanius/Iulus > Julian family
> Julius Caesar > Octavian/Augustus
 - The folklore is there, Vergil just has to polish it

*Replica denarius of Julius Caesar
(minted 47-46 BCE),
Venus (top),
Aeneas carrying Anchises and
Palladium (bottom)*

