

In what way does the
aeneid fulfill its aim to
provide the romans
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Virgil's Aeneid as a Roman National Epic First and College First and Department..., University of... [Student's First and Last Name] is now at Department of..., University of... This research was in part supported by the grant awarded to [Student's First and Last Name] by [Sample Grant Programme]. Correspondence concerning this research paper should be addressed to [Student's First and Last Name], Department..., University of..., [Address] Contact: Virgil's Aeneid as a Roman National Epic The purpose of this essay is to analyse Virgil's epic poem, Aeneid, from the point of view of its contribution to the construction of Roman national identity in early Imperial period. It shall be argued that, far from being a strictly literary work, Aeneid was an integral part of Augustan project of rebuilding Roman national identity, with apparent focus going from Republican virtues to the notion of divine predestination of Romans to rule the world and to the idea of divine mission of Julian dynasty as heirs to Aeneas. In this work, I will use three main sources. The first one, *Epic and empire: Politics and generic form from Virgil to Milton*, is a book by Quint (1993) that examines the influences of epic poems on state ideologies. Focusing on Aeneid, in particular, Quint (1993) observes that it was used to enshrine the autocratic rule of Julio-Claudian emperors, starting from Caesar Augustus himself, and that the political character of Aeneid signified the final politicization of heroic epics that began with Alexander's appropriation of image of Achilles (Quint, 1993, p. 8). The second source, *Virgil's gaze: Nation and poetry in the Aeneid*, authored by Reed (2007), explores Aeneid from the standpoint of its character as a form of Roman foundational myth, itself appropriated from Hellenistic culture. Reed (2007) argues that Aeneid aimed at creating an image of coherent Roman national identity, which was achieved through

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organization of mythological 'facts' within an ethnic ideological framework (p. 1). Finally, Reed's (2010) article "Vergil's Roman" published in *A Companion to Vergil's Aeneid and its Tradition* anthology reinforces the argument presented in Reed (2007) by dwelling on prophetic aspects of Aeneid's narration of the future role of Romans that connected theological and political aspects of the poem. By choosing these sources, I tried to substantiate my general argument with additional evidence. In general, it may be said that Aeneid presents an etiology, i. e. an explanatory study of Roman nation's foundations with a view to emphasizing its distinct features and future prominence (Reed, 2010, p. 66). Aeneid presents a picture of divine predestination of Roman people, with Jupiter, king of gods, setting "them no spatial or temporal limits of power" (Virgil, 1. 278-9). The specificity of Aeneid's version of Roman identity consists in its simultaneous contrast and superimposition on the identities of other peoples, either conquered or hostile ones, suggesting that Virgil tried to present Roman identity as universalistic one, which coincided with corresponding multicultural politics of Augustan regime (Reed, 2007, p. 3). The extensive interest of Virgil in general Italian context of Roman identity, with multiple patterns of ethnic intermixing and new settlements in Italy, which culminate in Trojan arrival, seems to indicate its connection with Augustus's attempts to forge a new 'pan-Italian' view of Roman nation, thus finally uniting all of Italy around Rome (Reed, 2010, p. 70). It is also significant that the motif of contrast and struggle between the Occident and the Orient may be traced across the poem, with Aeneas's encounters with Dido in Carthage, the rejection of settlement in Egypt and Anchises's prophesy of future conquest of Greece by Aeneas's successors hinting at divine prefiguration of future Roman

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conquests (Reed, 2007). In addition, it might be said that Aeneas's description as both military and spiritual leader ordained by the gods to lead his people was an allusion to similar claims of Augustus himself, who was depicted as Aeneas's successor in the poem. Aeneid's political argument is even more extensive in case of justification of the rule of Augustus both as promised restorer of peace (Virgil, 3) and direct heir of Aeneas, himself the son of goddess Venus. Virgil's apologetic description of Augustus's victory over Antony and Cleopatra in the Battle of Actium in the description of Aeneas's shield (Virgil, 8. 675-728) suggests that the poet tried to create a picture of Imperial Rome as a true successor of the Republican one, omitting the discussion of civil wars at all. The fact that Antony is depicted mainly not as a Roman general, but as a 'barbarian' potentate wed to Egyptian queen indicates that Virgil intended to present opposition to Augustan regime as fundamentally un-Roman one (Quint, 1993, p. 24). In total, Aeneid presented Roman national identity as both universalistic and predicated on adherence to divine commandments. This corresponded well with Augustan ideology of the 'renovated' Rome, with its emphasis on unity and piety, while identification of Julio-Claudian dynasty and Augustus himself with offspring of Aeneas served to legitimize the new political regime. Therefore, Aeneid may be viewed not only as literary work, but as a skilful piece of political and moralistic propaganda, the main aim of which was to facilitate the ideological entrenchment of Augustan regime. References Quint, D. (1993). *Epic and empire: Politics and generic form from Virgil to Milton*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Reed, J. D. (2007). *Virgil's gaze: Nation and poetry in the Aeneid*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Reed, J. D. (2010). *Vergil's Roman*. In J. Farrell & M. C. J. Putnam (Eds.), *A Companion to* <https://assignbuster.com/in-what-way-does-the-aeneid-fulfill-its-aim-to-provide-the-romans-with-a-national-epic/>

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Virgil. Aeneid.