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## BUREAUCRATESE IN VERGIL *AENEID* 8.721

Clifford Weber



ALTHOUGH A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS RELATING TO *AENEID* 8.714–28 HAVE received their share of attention in the literature,<sup>1</sup> a lexical anomaly in 8.721–22 appears to have been overlooked. The text in question is this:

dona recognoscit populorum aptatque superbis  
postibus.

He reviews offerings from the peoples and fastens them to splendid door posts.

Aside from Ovid, who uses *recognoscere* three times in the sense of recollecting something once known,<sup>2</sup> Vergil is the only poet ever to use this verb, and he only once. Further, in its sole Vergilian occurrence in *Aeneid* 8.721, it is used in a sense (1.b in the *OLD*) that is paralleled nowhere else in Latin verse. In prose, on the other hand, both the word itself and its signification in Vergil are extremely common—so much so that a brief survey of prose attestations is in order, if only to establish how widely *recognoscere* carries in prose the specialized sense that, in verse, it uniquely has in *Aeneid* 8.721. In prose, this usage is found in the following contexts:

- validating copies of official documents: Cic. *Ver.* 2.190; *Vat.* 5; Gaius *dig.* 10.2.5 (formulaic *descriptum et recognitum*), 29.3.7 (same formula); Call. *dig.* 48.10.15.3 (formulaic *dictavi et recognovi*); Ulp. *dig.* 50.16.56pr.; Marcian. *dig.* 48.10.1.8 (*dictavi et recognovi*)
- verifying personal seals: Apul. *Met.* 10.9.19; *Apol.* 89; Ulp. *dig.* 29.3.4, 43.5.3.9
- reviewing the legality of a decree: Cic. *Balb.* 11

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<sup>1</sup> For bibliography and a recent discussion, see Miller 2000, esp. 409–14. Earlier work includes Morwood 1991, 219–21; and Drew 1924, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> *Met.* 11.62, *Fast.* 1.7, 4.418.

- examining existing laws or bequests: Cic. *Leg.* 3.37; Scaev. *dig.* 34.3.28
- looking over scientific papers: Cels. 6.6.39.c
- proofreading text: Plin. *Ep.* 4.26.1
- authenticating boundaries: Liv. 42.8.4, 42.9.7, 42.19.1
- taking inventory of holdings (as in *Aen.* 8.721): Plin. *Nat.* 11.36.109; Sen. *Ben.* 7.10.1; *Ep.* 110.14; Col. 11.1.20–21 (bis), 12.3.5; Curt. 5.1.23; Tac. *Agr.* 6.5
- examining financial records: Ulp. *dig.* 42.5.15
- reviewing auction results: Sen. *Con.* 1.pr.19.15
- going over a day's profits: Sen. *Con.* 10.4.24
- surveying flocks and herds of farm animals: Col. 6.23.3, 8.4.3, 8.11.2
- inspecting slaves' living conditions: Col. 1.18.16, 1.18.18
- verifying allotments of water: Fron. *Aq.* 103
- establishing ownership of stolen property: Liv. 5.16.7
- identifying heroes of the state: Sen. *Con.* 10.2.16
- approving aspirants to the equestrian class: Liv. 39.44.1; V. Max. 2.9.6, 4.1.10; Suet. *Aug.* 37, 38; *Cal.* 16; *Cl.* 16
- identifying troops and naval crews: Liv. 42.31.7; Fron. *Str.* 4.6.3
- reviewing jails and prisoners: Liv. 22.61.8; Suet. *Aug.* 32; *Tib.* 61; *Cal.* 27
- empaneling juries: Suet. *Aug.* 29
- officially acknowledging an emperor's excellences or shortcomings: Plin. *Pan.* 4.1

These are only the attestations culled from the Packard Humanities Institute's Latin concordance. Documents preserved on stone and papyrus yield even more. In imperial rescripts, for example, the closing formula was *rescripti. recognovi*, indicating a copy certified by an official in the bureaucracy.<sup>3</sup> The formula *recognovi* appears in a birth certificate of AD 242 and in connection with a petition to the Egyptian prefect of AD 249, both preserved on papyrus.<sup>4</sup> In official papyri written in Greek, ἀνέγνων = *recognovi* is common.<sup>5</sup> Formulaic *descriptum et recognitum* to certify true copies appears in birth certificates from Alexandria.<sup>6</sup> This seems to have been the usual formula in legal and governmental documents generally (e.g., *ILS* 5918<sup>a</sup>, 7215<sup>a</sup>) and in the military diplomas of *ILS* 1986–2010 and

<sup>3</sup> For three epigraphical examples, see Kehoe and Peachin 1991, 157, nn. 9, 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 158, n. 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Schulz 1943, 58.

*CIL* XVI in particular.<sup>7</sup> The literary attestations of *recognoscere* referring to the equestrian census are paralleled in at least one inscription (*ILS* 9483, with the same phraseology as in *V. Max.* 2.9.6 above). Finally, a further literary example is found in Justin 43.4.11, where actions taken to protect Massilia include *peregrinos recognoscere*, registering aliens.

Per se, then, *recognoscere* is an *unpoetisches Wort* writ large, occurring only four times in the works of only two poets. Further, as many of the examples above firmly establish for the sense in which it is used in *Aeneid* 8.721, this verb also belongs to the specialized technical vocabulary of Roman law and government.<sup>8</sup>

Aside from its use in metaphor, the technical language of a particular sphere is avoided in elevated verse such as epic. D. R. Langslow<sup>9</sup> cites the telling example of *hippomanes*. In Vergil's didactic, it is mentioned by name (*G.* 3.280–83), but, in the *Aeneid*, the name is avoided and replaced with a paraphrase (4.513–16). In addition to genre, what Langslow calls “the taste of the individual poet” is even more decisive. In this respect, as Langslow shows, even Vergil's didactic, compared to Lucan's epic, is “typically restrained” in its use of technical terminology.<sup>10</sup>

No such restraint, however, is apparent in *Aeneid* 8.721. Even by the permissive standards of an Ovid, in whose verse legal terminology is “on occasion almost aggressively technical,”<sup>11</sup> Vergil's recourse to hackneyed legal jargon in *Aeneid* 8.721 is remarkable. Thirty-seven lines earlier, moreover, one finds the *corona navalis*, an item of uniquely Roman civic

<sup>7</sup> Kehoe and Peachin 1991, 158 with n. 14.

<sup>8</sup> There is an entry for *recognoscere* in Berger 1953, 669. In writing of military jargon, Gordon et al. 1993, 147 distinguish between two categories: “partly ... terms denoting realities which did not exist outside the army, partly of cant uses of common language.” In the case of *recognoscere*, we are dealing with the latter category, while the uniquely Roman reality of the *corona navalis* in *Aen.* 8.684 exemplifies the first category, *mutatis mutandis*.

<sup>9</sup> Langslow 1999, 193. When de Meo writes, “Ovviamente la poesia ama evadere dalla terminologia strettamente tecnica” (de Meo 1986, 258), *ovviamente* is unequivocal. In the religious sphere, “Virgil is often at some pains to avoid systematic and accurate application of recognisable religious language” (Horsfall 2006, ad 3.36).

<sup>10</sup> Twenty years earlier, in its avoidance of “items with a specifically ‘agricultural’ tone” in favor of metaphor, periphrasis, and neologism, Jocelyn found “the most striking feature” of Vergil's didactic vocabulary. See Jocelyn 1979, 117, where the text would appear to be misprinted. “Specifically ‘agricultural’” words amount to barely a dozen and are listed *ibid.*, 142, n. 277.

<sup>11</sup> Kenney 1969, 250. Coleman 1990 gives instances of “the pedantic locutions of jurists’ language” in a passage featuring Tiresias in *Ov. Met.* 3.322–38. In his erotic didactic, according to Henderson 1980, 162, Ovid, “posing as an expert in one field, ... seeks to augment his air of authority by a judicious use of jargon culled from others.”

regalia that Vergil is willing to mention explicitly by name.<sup>12</sup> In marked contrast, even when writing in a less elevated register, Horace declines to name the *sella curulis* in *Epistles* 1.6.53–54, Propertius the *toga praetexta* in 3.15.3, and the same poet the *spolia opima* in 4.10.2.<sup>13</sup> So it occasions some surprise to find the “typically restrained” Vergil giving to Agrippa’s crown in an epic poem the name that it actually had.<sup>14</sup> There is no avoidance of technical terminology here; if anything, it proliferates. How to account for this? A suggestion follows.

In the literary precursor of the *Aeneid*, there is a noticeable similarity between this line of Ennius (*Annales* 213Skutsch):

quantis consiliis quantumque potesset in armis

of what scope his plans and how much power he had in arms

and these words in Caesar *de Bello Gallico* 2.4.1:

cum ab iis quaereret quae civitates quantaeque in armis essent et quid in bello possent...

When he inquired of them what states and how many were under arms and what strength they had in war...

Even closer is the element-for-element correlation between *Aeneid* 8.721

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<sup>12</sup> It is so called in Liv. *perioch.* 129; Sen. *Ben.* 3.32.4; Plin. *Nat.* 7.115; Gel. 5.6.18; and Fest. p. 162M. For the name and its variants, see Maxfield 1981, 75.

<sup>13</sup> Paraphrase is the norm in Hor. *Ep.* 1, even if Horace was “ready enough to employ legal or medical terminology where it makes its point” (Mayer 1994, 19). For alteration or paraphrase of legal terminology in this book of the *Epistles*, see 1.2.44, 1.3.18, 1.3.23–24, 1.5.4, 1.6.62, 1.16.41, and 1.18.35 with Mayer’s notes ad loc. Avoidance of the usual form of Roman place names such as the *via Appia* is evident in *Ep.* 1.6.26 and 1.18.20. On the page cited above, Mayer mentions the modern parallel of Samuel Johnson’s criticism of Milton for tolerating technical jargon in his epic verse. In Ennius’ tragedies, legal formulae are generally allowed, but they “never seem to have provided more than a light antique colouring to the style of an actor’s speech” (Jocelyn 1967, 42). For legalisms in Ennius’ tragedies, see *scen.* 48, 60, 112, 127, 131, 145, 177–78, 272, and 280 with Jocelyn’s commentary ad loc. The citations above and the examples in the text ultimately derive from Langslow 1999, 195.

<sup>14</sup> The same applies to *Aen.* 6.855, where Vergil allows the *spolia opima* that Propertius declines to name in 4.10.2. At the same time, for assigning a comparable status as fixed expression to *triplex triumphus* in *Aen.* 8.714, a lone parallel in Liv. 6.7.4 is not enough.

dona recognoscit populorum

he reviews offerings from the peoples

and Tacitus *Agricola* 6.5

ad dona templorum recognoscenda<sup>15</sup>

for reviewing offerings in temples

From the correspondence between Ennius and Caesar, Skutsch concludes that both authors are “influenced by a formula used in the Senate.”<sup>16</sup> That the same influence probably affected both Vergil and Tacitus alike would follow from these passages, where *recognoscere* is found in the context of a meeting or a decree of the senate:

Brundisium ad classem ire placuit atque ibi recognoscere socios  
navales  
(Liv. 42.31.7)

it was resolved to go to Brundisium to the fleet and there to review  
the crews

quo loco [the temple of Palatine Apollo] senior saepe etiam senatum  
habuit decuriasque iudicum recognovit (Suet. *Aug.* 29)

where in his old age he often convened the senate as well and reviewed  
the decuries of judges

sed parendum est senatus consulto quod ex utilitate publica placuit ut  
consulis voce, sub titulo gratiarum agendarum, boni principes quae  
facerent recognoscerent, mali quae facere deberent (Plin. *Pan.* 4.1)

but one must obey the decree of the senate that, in accord with the  
public advantage, resolved that, with a consul speaking, on the pretext

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<sup>15</sup> Griffiths 1977, 437 conjectures *bona* for the manuscripts' *dona*.

<sup>16</sup> Skutsch 1985, 380. In Liv. 22.1.17, a syntactical rarity comparable to the scarcity of *recognoscere* in verse may possibly reflect bureaucratic usage. Orators and historians alike avoid using *ex* + *abl.* to modify a noun. For that reason, when Livy writes *ex argento dona* in 22.1.17, Jocelyn (1979, 123) finds an echo of the language of “a decemviral pronouncement.” A further example in Cic. *Ver.* 4.109 he attributes to “the technical subject matter.”

of giving thanks, good emperors review what they are doing, and bad ones what they ought to be doing

In an article published in 1985, Patricia Watson observed, citing the apt example of *parvulus* in *Aeneid* 4.328, that identifying an *unpoetisches Wort* requires the further step of “determining the effect that such a word has in a given context.”<sup>17</sup> If this applies to *unpoetische Wörter* in general, it applies above all to technical jargon in particular, and especially to the sole occurrence of that jargon in all of Latin verse. The traces of *sermo amatorius* in *Aeneid* 4 are of a piece with its erotic narrative. The archaisms in Book 6 reflect the religious and antiquarian focus of that book. In Book 8, Augustus’ triple triumph is a public celebration, decreed by the government, that Vergil’s contemporaries would themselves have witnessed. The poet’s brief recourse to bureaucratic jargon in line 721 connotes the official status of the celebration by echoing the officialese in which the senatorial decree authorizing the triumph would have been cast.

In addition to *Aeneid* 8.721, there is another passage in which senatorial language comes to the fore. In Book 3, after learning that the blood of Polydorus drips from the myrtle that he has just uprooted, Aeneas consults his father and the Trojan power elite as follows (3.58–59):

delectos populi ad proceres primumque parentem  
monstra deum refero, et quae sit sententia posco.

I refer the matter of the gods’ portent to the elite of the people’s leading men and to my father first, and I ask what their judgment is.

Despite his oft-asserted doubts that alleged instances of technical language are in fact genuine, Nicholas Horsfall is nevertheless willing to concede that Aeneas is here “a Roman magistrate who refers a portent to the senate for discussion.”<sup>18</sup> Even if not *unpoetische Wörter* in themselves, *referre* as it is used here belongs to “the technical language of Roman public life,” and

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<sup>17</sup> Watson 1985, 430.

<sup>18</sup> Horsfall 1989, 17. In *Sen. Ep.* 21.9, the expressions *considere* and *sententiam dividere* are explicitly borrowed from senatorial idiom (*quod fieri in senatu solet*, “that which is commonly done in the senate”) and transferred to philosophical inquiry. The same transference of the same two expressions is implicit in *Sen. Dial.* 5.3.2. See de Meo 1986, 210. In Jocelyn 1979, 75–76, it is proposed that senatorial usage lies behind the literary term *auctor* (cf. senatorial *patres auctores*) and is the origin of the expression *aliquem ponere* referring to a writer’s status within a particular literary tradition. Jocelyn even suggests a transference of senatorial language for the sobriquet *pater*

*sententia* “belongs again to the standard usage of public business.”<sup>19</sup> Vergil here anachronistically imposes a contemporary reality on a mythical past and, like other Roman authors writing of foreigners, a distinctly Roman institution on an Asian prince and on the elite among his compatriots. In the contemporary context of *Aeneid* 8.721, on the other hand, *recognoscit* evokes a language familiar to Vergil’s Roman audience as the actual idiom of their own government and bureaucracy.

Finally, with regard to poetic style as distinct from content, the flat technical cliché in *Aeneid* 8.721 creates a sharp contrast (*variatio*) with the exotic names of foreign places and peoples with which Vergil’s account of the triple triumph brings Book 8 to its grandiloquent conclusion.

As recently as 2006, Nicholas Horsfall noted that a “general study of supposed technical language in Virgil” had yet to be written.<sup>20</sup> To be sure, the specific topic of legal terms and expressions is not entirely absent from the *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* (s.v. “tecnicismi giuridici”) or from the indices of commentaries on Latin poets in general. At the same time, the law and courts of law are not the same thing as the government and its apparatus. “Legal language” and “bureaucratese” are not interchangeable terms, even if these two jargons do share many points of contact.<sup>21</sup> A branch of the government does enact laws, while the judiciary too is itself a branch of government. Further, as Kathleen Coleman has noted concerning “abundant parallels” in legal texts for the bureaucratic expressions in Pliny’s correspondence with Trajan, “the provincial administration [of the Roman empire] was as concerned with clarity, disambiguation, and definition as the lawyers were.”<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the language of the bureaucracy remains a distinct entity, as speakers of German acknowledge by giving it a name all its own: *Kanzleisprache*, “chancellery speech.” For lack of a comparably uniform designation, English speakers may be apt to lose sight of the difference between legal language and whatever one may choose to call bureaucratese, whether officialese, bureaucratic jargon, or any of a number of other attested terms.

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that Horace and Propertius apply to Ennius (Hor. *Ep.* 1.19.7; Prop. 3.3.6), “arguably mak[ing] him a member of some literary senate with a special status.”

<sup>19</sup> Horsfall 2006, ad 3.59.

<sup>20</sup> Horsfall 2006, ad 3.291.

<sup>21</sup> “Le magistrature erano strettamente connesse con l’attività di giudici” (de Meo 1986, 68).

<sup>22</sup> Coleman 2012, 192. As distinct from *la lingua giuridica*, to which he devotes a full chapter, de Meo explicitly declines to consider *la terminologia della ‘costituzione’*, i.e., *Kanzleisprache* (de Meo 1986, 209, n. 1).



Whenever a general study of technical language in Vergil is written, the chapter on *Kanzleisprache* should not overlook the verb *recensere*. Its entry as a synonym of *recognoscere* in the so-called St. Gall Glossary<sup>23</sup> (ca. AD 675–725) is borne out empirically when Roman authors are found to use the two verbs interchangeably in connection with the equestrian census. Specifically, Livy writes *in equitatu recognoscendo* in 39.44.1, but *in equitatu recensendo* in 38.28.1 and *in equitibus recensendis* in 43.16.1.<sup>24</sup> The same verb *recensere* is also applied to the equestrian census in Livy 40.46.8 and in Suetonius *Vespasian* 9. Thus, with regard to *recensebat* in *Aeneid* 6.682—a hapax in the *Aeneid*,<sup>25</sup> like its synonym *recognoscit* in 8.721, and filling the same position in the line—there is some evidence to support Norden’s suggestion<sup>26</sup> that Anchises in the Underworld is assimilated to a Roman censor reviewing the qualifications of would-be *equites* as they file past him one by one.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Warren 1884, 178, l. 44, with p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> While Columella uses *recensere* of inventorying iron tools in 11.1.21, the noun denoting the inventory itself, only three words later, is *recognitio*. In the space of only a few words in *Con.* 1.pr.19.15, the elder Seneca uses both *recognoscere* and *recensere* to denote going over auction results.

<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere only in *G.* 4.436, of a herdsman counting his herd.

<sup>26</sup> Norden 1927, 302. For a full discussion with bibliography, see Horsfall 2013, 517–19. While allowing that “readers may also have recalled e.g. the *recognitio* of the *equites equo publico*,” Horsfall concludes that “Rome’s future heroes hardly ‘march past.’”

<sup>27</sup> For the procedure followed in the equestrian review, see Astin 1988, 488–89. The discussion anticipated (488–89, n. 6) seems never to have been completed. The present paper might have met a similar fate but for the generosity of Nicholas Horsfall, Fiachra Mac Góráin, Donald Lateiner, Kathleen Coleman, and James Adams, who read earlier versions and offered some very helpful suggestions. For procuring indispensable books in a town poor in libraries, sincere thanks are also owed to Tim Nidever and to Wally Englert, whose student, Ms. Laura Moser, flawlessly processed the words of a digitally challenged author.

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