

Disarming Aeneas: Fulgentius on *Arms and the Man*

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Much like modern ideologues, the mythographers of late antiquity recast ancient heroes for their own purposes. Their urgent mission was to discredit the core meaning of stories that had long defined their own civilization and the place of human beings in the cosmos. Through various allegorical methods, they aimed to demolish the old understanding of these pagan texts and replace them with radically different Christian interpretations. This paper focuses on a late antique master of this art, Fulgentius the Mythographer.

Modern readers have often ridiculed or dismissed his writing. But Fulgentius mesmerized medieval writers and readers, and he transformed the reading of the ancient myths for nearly a thousand years. This paper analyzes two of his highly influential works: the *Mythologiae* in three books and *Expositio continentiae Virgilianae secundum philosophos morales* ["Explanation of the Content / Chastity (pun intended) of Vergil in accordance with Moral Philosophers"]. The reader who struggles to comprehend Fulgentius's interpretations must emerge from these texts with thought processes utterly transformed, embracing a revolutionary vision of ancient literature in general and the *Aeneid* in particular. For the generations of students trained by his texts, neither ancient heroism nor the *Aeneid* can ever again be the same.

This paper concludes with examples of Fulgentius's enormous influence in the Carolingian age, when his works seem to have served as school textbooks, and on the medieval writers who found him a valuable link between the Christian and pagan worlds. Fulgentius's aggressively subversive texts settled into the consciousness of generation after generation of later writers and influenced a world view that impugned the old heroic values by associating them with perversion and then replacing them with a new heroic ideal of Christian morality. By pursuing Fulgentius's apparently bizarre and obscure allegories, we can enter his world of *Virgile moralisé* and in the process, better understand the transformation of the heroic in Christian late antiquity.