

Creusa, Ascanius, and Aeneas in Renaissance Prague

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the figural stucco in the Villa Hvězda (1555–1563) in Prague, depicting Aeneas with his father Anchises on his back and accompanied by his son Ascanius and his wife, Creusa. In numerous 16th century representations, Creusa always walks behind Aeneas, and Ascanius is always accompanying Aeneas. In the Villa Hvězda, the protagonists of the Flight from Troy are Aeneas and his wife, Creusa. Aeneas carries Anchises on his back, and in front of him, Creusa leads their son Ascanius. This anomaly calls for an explanation, and it may be this, that Creusa allegorically stands for Queen Anne as a model of a pious matriarch of the Habsburgs.

KEYWORDS

Villa Star; Prague; Renaissance; classical tradition; ancient myth; stucco.

*Men know that the noblest bloodline in the world is that which descends from
Aeneas and Creusa, daughter of King Priam: that of the Caesars,
who are the rulers of the whole world.*

Haukr Erlendsson, Hauksbók, 1302–1310.¹

The Villa Hvězda in Prague was financed and built by Archduke Ferdinand, who was Regent in the Kingdom of Bohemia from 1547.² Archduke Ferdinand was the second son of the Bohemian king Ferdinand I from the house of Habsburg and it is certainly no coincidence that the Villa Hvězda was built and decorated at the very same time that Ferdinand became Holy Roman Emperor. Starting in 1531, when Ferdinand was crowned Roman King in Aachen, he was a serious candidate for the title of emperor, which he became *de facto* in 1556 and *de jure* in 1558. The decoration of the Villa Hvězda in Prague consists of twelve ceilings with white stucco relief sculptures created by Antonio Brocco from Campione.³ The figural stuccoes celebrate the newly elected emperor, their forms closely follow ancient Roman models, and classical history and mythology inspired their themes.⁴

In 1597, Torzelianus wrote a celebratory poem on the Villa Hvězda (Star): ‘At snow white walls, you see high up thousands of shapes, which created the artist’s smoothing hand. The themes were inspired by false myths; here merry goddesses dance with satyrs. In the middle of the ceiling, you see a pious Aeneas. He carried his father on his back when fire consumed Troy. I would not describe these images in the Star even if I wrote as many verses as there are

1 Quoted after ZIOLKOWSKI – PUTNAM 2008, 618.

2 KUBÍKOVÁ – HAUSENBLASOVÁ – DOBALOVÁ 2017.

3 Cf. BUKOVINSKÁ – KONEČNÝ 2017; MUCHKA 2018.

4 Cf. KRČÁLOVÁ 1973; STEJSKAL 1994; BAŽANT 2008; MUCHKA – PURŠ 2011; MUCHKA – PURŠ 2012; BAŽANT 2012; BAŽANT 2014; PURŠ 2014; MUCHKA 2014; DOBALOVÁ – MUCHKA 2014; STEJSKAL 2015; DOBALOVÁ – PURŠ 2017; DOBALOVÁ *et al.* 2017; DOBALOVÁ – HAUSENBLASOVÁ – KUBÍKOVÁ 2017.



Fig. 1: Antonio Brocco, The Flight from Troy, stucco, c. 1558, Villa Hvězda. Photo Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.

stars in heaven'.⁵ The decoration of the Villa Hvězda was inspired by 'false myths' in which 'merry goddesses dance with satyrs'. In the centre, however, was 'pious Aeneas'. Torzelianus' text indicates that in the 16th century the Flight from Troy was considered to be the key depiction of the Villa Hvězda, and pious Aeneas its main hero.

The room with figural stuccoes in Dresden Castle, where Brocco worked before he came to Prague, has no central theme. But the Prague villa was literally built around the tondo

5 *Suspiciis in niveis formatas mille figuras/ Parietibus factas expoliente manu/ Historijs varijs inserta est fabula mendax:/ Cum satiris saliunt turba petulca Deae./ Hic pius Aeneas media testudine portat/ Anchisen, quoniam Troija flamma volat.* HEJNIC – MARTÍNEK 1982, 379. Jan Sixt published the poem as his own work (HEJNIC – MARTÍNEK 1982, 113).

with the Flight from Troy. The Villa Hvězda has a unique ground plan of a six-point star, and originally had no vestibule. Visitors enter a short corridor, at the end of which they arrive at the dodecagonal central hall. Neither the corridor nor the central hall has windows, but the latter is better lit and visitors thus instinctively proceed to it to discover a tondo with Aeneas' flight from Troy at the centre of its ceiling (**Fig. 1**). The central hall is lit by windows at the end of the corridors that flow into it (**Fig. 2**). These six corridors with barrel vaults are located between the tips of the hexagon, in which there are six halls, one of which was used for the staircase landing. One can walk through these halls in a circle, but they are not directly connected to the central hall, which heightens its seclusion and importance. The central hall is isolated from the surrounding world, and its dominant position in the villa can be physically experienced by walking around it without actually entering it.

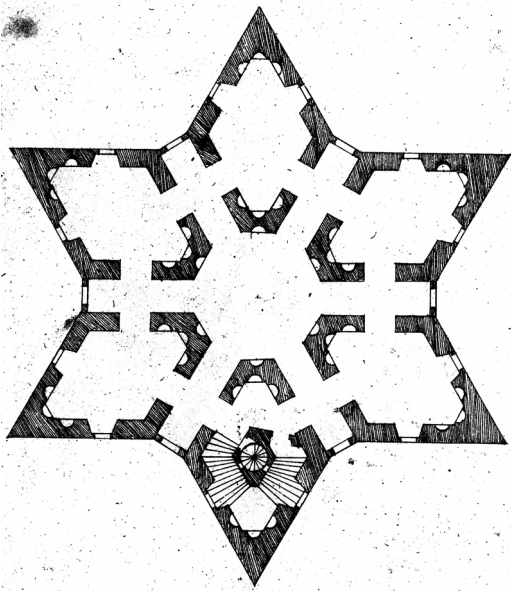


Fig. 2: Archduke Ferdinand, a copy of the plan of the ground floor of the Villa Hvězda, 1555.

The Flight from Troy in the central room in the Villa Hvězda was highlighted also by the system of ceiling decorations in this villa. Working off ancient Roman interiors such as the rooms of the Domus Aurea, Italian Renaissance artists adopted the centralised organisation of ceiling decoration. In every room on Hvězda's ground floor, except for the staircase landing, we find the main figural panel in the centre of the ceiling. It is always sunken into the surface, and is also singled out by an elaborate ornamental frame. These panels resemble popular emblems of the time, which were ideas expressed by pictures. There are altogether eleven secondary emblems which are arranged in a circle around Aeneas' Flight from Troy, the main emblem of the villa.

In the 16th century, the theme of the Flight from Troy was often represented as a model of virtuous behaviour worthy of emulation, because Aeneas was unanimously perceived as a model of an ideal Christian ruler.⁶ The story is well known from ancient representations, which could serve as models for renaissance artists.⁷ The primary source of inspiration was,

6 FAGIOLO 1981; MYERS 1986; KALLENDORF 1989; SEGRE 2003-2004; SEGRE-RUTZ 2005; WILSON-OKAMURA 2010.

7 FUCHS 1973; BERGER-DOER 1992.

however, Vergil's *Aeneid*.⁸ After the Greeks captured Troy, Venus advised her son Aeneas to leave the city with his father Anchises, his wife Creusa, and their son, Ascanius. On their journey through the dark city, however, Creusa lost her way. When Aeneas discovered that his wife was not with them, he immediately returned to the city. In the burning and plundered Troy, he met the ghost of the deified Creusa, who urged him to leave the city without his wife because it was the will of the gods. The ghost predicted that Aeneas would finally reach Italy and, being a widower, would be able to remarry and found a new kingdom: 'you have to plough through a great waste of ocean to distant exile. And you shall come to the Western Land where the gentle current of the Lydian Tiber flows between rich meadows where men are strong. There happiness and a kingdom are in store for you, with a queen for you to marry'.⁹

In the Flight from Troy in the Villa Hvězda, we see on the left the ruins of Troy in flames underneath a docked ship, a token of the fleet of the Greek invasion army. A huge naked human figure is standing in an arcade, and another one flies to it from heaven; this giant is represented from behind, his head bowed and hands stretched downward (**Fig. 3**). They are probably demons destroying the city, which would be a literal illustration of Aeneas' words: 'The great divine powers, as opposed to Troy, appeared in all their hostile array. Then the whole city of Ilium appeared to settle into flames and all of Neptune's Troy to be overwhelmed from its base up'.¹⁰ In the centre of the stucco relief, we see Aeneas carrying his lame father Anchises on his back and walking away from Troy, this corresponds to canonical pictorial tradition and the text of Vergil's *Aeneid*. In the epos, Aeneas ordered Anchises: 'So come on, my dear father. Get yourself up on to my neck; I will put my shoulders under you, and there is but shared danger. For us two, there will be but a single deliverance.'¹¹

The group of Creusa and Ascanius in the right half of the Flight from Troy in the Villa Hvězda differs not only from Vergil's text but also from all renderings of this theme we know from 15th–16th century art. In the *Aeneid*, the hero expressly ordered: 'Let little Iulus accompany me, and let my wife take note of my route at a distance. You servants apply your minds to what I shall say. As you leave the city, there is a mound and an old, disused temple of Ceres [...] To this single rendezvous, we will come by varied routes.'¹² It was prudent not to walk as a group in a city full of enemy soldiers.¹³ In burning Troy, members of Aeneas' household dispersed themselves for tactical reasons and walked in the dark, as Aeneas testifies: 'Little Iulus grasps closely my right hand and follows his father with unequal paces. My wife comes on behind. We move through the darkest areas'.¹⁴

While in the renaissance pictorial tradition Aeneas always walks in front and Creusa follows him, in the Villa Hvězda it is Creusa who walks in front of Aeneas. It does not seem to be her ghost only, as Ivo Purš has proposed.¹⁵ In the *Aeneid*, the hero claims that: '... the spectre of Creusa herself appeared before my eyes, a ghost larger than the Creusa I knew.'¹⁶

8 Vergil, *Aeneid* II, 588ff, cf. NOVARA 2007. On Vergil in post-antique art in general: FAGIOLO 1981 (for The Flight from Troy cf. pp. 203–210), on the Flight from Troy: FIGLER 1974, 2, 286–289; REID 1993, 1, 43–45; M. Tardioli: <http://www4.ac-nancy-metz.fr/langues-anciennes/Textes/Virgile/Anchise.htm>.

9 *Aeneid* II, 780–784 Creusa's prophesy (cf. AKBAR KHAN 2001).

10 Vergil, *Aeneid* II, 622–625, translated by Nicholas Horsfall (HORSFALL 2008).

11 Vergil, *Aeneid* II, 707–710.

12 Vergil, *Aeneid* II, 710–716.

13 NOVARA 2007; HORSFALL 2008, *ad Aeneid* II, 707–720, but cf. GRILLO 2010.

14 Vergil, *Aeneid* II, 723–725.

15 MUCHKA *et al.* 2017, 183.

16 Vergil, *Aeneid* II, 772–773.



Fig. 3: Antonio Brocco, *The Flight from Troy*, detail with burning Troy, stucco, c. 1558, Villa Hvězda. Photo Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.



Fig. 4: Antonio Brocco, *The Flight from Troy*, detail with Creusa and Ascanius, stucco, c. 1558, Villa Hvězda. Photo Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.

In the Villa Hvězda, Creusa is not coming towards Aeneas, and she is not represented as being exceptionally large (**Fig. 4**). On the contrary, she walks in the same direction as Aeneas. She turns back, but she is not looking at Aeneas; instead, she is looking at the burning Troy, and in its direction she raises her hand. Even more importantly, Aeneas carries Anchises and Creusa walks with Ascanius, while in the *Aeneid* the hero left Ascanius and Anchises behind when he returned to the city in search of his lost wife. Aeneas was not searching for the lost Creusa with his father on his back and Creusa did not disappear together with her son. In the Villa Hvězda, Brocco combined two moments of the narrative. First, we see Creusa in the flight from Troy with Aeneas, Anchises and Ascanius. When we look closely, however, we see her ghost delivering a prophecy.

In the illustration of Vergil's *Aeneid* edited by Sebastian Brant, the ghost of Creusa is a naked woman in a cloud above Aeneas (**Fig. 5**). This lavishly illustrated edition was published for the first time in 1502, and it established a template for the 16th century illustrations of the *Aeneid* in printed books, applied art and wall painting.¹⁷ However, the first representation of

17 SUERBAUM 2008, 51–65. They served as models for Limoge emails of circa 1530–1535 (BARATTE 2001) and for a series of monochrome frescoes in the courtyard of Palazzo Besta in Teglio from around 1535 (MUSCOLINI 1983; GATTI PERER 1983, 49 fig. 74).

Aeneas meeting the ghost of Creusa in monumental art appeared in 1586–1588 in Palazzo Fava in Bologna by Agostino, Annibale, and Lodovico Carracci (**Fig. 6**).¹⁸ Here the position of Aeneas and Creusa is reversed when compared with Prague. As was the rule in Renaissance art, Creusa is following Aeneas, but in this case he turns back to her. Creusa in the Villa Hvězda has nothing in common with the depiction in Palazzo Fava except for her raised hand.



Fig. 5: The ghost of Creusa appears to Aeneas, woodcut (BRANT 1502, 181v).

18 Hall A3, cf. FAGIOLLO 1981, 154. Book illustrations of Aeneas' meeting with the ghost of Creusa: the *Codex Riccardiana*, c. 1450 (BOMBE 1915–1916, fig. 6) and BRANT 1502, fol. 181v. Rare representations of this theme in printed illustrations to the *Aeneid* (from 17th century on): SUERBAUM 2008, 1688 A, fig. 10; 1736 B; 1811 A nr. 15.



Fig. 6: Agostino, Annibale, and Lodovico Carracci, Aeneas meeting the ghost of Creusa, 1586–1588. Palazzo Fava in Bologna. Engraving by Giuseppe Maria Mitelli, 1662. Wikimedia Commons.

In the Flight from Troy in the Villa Hvězda, the family is still together, but Creusa knows that this will not last for long, she turns back to the burning Troy and raises her hand. If the figures represent giants destroying the city, Brocco's two *invenzioni* would be interconnected. The giants and Creusa raising her hand towards them would make it clear that it was the gods who decided that the city must perish. Everything is the gods' will and mortals must obey it, Troy must be destroyed, Creusa must leave her family, and her husband and son must accomplish their world mission.¹⁹ The history of Troy ended with Aeneas' flight from his kingdom, which was the beginning of the history of the Roman nation, and, when its turn has come, of the Christian successor state to the Roman Empire.

In the Villa Hvězda, Ascanius is partly hidden behind Creusa, but it is he who leads the group. This is declared by his outstretched hand holding a lantern. Creusa looking backwards is part of the narrative in the Villa Hvězda, but she is also a symbol of the past. She is crucial for the story as Ascanius' mother, but she plays out her role and soon has to leave the scene – all the more so because she was a woman. In Vergil's time, just as in 16th century Europe, the role of the woman was to accept her pre-ordained status unconditionally. Only men were allowed to resist to the last breath. Ascanius embodies the future that his mother predicted to Aeneas, and therefore he is represented as the head of the group. Before the ghost of Creusa disappeared forever, it said to Aeneas: 'Now, farewell and do you preserve the love of our common son.'²⁰ Why Ascanius (Iulius) was so important Jupiter explains earlier in Vergil's epos: 'The noble Trojan line will give us Caesar – a Julian name passed down from the great Iulus – with worldwide empire, glory heaven-high.'²¹

19 BETTINI 2006; BRADLEY 2017.

20 Vergil, *Aeneid* II, 789.

21 Vergil, *Aeneid* I, 286–288 (translation Sarah Ruden).

Brocco singled out Ascanius via his positioning in the group and the *en face* view of his head. The figures represented on the ceilings of the Villa Hvězda are wholly immersed in the timeless mythical world and ignore the visitors ostentatiously. It is characteristic that the only exceptions are Jupiter, who blesses the visitors from the centre of the ceiling in a hall to the left of the entrance corridor, and Ascanius in the Flight from Troy, who sums up the message of the Villa Hvězda decoration. Brocco's rendering of Ascanius is deliberately ambiguous. He is represented as an innocent curly-haired baby who hides himself behind Creusa as shy children tend to do. He is four or five years old, as Vergil described him in the Flight from Troy. He holds his mother's hand firmly and presses it to his chest; his body and his chest are protectively wrapped by the tip of his mother's shawl. However, Ascanius' superior rank is none the less evident in his face-to-face relationship with the visitors.

The hero of the *Aeneid* was not only Aeneas but also his son.²² In 15th-century Italian book illustrations, we find depictions of the Flight from Troy that either follow the text of Vergil's epos or sum up its content. In the first case, Aeneas is carrying Anchises on his back and holds the hand of Ascanius, who walks behind him; at some distance behind this group Creusa walks alone, exactly as the formation is described in the *Aeneid*.²³ In the latter case, Ascanius walks in front, raising his hand and pointing forward with an outstretched forefinger.²⁴ In these illustrations, Ascanius became the embodiment of Aeneas' descendants in Italy and world history. The rise of the Roman Empire was in this way presented as the ultimate result of Aeneas' flight from Troy.²⁵

Ascanius stands out in a woodcut illustration of the Flight from Troy in Brant's edition of the *Aeneid* of 1502 – Aeneas holds his hand, but his son is in front of him and shows the way with his raised hand (**Fig. 7**).²⁶ In the woodcut illustration of the *Aeneid* published in 1558, Ascanius' role was further reinforced by two innovations. He does not hold his father's hand and walks at some distance ahead of him (**Fig. 8**). Moreover, he not only shows the way with his pointing hand, but he is also illuminating it because he holds a lantern in his other hand.²⁷ Brocco's group of Ascanius, Aeneas, and Anchises was inspired by printed sheets, in which this trio was very popular. It could very well be a print by Giovanni Giacomo Caraglio from around 1525, in which the leading role of Ascanius was accompanied by the treatment of Aeneas and Anchises, which Brocco imitated (**Fig. 9**). The son and his father are naked, which heightened their symbolic status, and Aeneas carries Anchises differently when compared to illustrations of Brant's edition. The father is no longer riding on his son's shoulders as if he were a boy. Anchises' position is more dignified and intimate at the same time. He leans his

22 FELDMAN 1953, 313.

23 Apollonio di Giovanni, c. 1450, MS illumination of Vergil, *Aeneid*, Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS 492, fol. 89r. Follower of Floriano Ferramola, cassone, second half of the 15th century, Milano, Bagatti Valsecchi Museo, cf. PAVONI 2003, no. 30. This pictorial type continued to be used also in the 16th century: Circle of Niccolò Giolfino, painting on cassone, early 16th century, Philadelphia Museum of Art 221; 'Noël Jallier' fresco in Château Oiron, Galerie du Grand Ecuyer, 1546–1549.

24 MS illumination of Vergil's *Aeneid*, illustration of beginning of Book I (Pesaro, 1459), private collection: https://iconographic.warburg.sas.ac.uk/vpc/VPC_search/record.php?record=72557; cassone, second half of the 15th century, Brescia, The Bagatti Valsecchi Museum: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/cassone/mwE4dhEfHlfoWw>.

25 LANDINO 1481, 97.

26 It differs from Vergil's text and the previous pictorial tradition also in that Creusa is accompanied by two women.

27 VERGIL 1558, 160r (reprint 1566). A painting by Ponifacio de' Pilati of 1510–1510 in Verona, Fondazione Cariverona belongs to the same pictorial type; in this painting we see a light in Ascanius' lantern.



Fig. 7: The Flight from Troy, woodcut (VERGIL 1502, 178r).



Fig. 8: The Flight from Troy, woodcut (VERGIL 1558, 160r).

weight on his son's back and presses his head towards his son's. The father and son visually merge into one figure. The new position of Anchises contributed significantly to the transformation of the pictorial type of the Flight from Troy to a political allegory of the inseparable unity of generations in a dynasty.

In Caraglio's print, the accompanying inscription identifies the figures explicitly as Aeneas and Anchises: 'This is the one that in Troy drew his father Anchises from the fire, and after long wandering placed himself under the cliffs of Antandrus'.²⁸ The inscription is important

²⁸ Antandros was the Anatolian city from which Aeneas sailed to the west.



Fig. 9: Giovanni Giacomo Caraglio after Raphael, *The Flight from Troy*, engraving ca. 1525, New York MMA 49. 97. 253. Public domain.

because the integrated group appeared for the first time in a generic context. The model for Caraglio's group of father and son was created by Raphael, who used it in the wall painting in Stanza dell'Incendio in the Vatican palace created by his pupils in 1514.²⁹ The fresco represents the fire of Borgo of 847, which was miraculously contained by the benediction of Pope Leo IV. In 1568 Vasari noted that the man carrying an old man on his back in Raphael's fresco resembles Aeneas and Anchises, but he describes Creusa behind them as an 'old woman' and Ascanius as a 'young boy'.³⁰ Soon after Raphael's fresco was finished, this group was often imitated as a representation of Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius. In 1518 Ugo da Carpi published a print in which the old man holds the Palladion, which identifies him as Anchises.³¹ Giulio Bonasone's print from circa 1545 repeats Raphael's design without any additions (save for the lantern in the hand of

29 Raphael's preparatory drawing: Wien, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, inv. 4881. For bibliography of the composition, see HALL 2005, 134–135.

30 'Dall'altra parte v'è figurato, nel medesimo modo che Vergilio descrive che Anchise fu portato da Enea, un vecchio ammalato, fuor di sé per l'infermità e per fiamme del fuoco'; VASARI 3, 1568, 80.

31 BARTSCH 1818–1876, XII.104. 12. This was a model for the print of the Master of the Die (BARTSCH 1818–1876, XV.224.72) published in 1530–1560 with the inscription in which the identification as the Flight from Troy is explicitly stated.

Ascanius) but adds a quotation from the epigram of Jacopo Sannazaro: ‘This is the piety beheld amid the flames of Troy when the fire feared to harm the gods set for exile’.³²

Raphael’s group of the Flight from Troy incorporated in the Fire in Borgo became an emblem visualising destruction that gives rise to a new beginning – ‘*rinascita*’ – which at that time was a very topical theme in art, politics, and religion. In this concept, the past and future form an indivisible unity, which Raphael’s composition accentuated. Anchises represents the past, Aeneas the present, and Ascanius the future. In the case of Raphael’s group, the political dimension was perhaps indicated by crypto-portraits. Anchises resembles Cosimo de’ Medici ‘Il Vecchio’, the founder of the House of Medici, and Ascanius Giovanni de’ Medici, that is, Pope Leo X, for whom Raphael created the wall painting.³³ Recently, Luke Houghton aptly summed up the message of the painting in Stanza dell’Incendio: ‘since Aeneas’ flight from the burning city of Troy resulted eventually in the foundation of Rome, the presence of the Aeneas group in Raphael’s scene casts the miraculous termination of the fire by Leo IV as in a sense a refoundation of Rome, and by implication confers the same tribute on the pope’s present-day namesake and successor’.³⁴

In 16th century Italy, Raphael’s group was enormously popular; there are so many prints, paintings, sculptures and majolica plates repeating or modifying this composition that we may safely presume that visitors of the Villa Hvězda knew it well.³⁵ In Andrea Alciati’s book *Il libro degli Emblemi*, which was a Renaissance bestseller, the variation on Raphael’s group of Aeneas carrying Anchises appears with the title: ‘*Pietas filiorum in parentes*’ [Honour from children towards parents].³⁶ The book was published for the first time in 1531 and became an immediate success; numerous re-editions and translations followed. In the same sense, the pictorial type of the Flight from Troy appeared in another great literary success, *Iconologia* by Cesare Ripa, which was first published in 1593.³⁷

The widely read books of Alciati and Ripa demonstrate that in the 16th century, the Flight from Troy was, above all, an ethical exemplum of filial piety, in which there was no place for either Ascanius or Creusa. They were therefore omitted in these scenes. But in the Villa Hvězda, Aeneas’ son and his wife dominate. This feature of Brocco’s stucco forces us to pause, all the more so because Creusa is rarely prominent in Renaissance treatments of the Flight from Troy.³⁸ The first painting in which Creusa attracts attention was created by Girolamo Genga around 1509 (Pl. 5/1).³⁹ Aeneas, Ascanius, and Anchises are depicted following the 15th-century tradition, but they are aware that behind them Creusa is on the verge of disappearing. Anchises looks at Aeneas, and points to Creusa behind them; Aeneas and Ascanius have stopped and turn their

32 SANNAZARO 2009, 269.

33 JOANNIDES 1983, 104–105, cat. no. 367.

34 HOUGHTON 2019, 152.

35 Cycles of Aeneas myth in Italian Renaissance residences (DE JONG 1994): Dosso Dossi, ducal palace in Ferrara, c. 1520 (CHRISTIANSEN 2000; BERGHAZI 2010); Nicolò dell’Abate, Palazzo Leoni in Bologna, 1550 (DE JONG 1990); Luca Cambiaso, Giovanni Battista Castello, Genoa, Palazzo Imperiale, 1560–1561; Carli Urbino, Hall of Aeneas in Palazzo del Giardino in Sabbioneta, 1584–1585 (VENTURA 2008, 183–197).

36 Emblem LXIX, ALCIATO 2009, 369–372. In the first edition the 15th century pictorial type was used. From 1549 the woodcuts follow Raphael’s prototype.

37 298,6, cf. RIPA 2012, 477.

38 SCHLEINER 1975, 97: ‘In the Renaissance “pious Aeneas” displays pre-eminently the virtues of filial piety and shows little or no concern for marital love or care’.

39 It was originally a fresco wall painting in Palazzo del Magnifico in Siena; today it is located in Siena, Pinacoteca nazionale, inv. n. 334.



Fig. 10: Francesco Xanto Avelli, Plaque painted with the Flight of Aeneas and the death of Creusa, c. 1535, Brunswick, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum (VERSTEGEN 2015, fig. 11, 3).

heads backward. Creusa does not return the gaze of her husband and son, but turns her head away from them to the lower right corner of the picture, where a strange ape-like creature walks away. Creusa is represented in an agitated pose with both hands up, jumping down, and her left leg still in the air. Her right elbow is partly hidden behind the rock, as Genga wanted to suggest that in the next moment she will disappear completely. She is still alive but already a ghost – similarly as in the Villa Hvězda.

In 1519–1523 Domenico Beccafumi painted a similar scene in the Palazzo Bindi Sergardi in Siena. As in Genga's painting, we see the burning Troy in the background of the painting. Aeneas walks to the left, and Anchises looks back at Creusa, who is seen from behind. She has her hands raised and is jumping down to the right. In the majolica plaque by Francesco Xanto Avelli of 1535, the depiction of the trio of Ascanius, Aeneas, and Anchises follows Caraglio's print of 1525 closely, but in the background, we see Troy (**Fig. 10**).⁴⁰ Creusa is represented behind her departing family, but she is not part of the narrative. She is represented as a martyr: she is half naked and stands in flames with her hands clasped in a gesture of prayer. She is not looking

⁴⁰ Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum. On the reception of Raphael's group of Aeneas and Anchises on majolica ware: RAVANELLI – GIUDOTTI 1990.

in the direction of her husband and son, whom she had to abandon in order to secure their future. She has turned her head away from them and looks up to denote that she has obeyed the will of the gods. The fire in which Creusa stands is on a block resembling an altar, at the side of which a quotation from Petrarch's *Triumph of Love* is written ('I know you have heard of him, who for Creusa on the rock of Antandrus mourned so long').⁴¹ In the aforementioned print by Caraglio, the verses of Petrarch were paraphrased to celebrate Aeneas's piety and endurance. In the plaque of Avelli, the verses are quoted verbatim. In the *Triumph of Love*, Petrarch celebrated Aeneas' love of Creusa and her noble self-sacrifice, in which she demonstrated that she cared more for the future of her husband and their son than for her own life. Aeneas was pious, but Creusa surpassed him in her piety because she sacrificed herself.

In paintings depicting the Flight from Troy, it was only in the 1580s that Creusa became a powerful symbolic figure. In 1585–1586, Ludovico Carracci painted the fresco with the Flight from Troy for the Palazzo Ratta in Bologna.⁴² Aeneas is running with Anchises on his shoulder, and his son is running beside him. The father looks onward, but his son turns his head to the side and watches Creusa with distress as she is carried away by a soldier. The soldier grasps her firmly around the waist and lifts her off the ground. Creusa raises her left hand high to the soldier, but she is no longer defending herself. She looks serenely down at Ascanius, who clasps her extended right hand to bid her farewell. The faces of both Creusa and Ascanius are calm; they know the parting is inevitable. Creusa must leave so that her son might start a new career in his new fatherland. Annibale Carracci painted the same theme slightly differently in Palazzo Fava in Bologna.⁴³ Ascanius is also represented behind his father; he holds his father with his right hand, and with his left he waves to Creusa, who keeps her pace with the group. Ascanius knows his mother must remain in Troy. Otherwise, he and his father will not succeed in their mission; his gesture, therefore, is a farewell and an order at the same time.

Pia Creusa, a counterpart to pious Aeneas, appeared in a painting by Federico Barocci, the court painter of the Duke of Urbino, Francesco Maria II della Rovere. 'Due to Barocci's fame', wrote Giovan Pietro Bellori in 1672, 'the emperor Rudolf II asked the duke, through the intermediary of his ambassador in Rome for a painting by his hand, which was the Burning of Troy, in which Aeneas carries his old father Anchises on his shoulders, followed by the boy Ascanius and by Creusa'.⁴⁴ The painting was delivered to Prague three years later, in 1589, but now is lost. However, the preparatory drawings for the Prague paintings have been preserved, and we also have a copy by Barocci, which was painted in 1589 for Scipione Borghese.⁴⁵ Rudolf II expressly ordered that the painting have a secular theme, but he did not specify what kind.⁴⁶ Barocci obliged and painted Aeneas' Flight from Troy, which is, however: 'exactly in the same style that he used in his sacred works', as Marcia Hall stated.⁴⁷

Barocci's group of Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius is a variation on Raphael's group, but in his version, Creusa was modelled on the Virgin Mary in representations of the Annunciation (Pl. 5/2). She is not agitated like her counterpart in the painting of Genga; she piously accepts

41 Petrarch, *Triumphs* I, 105–107. Cf. HOLCROFT 1988, 226.

42 MOZZATTI 2010; PANIZON 2019.

43 Hall A7, c. FAGIOLO 1981, 156; EMILIANI 1984, cat. no. 134, VI.

44 BELLORI 2005, 170.

45 Rome, Galleria Borghese, inv. n. 68. BOESTEN-STENGEL 2001, 226; GILLGREN 2011, 163–176; NEELY 2015.

46 The letter of September 28, 1586: 'ma bisogna che sappiate che l'Imp.re non uorrebbe opere di deuotione, ma di altro gusto', cf. GRONAU 1936, p. 163 F, Nr. CCXI. The subject matter could be suggested by Bernardino Baldi, the leading humanist at the Urbino court (RICHARDS 1961).

47 HALL 1999, 274.

the divine will and prepares herself to withdraw in peace. She bows and kneels on one knee; her head is lowered with closed eyes and her left hand is raised to her chest to declare the sincerity of her piety. With her right hand, she makes the gesture of futility, explaining why she is renouncing the material world. However, the main theme of Barrocci's painting was not a religious renovation, but a dynastic one that visualised the exemplary patrilineal trio in the left half of the painting, which celebrated Rudolf II as the latest descendant of Aeneas.⁴⁸ The dynastic message was comprehensible in any court of Early Modern Europe; in this respect, there was no difference between Prague and Urbino. In the succession of rulers, a wife was a necessary component, but her role ended with giving birth and raising the heir to the throne. Whenever she stood in the way of the continuation of the dynasty, she was forced to retire.⁴⁹

In Barrocci's *Flight from Troy*, Creusa is young, and the erotic charm of her body made her self-sacrifice all the more appealing. In the *Villa Hvězda*, she is fully dressed and has a scarf on her head; her face is wrinkled. She is an old woman even though Ascanius, who accompanies her, is a child. This combination is very unusual, but not without precedent; the model for Brocco's Creusa was Raphael's fresco in the Vatican (**Pl. 5/3**). In the *Fire in the Borgo*, the family group of grandfather and father are looking downward, determined to fulfil their mission despite the horrors taking place around them. The son walks in front but looks back at the old woman, who is walking last.⁵⁰ The old woman ignores the flames behind her, which consume a collapsing building; her face is worried but calm. She is looking up to indicate that she is not thinking about what is happening here and now, but is contemplating what will happen in the future. She knows what the outcome will be.

Raphael's old woman is a prophetess modelled on Michelangelo's Sibyls on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel of 1508–1512. Brocco followed Raphael, and he might have used, for instance, the engraving of Marco Dente as an *aide-mémoire*.⁵¹ The quotation of Raphael's group in the *Villa Hvězda* is not surprising – its painted copies created in Central Europe around the middle of the 16th century attest to its enormous popularity.⁵² Brocco's version of Raphael's old woman might be compared with that of Maarten de Vos of 1581.⁵³ The Creusa of Vos is also a prophetess characterised by old age, a veiled head, and her head turned back to Troy. In his engraving of Vos' version, Pieter de Jode the Elder changed Creusa's stick into a sword.⁵⁴ He characterised Creusa not only as a prophetess but also as the last descendant of the royal house of Priam. She holds a sword in her right hand and a box with statuettes of ancestral gods in her left, attributes of secular and sacral authority. After Priam and Hector died, she was the rightful heir to the throne of Troy, which she delegated to her son.

Creusa in the painting by Adam Elsheimer from the beginning of the 17th century may have been influenced by Brocco's stucco in the *Villa Hvězda*, or they used the same model, which is now lost (**Pl. 5/4**).⁵⁵ The source of Elsheimer's painting was the work of Jan Brueghel the

48 RICHARDS 1961; OLSZEWSKI 1981; VERSTEGEN 2015.

49 VERSTEGEN 2015.

50 KUHN 2000, 143.

51 WOOD 1988, 217.

52 *Paintings*: Lambert Zutman (Lambert III Suavius), formerly attributed to Jan van Scorel or his circle, 1550, Utrecht, Centraal Museum inv. 2374 (another version in a private collection: Christie's (New York City) 2008-04-15, nr. 249); Ludger Ring the younger, 1551, Münster, Westfälisches Landesmuseum.

53 Maarten de Vos, *Pietas*, drawing, 1581, Madrid, Biblioteca nacional de España, inv. 8637.

54 Pieter de Jode I, *Piety* (detail), engraving after Maarten de Vos (before 1634), Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, inv. n. A1: 1179.

55 A variation is in a private collection, SUMOWSKI 1992, 155, fig. 10.

Elder from around 1595,⁵⁶ but the German painter did not follow Brueghel in his rendering of Creusa. In Elsheimer's painting, her position and pose is similar to Brocco's. She is also walking in front of Aeneas, but turning to him and raising her right hand with outstretched fingers. Elsheimer shifted Ascanius to the middle of the family group in his dramatic night scene; Ascanius holds a torch behind his back, which illuminated the members of this central group of his nocturnal veduta of burning Troy.

In Christian Europe, the story of Creusa: 'came to symbolize God's design for the unification of the civilized world under Rome as well as the spread of faith from that divinely ordained seat of Christendom founded by Aeneas' descendants'.⁵⁷ Federico Barocci's famous work for Rudolf II opened a series of paintings in which Creusa's piety was at the centre of attention.⁵⁸ But Antonio Brocco celebrated pia Creusa four decades before Federico Barocci. We may perhaps connect the glorification of Creusa in Prague with the specific political situation in the Kingdom of Bohemia and the dynastic claims of the Habsburgs. Ferdinand I appeared on the high political stage by marrying the Bohemian Princess Anne (1503–1547). He later became Bohemian and Hungarian King, Holy Roman Emperor, and the founder of the imperial dynasty. In Early Modern Europe, wives lived in the long shadows of their husbands, but matriarchs who founded a dynasty were celebrated together with their husbands.

From the 1530s until the 1560s, there was a shift in power from the Spanish to the Austrian line of the Habsburg Dynasty, and the establishment of the Danubian Empire. Queen Anne, the daughter of the Bohemian King Vladislaus II and sister of his successor Louis II, played a vital role in this crucial turning point.⁵⁹ According to the Bohemian estates, Anne lost her claim to the Bohemian throne by marrying Ferdinand I from the House of Habsburgs in 1521. When her childless brother Louis died in 1526, there was no legitimate heir to the Bohemian and Hungarian royal crown, and it was thus necessary to elect a new king. Ferdinand I was duly elected, but he never came to terms with his status as elected king, which significantly reduced his authority and blocked his dynastic ambitions. After a decade of intense pressure, he was finally able to force the Bohemian political representation to announce that their legal interpretation of the state of affairs, which remained after Louis's death, was incorrect. In 1545, the Bohemian diet officially proclaimed that Ferdinand did not become king through elections, but through his marriage to Anne, who was the rightful heir to the throne. At this time, Ferdinand I built the Villa Belvedere in the garden of the Prague castle. In the villa's sculptural decoration (1537–1550), he and his wife, Queen Anne, were explicitly celebrated.⁶⁰ At the time when the Villa Hvězda received its stucco decoration, a crucial change occurred in the Kingdom of Bohemia and the Holy Roman Empire. In 1562, Ferdinand's firstborn son Maximilian II was crowned King of Bohemia, and when his father died in 1564, he became the Holy Roman Emperor. The transmission of dynastic power between Aeneas' wife and son was re-enacted by Queen Anne and Maximilian II, which might explain why Creusa and Ascanius dominated in the decoration of the Villa Hvězda.

56 Cf. HANSELAER 1989.

57 GIDSON-FAXON 2013, 439.

58 Creusa holds or gives the statues of penates to Anchises: Lionello Spada, circa 1615, Paris, Musée du Louvre inv. 680; Simon Vouet, circa 1635, San Diego, San Diego Museum of Art; Carle van Loo, circa 1729, Paris, Musée du Louvre and Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, inv. n. NM 6814.

59 BAŽANT 2016; 2017.

60 King Ferdinand I is depicted here together with his wife, Queen Anne, with his oldest son Maximilian, or with his friends on a hunt. His brother Charles V is depicted twice on the Villa Belvedere.

The special relationship between Aeneas and the Habsburg Emperors was due to the fact that they considered themselves to be his descendants.⁶¹ It was not Aeneas, however, but Ascanius who was the rightful heir to the throne of Troy. It also follows that he was the heir to the thrones of the East and West, i.e. the Trojan and Latin kingdoms, which fused into a new worldwide empire, the Roman state.⁶² Aeneas' mother was Venus, this divine ancestry enhanced his prestige, but diluted his dynastic claims. Technically speaking, Aeneas was the illegitimate son of Anchises because he and Venus were not married. More important was the fact that Anchises came from the junior line of the Trojan royal house at the head of which was king Priam and his son Hector, the foreordained successor. When both Priam and Hector died, the legitimate heir to the throne of Troy was Ascanius, son of Hector's sister Creusa, as Vergil often repeated in his epos. Maximilian II, the firstborn son of Ferdinand I and Anne, was in a way a second Ascanius because his mother was the daughter of the king (Vladislaus II, a second Priam), the sister of the heir to the throne (Louis II, a second Hector).

The architecture of the Villa Hvězda differs from Renaissance villas in that it has a clearly defined midpoint, which was highlighted by Aeneas' Flight from Troy. This image had several superimposed levels of meaning, as was usual for that time. It might glorify Archduke Ferdinand's devotion to his father, Ferdinand I. By celebrating Creusa, it might celebrate Queen Anne's contribution to the founding of the Danube Monarchy. In Vergil's Rome and Renaissance Europe, the ruler and his wife formed an equal pair in one context only – as the founders of the dynasty. Marriages established or reinforced political ties, alliances were arranged for reasons other than love, and wives had few powers. However, their irreplaceable role in the allying of families was acknowledged and appreciated. In the Villa Hvězda, Creusa is not a charming young woman in distress as was usual in the art of that time. She is an old and dignified seeress, looking backwards to prophesy the future. Brocco did not place her isolated and threatened behind Aeneas. She walks in front of her husband, and it is not he but Creusa who escorts their son Ascanius, the rightful heir to the throne of Troy. The Flight from Troy in the Villa Hvězda evoked the beginning of Roman history, which was also the beginning of the state in which the villa was built.

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61 TANNER 1993; REISNER 2001; RÖMER 2001.

62 EDGEWORTH 2001.

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Pl. 5/1: Girolamo Genga, The Flight of Aeneas from Troy, c. 1510, Siena, Pinacoteca nazionale inv. n. 334. Wikimedia Commons.



Pl. 5/2: Federico Barocci, *The Flight of Aeneas from Troy*, 1598, Galleria Borghese, Rome. Wikimedia Commons.



Pl. 5/3: Raphael, *The Fire in the Borgo*, detail, 1514, wall painting in Stanza dell'Incendio, Palazzo Apostolico, Vatican City. Wikimedia Commons.



Pl. 5/4: Adam Elsheimer, *The Flight from Troy*, 1600–1601, Munich, Alte Pinakothek inv. 205. Wikimedia Commons.