

Hildebrand, Virgil, and Brutus the Trojan

First appearing in the ninth-century CE, *Historia Britonum*, Brutus, a descendant of the famous Aeneas, was purported as the legendary founder and first king of Britain. His popularity was further cemented in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historiae Regum Britanniae*, after which Brutus remained the *de facto* founder of Britain through the Early Modern Period to the chroniclers of British history. *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, published in 1577, for example, treats the myth as fact. As Brutus' status as myth or man came into question around the sixteenth century, he still continued to be celebrated for the next two hundred years in works like John Milton's incomplete *History of Britain* and Alexander Pope's fragmented *Brutus*. In the late seventeenth century, British poet and playwright, Jacob Hildebrand created a five-book epic poem about Brutus' journey. Though never finished, Hildebrand traces the beginning of Brutus' journey in a detailed manner, which follows the outline set forth by Geoffrey of Monmouth. A deep study of this particular text, however, has been mostly overlooked by other scholars, perhaps due to the incomplete nature of the text.

From the first page of his piece, Hildebrand makes clear the connection between his own work and that of the *Aeneid*. On the front page of his work, *Brutus The Trojan: Founder of the British Empire*, Jacob Hildebrand remarks *Tanta molis erat condere Gentem!* — “Such a great burden to found this race!” His remark is a clear reference to Vergil's *Aeneid* (1.33), *tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem!* — “of such a great burden was it to found the Roman race!” Hildebrand's work details the journey of Brutus, founder of not the Roman race but the British, yet the references to the *Aeneid* are evident.

In this paper, I offer a brief summary of the English literary and historical tradition of Brutus that Hildebrand is building upon from authors such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, Milton,

and Pope. I focus primarily upon the way in which Hildebrand expands upon the epic tradition of Vergil through his language. For example, he opens Book I with the phrase, “I sing the Founder of the *British* Throne.... Say, *Muse!* what Toils he bore, e’er eh attain’d to fix the *lasting Seat* of *Albion’s* Kings” a clear echo of *Aeneid* I.1, *arma virumque cano*, and I.8-11, *Musa, mihi causas memora ... tot adire labores impulerit*. In this paper, I also consider Hildebrand’s references to the plot of the *Aeneid*. In Book I of Hildebrand’s text, Aeolus is called upon to calm the seas for Brutus, and in Book V, Fame flies around with an imagery reminiscent of Vergil’s. Through these subtle and slightly more oblique references, Hildebrand was able to create a British heritage founded upon a past shared by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Through this imaginary, eponymous founder, Medieval authors gave their country connections to the Classical world and breathed further life into this figure, shadowed in myth. Hildebrand built upon this lengthy tradition through his references to the *Aeneid* which deserve a closer examination.

Bibliography

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