

# The Roman d'Enéas

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The *Roman d'Enéas*, written by an anonymous Norman poet probably between 1155 and 1160, is the second of the three "romans d'antiquité" (romances of antiquity), written after the *Roman de Thèbes* (ca. 1150) and before Benoît de Sainte Maure's *Roman de Troie* (ca. 1165). Scholars agree that the *Enéas* was written shortly after Wace's *Roman de Brut* (ca 1155), before Marie de France's *Lais*, and certainly well before Chrétien de Troyes's romances.

It is one of the earliest "romances" in the 12th century meaning of the term and is one of the most curious admixtures of influences of both Virgil and Ovid.

The following excerpt, concerning magnets, is taken from John A. Yunck's translation (*Eneas: A Twelfth-Century French Romance*), NY: Columbia U Press, 1974. It is an English prose translation of the Old French octosyllabic verse poem which runs 10,156 lines. "Normal" romance (i.e. Chrétien de Troyes) runs about 8000 lines and can be performed aloud in about three hours or so.

At the very beginning of the poem, Eneas, shipwrecked and stranded, lands in Carthage--an extraordinary city ruled by an even more extraordinary woman (i.e. a woman ruler and an extraordinary woman ruler!). The passage discussing the magnets is preceded by (and is prepared by) one of the descriptions of Dido's cleverness. We should not be surprised that such a clever woman has a "clever" defense system for her city:

"Lady Dido ruled the country better than any count or marquis would have ruled it. No domain or realm was ever thereafter better governed by a woman. She had not been born in this land, but was from the country of Tyre; Sicheus was her husband's name. One of her brothers had had him killed and had driven his sister into exile, because he wished to take possession of the realm. She fled by sea, together with a large company of followers, carrying away very great treasures of silks and cloth, silver and gold. She arrived in this land and went to the prince of the country. With great cleverness she went to ask him if he would sell her as much of his land as the hide of a bull would enclose, and she gave him gold and silver for it. The prince, not suspecting a trick, granted it to her. Dido cut the hide into very thin thongs; with these she took so much land that she founded there a city. Then she conquered so much by her wealth, by her cleverness, and by her prowess, that she possessed the whole country, and the barons submitted to her." (Yunck, p. 63; vv. 378-406)

"Her city was named Carthage, and was situated on the coast of Libya. The sea beat against it on one side: it would never be attacked from there. On the other side were pools, and great, broad marshes, and large moats with barbicans made in the Libyan fashion, and trenches and palisades, fences, barriers, drawbridges. Before one could

reach Carthage there were many difficult spots and many hard defiles. High up on a corner of land by the shore was a great natural rock; there the walls were laid. The stones were of marble--gray, white, indigo, and red--all set in regular order with great skill and care, all of marble and adamant. The walls were made with columns, with pillars and with niches, carved with beasts and birds and flowers. The outside of the walls was covered with marble of a hundred colors, without red and without blue. Around the walls were placed with very great skill three rows of magnets, made of a stone which is very hard. The magnet is of such nature that no armed man approaches it whom the stone does not draw to itself. Thus, if men came near the walls wearing hauberks they would be immediately drawn to the walls." (Yunck, pp. 63-64; vv. 407-440)