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VERGIL'S *RES ROMANAE*.

DONATUS, after enumerating Vergil's early poems, proceeds (*Vita Verg.* 19): 'Mox cum res Romanas inchoasset, offensus materia, ad Bucolica transiit.' We have learned to distrust such statements about Vergil's early life, having discovered that an all too literal interpretation of the *Bucolics* provided a large part of Suetonius' data. The line quoted above may be nothing but an inference from *Eclogue* VI. 3:

cum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthus aurem
uellit et admonuit, etc.

Servius' comment shows how uncertain were the traditional data about this early attempt at an epic: 'Significat aut Aeneidem aut gesta regum Albanorum.' Since Servius knows so little about it, there is no profit in quoting Servius auctus (*alii Scyllam*), or Philargyrius (*Aeneidos libros*) or the Bern scholia. Now that criticism has succeeded in removing the long-entertained doubts regarding the authenticity of the *Culex*, the *Ciris*, and the fourteen poems *Catalepton*,¹ the safest way to reconstruct Vergil's biography is to proceed anew from the basis of the *Appendix Vergiliana* and the *Bucolics*, instead of accepting outright the statements of the scholiasts, who used practically only the *Bucolics*.

The ninth *Catalepton*, written in 42 B.C., seems to suggest (l. 62) that Vergil entertained an ambition to rival the Greeks with a *patrio carmine*. The fourteenth *Catalepton* carries us farther. I have shown elsewhere that every tangible clue in the *Catalepton* leads us back to the period before the *Bucolics*, and that, therefore, we should suppose the book closed before 41 B.C. In style and substance the poem is somewhat too naïve to accept as the work of Vergil's maturity; the reference to Sorrento accords well with Vergil's student days before Siro's death, and the offering of flowers for inspiration (l. 6) reminds us of the *Ciris* (l. 96). But the most definite reference is found in l. 11:

adsis, o Cytherea : tuus te Caesar Olympo
. uocat.

It was on September 26, in 46 B.C., that Caesar so strikingly called attention to his claims of descent from Venus and Aeneas by dedicating a temple to Venus Genetrix. It was on that day that Caesar called Venus from heaven to

¹ I have tried to summarize the conclusions in *Class. Phil.*, 1920, Nos. I.-II.

dwell in her new temple.¹ This may have been the act that first suggested to Vergil the thought of writing the epic of

Troius Aeneas Romana per oppida digno
 carmine

And we can hardly hesitate to accept an early date after September, 46 B.C., for the fourteenth *Catalepton*.

In the light of that poem the first lines of the sixth *Eclogue* become clear :

prima Syracosio dignata est ludere uersu
 nostra, nec erubuit siluas habitare, Thalia.
 cum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthius aurem
 uellit et admonuit : 'pastorem, Tityre, pinguis
 pascere oportet ouis, deductum dicere carmen.'

His first song,² also inspired by Thalia, was the *Culex* written in 48 B.C., a poem which was considered a pastoral by Vergil and Horace. Between that date and the writing of the *Eclogues* falls the first effort at *reges et proelia*, which he mentions here to excuse his failure to sing the deeds of Varus (l. 7). Donatus, therefore, seems after all to preserve an accurate tradition when he says that Vergil had first attempted a Roman epic before he wrote the *Eclogues*.

How far this first attempt proceeded we shall probably not know. Vergil's own words would imply that his early effort centred about Aeneas' wars in Italy ; the fourteenth *Catalepton*,

Troius Aeneas Romana per oppida digno,

and the sixth *Eclogue* (*reges et proelia*) are rather explicit on this point. Furthermore, the reference of Celaeno's omen to Anchises in the seventh book (l. 122) would indicate that this part at least was written before the harpy-scene of the third ; for the latter is so extensive that the poet could hardly have forgotten it.³

It is, however, in reading the first and fifth books that I think we may profit most by keeping in mind the fact that the poet had begun the *Aeneid* before Caesar's death. In Book I. 286 sqq. occurs a passage which Servius referred to Julius Caesar. It reads :

nascetur pulchra Troianus origine Caesar,
 imperium Oceano, famam qui terminet astris,
 Iulius, a magno demissum nomen Iulo.
 hunc tu olim caelo, spoliis Orientis onustum,
 accipies securus ; uocabitur hic quoque uotis.

¹ See Dio, XLIII. 22 ; Appian, II. 102 ; Heinen, *Klio* XI. 130, for references.

² The contrast lies between Vergil's *first* song and his *later* attempts at an epic. We cannot, therefore, accept the more usual rendering 'Mine was the first muse that deigned.' For the date and nature of the *Culex* see *Class. Phil.*, 1920, 23.

³ Because of the reference in Propertius (II. 24) and also of internal evidence provided by the *Aeneid*, many scholars hold that the seventh book was written earlier than the first six ; cf. G. Hirst, *An Attempt to Date the Composition of Aen. VII.*, *Class. Quart.*, 1916, 87.

Very few modern writers have dared accept Servius' judgment here, and yet if we may think of these lines as adapted from (say) an original dedication to Julius Caesar written about 45 B.C. the difficulties of the commentators will vanish. The facts that Vergil seems to have in mind are these: In September, 46 B.C., Julius Caesar, after returning from Thapsus, celebrated his four great triumphs over Gaul, Egypt, Pontus, and Africa, displaying loads of booty such as had never before been seen at Rome. He then gave an extended series of athletic games, of the kind described in Vergil's fifth book, including a restoration of the ancient *ludus Troiae*. When these were over he dedicated the temple of Venus Genetrix, thereby publicly announcing his descent from Venus, and presently proclaimed his own superhuman rank more explicitly by placing a statue of himself among the gods on the Capitoline (Dio, XLIII. 14-22). Are not the phrases *imperium Oceano* and *spoliis Orientis onustum* a direct reference to this triumph, which, of course, Vergil saw? And did not these dedications inspire the prophecy *uocabitur hic quoque uotis*? Be that as it may, it is difficult to refuse credence to Servius in this case, for Vergil here (I. 267-274 and 288) accepts Julius Caesar's claim of descent from Iulus, whereas in the sixth book, in speaking of the descent of the royal Roman line, he derives it, as was regularly done in Augustus' day, from Silvius, the son of Aeneas and Lavinia (VI. 763 sqq.). We must notice also that in the *Aeneid* as in the *Georgics* Augustus is regularly called 'Augustus Caesar' or 'Caesar,' whereas in the only other reference to Julius in the *Aeneid* the poet explicitly points to him by saying 'Caesar et omnis Iuli progenies' (VI. 789).

Servius, therefore, seems to be right in regarding Julius as the subject of the passage in the first book, and it follows that the passage contains memories of the year 46 B.C., whether or not the lines were, as I suggest, first written soon after Caesar's triumph.

The fifth book also, despite the fact that its beginning and end show a late hand, contains much that can best be brought into connexion with Vergil's earlier years. It is, for instance, easier to comprehend the poet's references to Memmius, Catiline, and Cluentius in the forties than twenty years later. Vergil's strange comparison of Messalla to the *superbus Eryx* in *Catalepton* IX., written in 42 B.C.,¹ is also readily explained if we may assume that he has recently studied the Eryx myth in preparation for the contest of Book V. (ll. 392-420). The poet's enthusiasm for the *ludus Troiae* is well understood as a description of what he saw at Caesar's reintroduction of the spectacle in 46. At Caesar's games Octavian, then sixteen years of age, must have led one of the troops: in the fifth book Atys, the ancestor of Octavian's maternal line, led one column by the side of Iulus:

alter Atys, genus unde Atii duxere Latini (l. 568).

Then, too, marks of youth pervade the substance of the book. The question-

¹ Cf. *Class. Phil.*, 1920, 11.

able witticisms might perhaps be attributed to an attempt to relieve the strain, but there is an unusual amount of Homeric imitation and inartistic allusion to contemporaries which, as in the youthful *Bucolics*, destroys the dramatic illusion. Thus, Vergil not only dwells upon the ancestry of the Memmii, Sergii, and Cluentii, but insists upon reminding the reader of Catiline's conspiracy in the *Sergestus*, *furens animi* who dashes upon the rock in his mad eagerness to win, and obtrudes etymology in the phrase *segnem Menoeten* (V. 173). One is tempted to suspect that the whole narrative of the boatrace is filled with pragmatic allusions. If the characters of his epic must be connected with well-known Roman families, it is at least interesting that the connexions are indicated in the fifth book, and not in the passages where the names first meet the reader. Does it not appear that the body of the book was composed long before the rest, and then left at the poet's death not quite furnished to the fastidious taste of a later day?

Finally, I would suggest that the strange and still unexplained omen of Acestes' burning arrow in ll. 520 sqq. probably refers to some event of importance to Segesta in the same year, 46 B.C. We are told by the author of the *Bellum Africanum* that Caesar mustered his troops for the African campaign at Lilybaeum in the winter of 47. We are not told that while there he ascended the mountain, offered sacrifices to Venus Erycina, and ordered his statue to be placed in her temple, or that he gave favours to the people of Segesta who had the care of that temple. But he probably did something of that kind, for as he had already vowed his temple to Venus Genetrix he could hardly have remained eight days at Lilybaeum so near the shrine of Aeneas' Venus without some act of filial devotion. If Vergil wrote any part of the fifth book in or soon after 46 this would seem to be the solution of the obscure passage in question.

It would be futile to attempt to pick out definite lines and claim that these were parts of the youthful poem. Indeed, the artistry of most of the verses discussed is, as any reader will notice, more on the plane of the later work than the *Ciris*, written about 47-3 B.C. It is safe to say that Vergil did not in his youth write the sonorous lines of *Aen.* I. 286-290 just as they now stand. But as we may learn from the *Ciris*, which Vergil attempted to suppress, no poet has more successfully retouched lines written in youth and fitted them into mature work without leaving a trace of the process. All that I would assume is that Vergil made the same kind of use of his fragmentary *Res Romanae* as he did of the *Ciris*.¹

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¹ Cf. *Ecl.* IV. 47 with *Ciris* 125; *Ecl.* IV. 49 with *Ciris* 398; *Ecl.* VIII. 41 with *Ciris* 430; *Georg.* I. 406-9 with *Ciris* 538-41; *Aen.* II. 405

with *Ciris* 402; *Aen.* III. 74 with *Ciris* 474. See Vollmer's edition of the *Ciris* for these and other references.