

Continuity in Pastoral: Plants and Food in Virgil

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It goes without saying that to be invited to address this society is a great honour and privilege. Yet a recent move of house and change of job have conspired against the original plan of this talk. For me the vacations have always been a time for reflection after the hurly-burly of school life and for quiet academic study. Whatever I study during those precious few weeks has been a huge resource during term time, both to add depth to lessons and as something very personal, not so much an escape as a vision of another place. However, those few weeks have recently been swamped by viewings and vendors and mortgage arrangements, which has meant that the more detailed slant I was intending to take on Virgil has given way to reflections on what his poetry has meant to me.

Just before I sat my final exams at St. Andrews twenty years ago, I asked myself the perennial undergraduate question of what I should do for a career after the last paper. The careers office suggested - as it did to so many of my contemporaries - the safe haven of accountancy. So the application forms were filled, an interview was forthcoming, and a position was obtained at well-known firm. Soon after the degree results had been announced, I caught the evening train from London. As day broke the next day the engineer striking his hammer on the carriage wheels woke me at Domodossola. The journey over the Alps is beautifully contrasting: it begins with the somewhat northern atmosphere of wooden chalets, sheltering pine trees and the massive greyness of the mountains; then the line runs gently down into the valley of the Po and the air quickly becomes warm and scented. At the stations the hawkers sounded almost musical as they wheeled their trolleys along the platforms advertising 'pannini, arranciata, acqua minerale'. My mind wandered to pastoral poetry and I took down my copy of Virgil from my rucksack. Thus I suppose it was Virgil and his pastoral poems that made me question my accountancy application and drew me back eventually to the study of classics.

To define pastoral is not my intention: in fact I would concur with Leach who suggests that the genre is quite protean in its elusiveness.¹ On the other hand, to summarise the format of pastoral poetry is relatively straightforward: the setting must be the countryside, and a maximum of three shepherds is required, either to deliver a monologue as in Virgil's Second *Eclogue* or to wage an amoebaeon debate such as that in the Fourth *Eclogue* of Calpurnius Siculus. The poet can use this structure to support his main theme, whether it be of love, or a description of a return to the Golden Age, or even to comment angrily on the system of appropriation being applied to rural properties in order to reward veterans when they had retired. Supposedly it was Theocritus who invented pastoral poetry in the third century BC. Poetry was naturally associated closely with music, and Greek herdsmen were singers and players, so Theocritus linked the two ideas for his new form of literature. Virgil broadly imitated Theocritus, but added many new and effective details of his own. Virgil himself had two imitators in antiquity: Calpurnius Siculus and Nemesianus. The Carolingian revival renewed the interest in classical poetry and Alcuin and Theodulus were among the writers of seven poems that can be described as genuine pastoral. The continuity in pastoral poetry from Theocritus to Theodulus can be traced in a wide variety of ways: for instance, through conventional themes, the conversations of the shepherds or the plots of the poems. But I would like to think here about the setting, food, flora and fauna of pastoral poetry. For what has always intrigued me about the ancient world is its archaeology in the broadest sense, which is why I have marched down Colchester High Street in the armour of a first century AD legionary with the Ermine Street Guard, cooked and eaten Roman food, helped to dig marching forts in Scotland and villas in England, and travelled to archaeological sites across the empire. My questions always revolve around the reality of a description and so the pastoral poems have focussed my mind on the *locus amoenus* of pastoral.

Coleman relates how beech trees are a re

feature of Virgil's bucolic landscape.² Some examples highlight their ubiquitous nature: Tityrus is pictured as reclining beneath a beech tree while playing his flute (*Ecl.* 1.1f) and Corydon wandering distraught among the thick beeches with their shady tops (*Ecl.* 2.3f). As Theocritus (12.8) says, beech trees were renowned for the shade they afforded. Philemon (ap. Ath. 2.52e) called beeches 'the glory of Pan', thereby underlining their symbiotic relationship with the countryside. This is not a poetic conceit: when travelling through the Apennines I have noticed many groves of beech trees. Beech wood is easily carved and can be processed into superb charcoal, whilst its mast provides excellent fodder for pigs. Here it is instructive to note that the Roman national dish was beans cooked with bacon.³ Damoetas (*Ecl.* 3.12f) describes how Menalcas broke the bow and arrows belonging to Daphnis at the old beech trees. Calpurnius Siculus (1.11) describes how Ornytus asked Corydon to accompany him to a grove 'where the beech tree shelters the waters beneath its root.' Nemesianus (1.30f) has Tityrus warn Timetas that if they try to sing the pine tree might interrupt them with its rustling noise, and advises a place where there are elms and beeches instead. I once sat beneath the pine trees that grow on the flat-topped hill of Cosa from where Lepidus sailed to Sardinia after his defeat by Pompey; they do in fact rustle in the breeze and make a dull whine fitting for the melancholy memory of this doomed struggle against the repressive diktats issued by Sulla. The beech tree, with its smooth grey trunk, is a native to Europe. The young foliage is light green, turning to dark green as it matures, and the alternate ovate leaves provide an excellent shade, which is a common line of thought in all these passages. Virgil (*Ecl.* 5.13f) depicts a poem written 'on the young bark', a detail that he must have drawn from real life, for the protective covering of the soft moist rind that encloses the trunk

of a beech tree is very smooth and thus, when fresh, easy to transcribe.

Another plant that appears frequently in pastoral poetry is *cytisus* or shrub trefoil. The roots of this plant are in fact harmful to trees, but farmers in antiquity nevertheless cultivated this plant for its abundant leaves that resemble clover. Columella (5.12.1f) sings its praises as fodder for all kinds of livestock and as ideal forage for bees. Meliboeus (*Ecl.* 1.74) laments that he will no longer lead his goats to crop the 'flowering trefoil'. Corydon (*Ecl.* 2.64) says that he is turned on by Alexis in the same way as the 'randy goat makes for the flowering trefoil', an imitation admittedly of Theocritus (12.30f), but all the same a wonderful simile of voracious sexual desire.

Meliboeus (*Ecl.* 1.14) relates how one of his goats produced twins 'amidst the thick hazels'. Hazels throw up numerous suckers, and this made them a useful source of tough withies as well as firewood.⁴ The trees themselves can grow up to six metres in height. Mopsus (*Ecl.* 5.20f) says that the nymphs lamented the death of Daphnis and that the hazels bore witness to this. In the spring hazels produce male flowers that are carried in catkins. These catkins are cylindrical, pendulous, and move slowly in the wind. Perhaps Virgil was thinking of these catkins when he wrote these lines, because their languid movement could suggest sadness and the measured pace of mourners at a funeral. At the beginning of the same poem (*Ecl.* 5.3) Menalcas and Mopsus decide to sit where the hazels intermingle with the elms. Curiously, although the hazel is a native to Europe, yet Virgil alone of the pastoral poets writes about it.

When evoking Theocritus (5.45ff), Virgil (*Ecl.* 1.51ff) introduces a wistful transformation of the humble realities of Tityrus' land into an idyllic landscape. Cyperus, a type of rush with a graceful appearance, grows in Africa, Egypt and Europe. There is a spring called today the Fonte Ciane not far from Syracuse which, according to myth, is the transformed nymph Cyane, wife of Anapo, her metamorphosis being a punishment for opposing the abduction of Proserpine by Pluto. Here there are large stretches of cyperus, and Theocritus may have used this plant in his poem through reminiscence on the town of his birth. Cyperus root was used in ancient cooking, Apicius (1.4 and 7.4.2) detailing its addition to plain Spanish olive oil to make an ersatz Liburnian oil and to a meat casserole. Although cyperus is not mentioned as such by Virgil, there are references to the *iuncus*, an aquatic or bog plant that grows in poor and acid soil all over Europe, such as where these reeds encroach on pastureland (*Ecl.* 1.48). The owner of these pastures is considered fortunate because his land is still belongs to him and has not been confiscated by Octavian's government. The reeds are almost a metaphor of the spears belonging to the soldiers who encircle the land and who might take it if they are afforded the chance. The poetry here derives much of its detail from Theocritus (7.133 ff). Like Virgil, Theocritus was careful to use appropriate plants in his poetry: *aigeiros*, the black poplar or *populus*, a fast-growing deciduous tree, is tolerant of wet soil, Virgil (*Ecl.* 7.66) remarking on it being found 'in streams'.

More peacefully Nemesianus (1.1) has Tityrus weave a basket from such reeds; Virgil (*Ecl.* 10.71) has a basket woven from the similar *hibiscus*. If *iuncus* is taken to be the equivalent of *schoinos*, Theocritus (7.133) has Eucritus and Amyntas lie down in a bed of these sweet-smelling reeds. Virgil (*Ecl.* 2.28 ff) describes Corydon wishing that Alexis would come and live with him so that they could drive the herd of goats together. There is a problem of interpretation at this point. In his commentary on the poem, Coleman asserts that *hibisco* must mean 'with a green marsh-mallow switch'.⁵ He argues that even such omnivorous creatures as goats would not touch this unattractive

fare and that the plant only grows on treacherous and marshy soil. By contrast Servius takes *hibisco* to mean 'to the marsh-mallows'. *Compellere* is indeed found with the dative - witness Horace (*Carm.* 1.24.18: '[quam] ... nigro compulerit Mercurius gregi') - and I find what Servius offers more attractive. Marsh-mallows do not only grow on treacherous and marshy soil, but also on merely moist land. When my daughter was a baby I wheeled her pushchair through a field of marsh-mallows at Otricoli - ancient Oriculum - where the ground was anything but treacherous. These tender evergreen plants with showy, short-lived and wide funnel-shaped leaves, would be agreeable as fodder for goats, but would be rather feeble as a switch. Virgil pictures himself as weaving a little basket from slender *hibiscus* (*Ecl.* 10.71) Small baskets made of mallow were used in antiquity for gathering small fruits and olives, or for draining freshly curdled milk in the manufacture of cheese. As Columella (7.8.3) describes: 'when the milk has thickened it should be transferred to little baskets.' Theophrastus (*CP* 9.15.5) explains that the *althaia*, which is similar to the *hibiscus* and the *malache*, grows in Arcadia, which is perhaps why Virgil places it in his poems.

Tityrus (*Ecl.* 1.19ff) tells Meliboeus how, just as he measured big things by little things, so he thought Rome was just a larger version of the market-town to where he was accustomed to drive his newly-weaned lambs. In a similar way, he adds, cypress trees tower over the *uiburna*. The *uiburnum* is either a wayfaring tree or a guelder rose, although the epithet *lentum* is better in describing the latter. Cypress trees can grow as high as nine metres and would therefore dwarf any guelder rose, so this simile is particularly apt, especially as a cypress, with its dark-green and abundant foliage, looks very majestic, whilst a guelder rose is merely limp undergrowth. The cypress tree was probably imported from the Middle East, but at an early period, so that by Virgil's day it had long been a feature of the Italian landscape. But whilst lines of alternating poplar and cypress trees are today redolent of peaceful Tuscan landscapes, Virgil may have been thinking too of their funereal imagery, and thus suggesting to the reader alongside its majesty the destructive force of Roman power.⁶

Theocritus (11.45) has Polyphemus extolling the delights that await Galatea if she leaves the grey-blue sea, for there will be *acanthus* or bear's breeches to tickle her fancy. Bear's breeches grow to about a metre in height and their natural habitat is Italy. In the wild they have ovate, glossy, green leaves which - and so they should in this context of love - have a heart-shaped base and wavy margins. Virgil (*Ecl.* 3.45) describes them as *mollis*. The cultivated varieties of bear's breeches do indeed lack the characteristic prickles of the wild variety and the luxuriant foliage is particularly dark and soft.

Theocritus (1.21) has a goatherd bid Thyrsis sit beneath an elm. The elm tree has dark-green coarsely toothed leaves, and prefers, as the gardening catalogues might say, any sunny aspect. The *arbusta* in Virgil (*Ecl.* 1.39) were special plantations of elm around which vines were trained. Nowadays wooden or plastic frames are used for this purpose, and the low T-shaped supports entwined with vines are a typical Mediterranean sight. Late one summer afternoon I walked up from the small railway station at Tindari on the north coast of Sicily. The path ran through a citrus grove with its heady aroma and then up through a vineyard that could have been from a scene in Virgil. Virgil's Second *Eclogue* concludes with Corydon reminding himself that in his distracted state he has left his vines half-pruned and the elms they grow on thick with leaves. Earlier in the poem the fact that it is harvest time has been mentioned - and the foliage had to be cut for fodder and to allow the light to reach the grapes. Menalcas asks Mopsus (*Ecl.* 5.1-3) to sit down with him where the

hazels mingle with the elms, to which Mopsus replies that as Menalcas is his elder, he will obey whatever he asks of him, whether they retreat to the shade of the trees or to a cave. The image of flickering shadows is suggested rather than actually depicted by the adjective *incertus* and the alliterative *s* of the leaves swishing. The bright Italian sun makes for sharply defined shadows and I have spent many an hour after a midday picnic amidst some ruins contemplating the interplay of light and dark in the shade of a tree. A similar image is described by Calpurnius Siculus (1.12), whereas Tityrus in Nemesianus (1.31) asks Timetas to sing beneath the elms rather than the pine tree as the latter might interrupt them with its loud noise.

One of the most familiar sights of the Italian landscape must be the groves of stone pines with their domed crowns casting valued shade. Whenever I have caught a train heading south from Roma Termini station, I have felt as if I am in gallery looking at landscape painting, the richly ploughed fields offset by mellow stuccoed farmhouses and dark green stone pines. Theocritus (5.49) mentions the tree and seems to be saying that Comatas' oak trees afford a safer shade, because underneath the pine trees there is danger from falling cones. On the other hand, the pine tree might belong to Comatas and not to Lacon, in which case the cones might be an added bonus. For not only will Comatas enjoy a pleasant shade, but he will also be able to collect pine nuts, the edible wingless seeds of the pine tree that are used so much in Mediterranean cooking. Elizabeth David's recipe for *Salsa Agrodolce* is a reminder of the value of pine nuts and of the survival of the characteristic sweet and sour taste of Roman cooking.⁷ Virgil (*Ecl.* 7.65) describes the pine tree as growing in gardens, which would be sensible in providing shade from the fierce heat in summer. Calpurnius Siculus (1.8ff) has Ornytus advise Corydon to head for the groves, the haunt of father Faunus, where the pine tree lifts its head to the sun. Being a tall tree, the pine does raise its head in this way, and at the same time it blocks the rays. Nemesianus (1.72) has Timetas, in the course of singing in honour of the late Meliboeus, describe the pine tree as whispering. Not far from the temple at Segesta in Sicily - up from the grandiose railway station that grandiosely proclaims its fascist origins to the empty countryside - there is a small grove of pine trees standing on a slight hill overlooking the archaeological site. Even when the wind blows only softly the pine needles rattle and a low-pitched whine is produced as the breeze rushes through the dense crowns. It is a peaceful, rustic sound as Theocritus mentions (1.1-2). The photograph of this place I have had enlarged for my classroom wall, a memento of this beautiful tree.

Virgil (*Ecl.* 2.54f) has Corydon actually address the laurel and myrtle - 'et uos, o lauri, carpam et te, proxuma myrte' - both trees associated with Apollo and Venus, who represented music and love respectively. Corydon follows this apostrophe by a list of flowers and fruit. These plants are nearly all in flower at roughly the same time, and if one or two are misplaced, it is because Corydon is more concerned about his love for Alexis than ensuring that each plant blooms in unison with the others. As Athenaeus (15.675e) reminds us, laurel was used to make wreaths for drinking bouts. Meliboeus (*Ecl.* 7.6-8) tells how he was protecting his myrtles from the cold when he caught sight of Daphnis. Pliny (*Nat.* 17.16) recommends using straw for this purpose, a method that gardeners still use with strawberries today. Nemesianus (1.65) depicts Apollo as plucking his laurel tree. The boy in the first book of Naso, alias the Carolingian poet Modoin, describes how an old priest has his temples wreathed with laurel.⁸ The laurel, however, has deep green leaves and cannot really be described as *nivea*, so the adjective must here go with *tempora*. This apparent confusion draws attention to a feature of Carolingian poetry: rarely are any plants named and the descriptions of the countryside are very stylised and bare. Pearsall and Salter point out that the same is true in mediaeval art: for example, the Bayeux tapestry reduces the trees to mere decorations, whereas the

fresco of the garden from the House of Livia at Prima Porta is a masterpiece of naturalistic art.⁹

Salictum in Virgil (*Ecl.* 1.54) refers to a clump of *salices* or willow, both the purple and white variety being well established in Roman Italy. Willows were used to support vines, to provide cattle fodder, and to act as hedging plants. They grow especially well beside water, and the *salicta* here are situated 'between well-known rivers and holy springs'. Poplars and willows are some of the most common trees in Lombardy, which is the area where Virgil lived.¹⁰ Damoetas (*Ecl.* 3.64-5) says that Galatea made a pass at him with an apple and then darted off towards the willows. Until the early modern period throwing a fruit at someone was a symbol of love. Written in the sixteenth century, the anonymous *Phyllida's Love Call* has Corydon state: 'I will gather pears, my lovely one, / To put in thy lap.' When talking about Amyntas and Mopsus (*Ecl.* 5.16), Menalcas contrasts the suppleness of willow with the more rigid olive wood. The adjective *pallenti* in this line could apply to the leaves of either tree, although olive leaves are better so described because they are a pale silvery colour. On the sides of the hills around Sorrento stand numerous heavily scented olive trees, and with bright sunlight beating down on them their light hue is emphasised. A walk from the bus stop on the main road down to the villa attributed to Vedius Pollio at the Capo di Sorrento passes under overarching olive boughs where the path is slippery with the berries that have been crushed underfoot. The olive was the more valuable of the two trees, although not the more beautiful. As a passing aside, Nemesianus (1.6-7) depicts some kids busily munching away at willow-shoots.

Virgil (*Ecl.* 2.18) refers to the *alba ligustra*. This is translated in dictionaries as the evergreen shrub privet, with ovate leaves that are a lustrous dark green, but *alba* is suspicious, unless it refers to the pale sheen on the leaves rather than the actual colour. The *uaccinia nigra* - the chiasmus 'alba ligustra ... uaccinia nigra' perhaps suggests the intertwining of the plants - has been identified as the bilberry, with bright green leaves that turn a dull purple in autumn. In August the plant bears blue-black fruits. Thus there is a metaphor between the tree losing its fruits in the latter part of the year and Alexis losing his good looks in the latter part of his life.

Tityrus offers Meliboeus 'castaneae molles' (*Ecl.* 1.81), that is chestnuts roasted or pickled to make them tender as described by Athenaeus (2.53-4). Corydon, as he fantasises about Alexis, recalls Thestylis making from garlic cloves and wild thyme a *moretum* or pesto of olive-oil, cheese and herbs (*Ecl.* 2.10-11).¹¹ Columella (12.59) gives recipes for several similar salads and there is the famous poem on this theme in the *Appendix Vergiliana*. The details of the chestnuts and of the *moretum* are highly Virgilian and are rarely found in other extant pastoral poetry from antiquity - Paulinus of Nola (11.37) compares the heights of cypress and chestnut trees in an interesting variation on a Virgilian theme - although they are popular features of mediaeval German poetry. In fact the chestnut seller in the squares of Austria and Germany is a nostalgic recurrence in the literature that followed the First World War, a wistful lament, as in Virgil, for a simpler world that had been lost in the carnage and confusion of war.¹²

As Virgil (*Ecl.* 10.20) relates, acorns were regularly employed by the Romans as winter-feed for livestock, a fact that Cato (*Agr.* 60) supports. Pliny (*Nat.* 16.15) even describes how, when wheat was in short supply, acorns were dried and ground into flour to make bread. That it was the people in the countryside who starved after a bad harvest can be ascribed to the practice of storing grain in city warehouses, either privately or through state intervention, in order to prevent food riots. The peasants, being scattered, were less likely to cause civil unrest.¹³ However, acorns were employed during happier times, and in Roman Spain they even found a place at the table, served as an after dinner nibble, a custom

also of the Greek East, at least as far as the entry under *tragemata* in the *Suda Encyclopaedia* is concerned.

As has already been noted, the flowers that Corydon lists in the Second *Eclogue* do not all bloom at the same time. According to Columella (10.99), *uiolae* (*Ecl.* 2.47) are in bloom from April to June. This flower is probably synonymous with the *ion leukoion*, from which a wine was made called *uinum uiolacum* that is recorded by Palladius (5.5). The *papauera* (*Ecl.* 2.47) flower from May to August, as do most species of *lilia*. The white *narcissus* (*Ecl.* 2.48) produces flowers in late spring. The phrase ‘bene olentis anethi’ is reminiscent of Theocritus (7.63). It grows from March onwards, its flowers appearing in about June as Columella (10.120) relates. It was a common ingredient in ancient Greek and Roman cuisine, as witnessed by the fragment of a Greek cookery book known from the Heidelberg Papyrus and from the pages of Apicius, one of the more delicious recipes being the *Ofellae Ostienses* (7.4) or Ostian Meat Casserole. *Luteola ... caltha* is the yellow marigold that flowers in July. The adjective *mollia* provides a tactile sensation, highly appropriate to what Corydon is thinking. *Mala* (*Ecl.* 2.51) - ‘cana ... tenera lanugine mala’ - are quinces or peaches which are covered with *lanugo* or down when fresh. The *mala* might also refer to Alexis who is young and has down on his cheeks. The smooth texture of the plums is aptly summed up by the epithet *cerea* (*Ecl.* 2.53), and the mention of these fruits perhaps refers back (*Ecl.* 2.16) - ‘quamuis ille niger’ - plums being dark, in which case *pomo* could look back to ‘quamuis tu candidus esse’, if it were a pale apple. Just as giving a fruit to someone was a sign of love, so giving presents was part of the art of courtship. This passage not only illustrates the great wealth of plants that Virgil could muster, but also his great skill in weaving them into his poetry to provide colour, texture and allusion.

All these plants are native to the Mediterranean. The poetry of Virgil and Theocritus is rich in plants, trees and herbs. Conversely Calpurnius and Nemesianus include considerably fewer flora in their eclogues, whilst Carolingian pastoral has only scant reference to plants. By the time the twelfth century arrives, with the anonymous ‘Altercatio Yemis et Estatic’ and the poems of Henri of Avranches, the landscape of pastoral poetry is bare and desolate. Only with the revival of pastoral poetry in the vernacular is there a renewed interest in painting a picture of the countryside, but the landscape has changed. No longer is there a feeling just for the Mediterranean, but instead the landscape familiar to the poet in question is depicted. In his poem ‘Spring’, Pope presents a very English scene: ‘Now hawthorns blossom, now the daisies spring, / The Nymphs, forsaking ev’ry cave and spring, / their early fruit, and milk-white turtles bring.’ By contrast Virgil actually used the plants found in Theocritus, expected homage to his predecessor and to this genre of writing. However, he added many other species, and so it is fair to say that, whereas Theocritus wrote very specifically about the land of his birth, Virgil’s landscapes can only be described as Mediterranean and not, as might have been expected, focussed on any particular area such as Mantua, although he does seem to draw on his knowledge of the countryside around the Po. Calpurnius and Nemesianus in their turn borrow from Virgil, but include a few details of their own. The Carolingian poets draw one or two plants from Virgil, but nothing more, except for Theodulus and his *tilia*, but this seems to be an isolated case. Yet in Alcuin (49) occurs the phrase *uirides rami*, presumably referring to branches that are green with moss, and if this is so, then this is a very northern touch, independent of the earlier tradition of pastoral landscape.¹⁴

The scenery of pastoral poetry includes ploughed fields or *arua* (*Ecl.* 1.3). To work the plough

as a farmer was noble and free, a sentiment underlined by Horace's famous poem 'beatus ille' (*Epod.* 2). Even in Alcuin (48), *requies* is to be found in these fields.¹⁵ There are also hills and rocks. Meliboeus (*Ecl.* 1.76) laments that he will never see his goats 'clambering far off on a brambly rock'. It is to the mountains that Corydon sings of his love for 'formonsum ... Alexim' (*Ecl.* 2.5), a theme to which Alcuin (1 and 47) returns.¹⁶ The landscape of these poems is well watered, as Virgil (*Ecl.* 2.59) and Theodulus (8).¹⁷ The sea is never far way either: Corydon (*Ecl.* 2.25) says that he saw his reflection on the beach and Polyphemus, as described by Theocritus (6.34-5), glimpsed his single eye reflected in the sea. Apparently it is possible to see one's reflection in the sea at the water's edge when it is very calm, although I have been thwarted so far in my attempts to see my own reflection along the Suffolk coast. And as there is only a small tide in the Mediterranean - the mean tidal range at Naples is only about 8cm, although even this was enough to allow the Roman army to storm New Carthage in 210BC according to Livy (28.45.8) - there are few rock pools to serve as a mirror. As Calpurnius (1.10) describes, here were numerous trees and woods. Meadows abound for the flocks to graze. In Nemesianus (1.32), Timetas is pleased to sing in such beautiful surroundings where the 'mollis ager' - a phrase redolent of Virgil (*Ecl.* 1042) - is covered with green grasses. Here he points out the bulls browsing quietly. Corydon (*Ecl.* 7.45) dubs the grass 'softer than sleep', an illusion to Theocritus (5.50-1). Marshland does encroach on Tityrus' pasture (*Ecl.* 1.48), but nevertheless he still possesses adequate land on which to graze his cattle. The numerous references to bog or aquatic plants show to what degree marshes were a feature of the classical pastoral landscape (e.g. Theoc. 7.133), Nemesianus (1.1) and Virgil (*Ecl.* 1.51). In Virgil (*Ecl.* 3.111) *rivi* or irrigation channels are remarked upon. These are used today, especially in southern Italy and Sicily, although now the water is carried in pipes or concrete channels to the fields; from there the water is taken, as in antiquity, along shallow trenches to the crops.

The animals that inhabit the pastoral landscape are varied and plentiful. Hybla, situated on the southern slopes of Mount Etna, is the home of the bees mentioned by Virgil (*Ecl.* 1.54), a reference perhaps to earlier pastoral because, as Columella (9.14.19) says, this area was as renowned for its honey as was Hymettus in Attica. Honey from the Greek islands of Chios and Siphnos were also prized. My copy of the Mynors edition of Virgil has a dark line along the edge of the pages of Book Four of the *Georgics*. I re-read these when travelling along the Adriatic coast of what was then Yugoslavia: only in the bars were there murmurs of the tensions that were soon to erupt in that murderous civil war. The dark line was caused by the grime on the trains and buses, but for a Roman might have presaged the darkness that was soon to cross that country. In Theocritus (7.80-1), bees are called *simai* or 'snub-nosed', an excellent description of those supposedly aerodynamically impossible creatures. Two species of birds are named in lines 57 and 58 of the First *Eclogue*. *Palumbes* can refer either to a wood-pigeon or to a ring-dove, Virgil (*Ecl.* 3.69) describing them as 'aeriae ... palumbes'. The turtle-dove is mentioned by Theocritus (7.141). In the Carolingian poets there is a newcomer to the pastoral scene, the cuckoo, although Pliny (*Nat.* 18.249) tells us that vine-dressers who were late were liable to be taunted by cries of 'cuckoo' as if the arrival of the birds had anticipated their job. The cuckoo is important in folk-lore and is a particularly northern bird. It is regarded as the herald of spring, as Thomas Nashe writes: 'Spring, the sweet Spring, is the year's pleasant king, / Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring, / Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing - / Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witte-woo!' A poem attributed to Alcuin also has a raven, another bird associated with more northern climes.¹⁸

Virgil (*Ecl.* 2.12f) mentions cicadas, bestowing on them the epithet *raucis*, a wholly apt onomatopoeia for the penetrating and persistent noise of their rasping. However, Calpurnius (5.56) is slightly kinder to them, calling them ‘argutae ... cicadae’ or merely ‘noisy cicadas’. In addition Theocritus (1.148) is by no means harsh on them. Another ubiquitous Mediterranean creature to feature in Virgil’s pastoral (*Ecl.* 2.9) is the lizard. I remember watching one from only a few metres away, basking in the midday sun among the ruins of Tiberius’ villa on Capri. They are a dull green colour and are such a common sight that Juvenal (3.231) can joke about it being better to be master of a single lizard on a farm than brave the ubiquitous hazards of metropolitan Rome.

Meliboeus (*Ecl.* 1.75f) says in pain and grief that he will never see his goats browsing on the rocky hillside again, having been forced to leave his farm. Menalcas (*Ecl.* 3.17) asks Damoetas whether or not he saw him sneaking up to cut off one of Damon’s goats. The *capreoli* (*Ecl.* 2.41) are kids of the wild she-goat *caprea*, or in other words roebucks. According to the commentator Servius, the white spots on their necks disappear after six months, and this is consistent with the fact that in the poem they are still unweaned. Corydon (*Ecl.* 2.28ff) wishes Alexis could be with him to shoot stag. After his daydreaming he suddenly realises that wild boars are paddling in his springs. Menalcas (*Ecl.* 3.75) complains that he has to watch the nets while Damoetas has all the fun chasing boars. Meliboeus (*Ecl.* 7.3) reveals that Thyrsis has sheep and Corydon has goats, whilst adding the detail that their udders are distended with milk. Sheep appear in Theodulus’ poem. Tityrus, as described by Nemesianus (1.34), shows Timetas where the cattle are chewing the grass. Damoetas (*Ecl.* 3.29ff) offers as a wager a heifer which comes to the milk pail twice a day and suckles a pair of calves as well, a sentiment reminiscent of Theocritus (1.25). Pliny (*Nat.* 8.177) says that it was rare for a heifer to produce twin calves, so this would have been a particularly special commendation.

Virgil’s landscape in the *Aeneid* is only realised sketchily. Yet here and there are pale images of his pastoral poems. Many of the references to animals belong to the stylised world of epic: heroes eating roast lamb and deer or hunting for boar and lions. But there are hints of Virgil’s fascination with the countryside: the statue of Italus, planter of the vines, standing in front of the entrance to the court of Laurentine Picus; Achaemenides living on the island of the Cyclops off stony cornel-berries and grasses torn up by the roots; the image of the strong farmers of Lydia working the rich fields of wheat. Here his preoccupations are with other themes. Food is no longer just for eating, but rather it has turned into a metaphor. While he is travelling, Aeneas survives off chunks of meat barbecued roughly by his men. It is crude and violent cuisine. What awaits him is the civilisation that will come from polite dining, the bread in baskets and the soft napkins and the changing of tables that first appears at Dido’s feast and features again when Evander entertains the Trojans. When Aeneas finally reaches his destined land, and he is eating his plates, it is with ‘pomis agrestibus’ (*A.* 7.121) that the plates of crisp bread are eaten. The world of pastoral poetry is near at hand in images of elsewhere.

A clear line of continuity may therefore be traced in pastoral, both in the different types of animals and in the wide variety of plants. There is a remarkable consistency in the depiction of what kind of place the shepherds of pastoral poetry inhabited. Although the geographical location is sometimes given, Theocritus situating some of his poems in Sicily, others in Cos or southern Italy, whilst Virgil locates his later pastoral poems in ‘Arcadia’, yet the descriptions seem to depict an

ideal Mediterranean setting, related in but few ways to the harsher realities of the true countryside. Only on one or two occasions is a glimpse provided of this side of the herdsman's life as, for example, when Virgil (*Ecl.*1.14f) depicts a goat belonging to Meliboeus producing two kids that have pathetically to be abandoned on the hard rock. Plants are not just named at random, but for a purpose, be it to create pathos, to paint a landscape, or to offer to the reader's imagination delicately beautiful and visually stunning displays of colour and form. The season forever seems to be spring or early summer, the 'formonsissumus annus' (*Ecl.* 3.57). The scenery of the countryside is rich in its hills, woods, ploughed farmland and streams. Amongst the trees, on the hillsides, or in the fields graze sheep or cattle, whilst gentle birds soar in the sky or sing. As Marlowe later wrote: 'There we will sit upon the rocks / And see the shepherds feed their flocks, / By shallow rivers to whose falls / Melodious birds sing madrigals.' We as listeners or readers are being invited into a picture, as it were, of a lovely Mediterranean setting. Just as in later mediaeval art nature became stylised and neglected, so too in poetry the delineation of the shepherds' habitat was considered of less importance than the dialogue and plot. Perhaps the later poets felt that Virgil, Theocritus, and to a lesser extent Nemesianus and Calpurnius, had exhausted this aspect of the pastoral; or more probably it was just tastes that had changed, a move away from the world around to the inner feelings.¹⁹ The evening had come to this most lovely of art forms: 'ite domum saturae, uenit Hesperus, ite capellae'.

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NOTES

- ¹ E.W. Leach *Virgil's Eclogues: Landscapes of Experience* (Ithaca and London 1974), 19
- ² Virgil *Eclogues* edited by R. Coleman (Cambridge 1977), 71
- ³ L.Fenaroli, *Guida agli Alberi d'Italia* (Firenze 1984), 103 on the multifarious uses of beech wood and R. Faber, 'Virgil *Eclogue* 3.37, Theocritus 1 and Hellenistic Ekphrasis', *AJPh* 116 (1995), 411-417 on beechwood cups.
- ⁴ L. Fenaroli, *ibid.*, 99
- ⁵ R. Coleman, *ibid.*, 98-9. G. Maggiulli (*Incipient Silvae Cum Primum Surgere: Mondo Vegetale e Nomenclatura della Flora di Virgilio* (Roma 1995), 311-2) elaborates on this debate.
- ⁶ C. Connors, 'Seeing Cypresses in Virgil', *CJ* 88 (1992), 1-17
- ⁷ E. David, *Italian Food* (Harmondsworth 1963), 296-7
- ⁸ R.P.H. Green, *Seven Versions of Carolingian Pastoral* (Reading 1980), 14 and 70.
- ⁹ *Landscapes and Seasons of the Mediaeval World* (Toronto 1973), *passim*.
- ¹⁰ D. Nardoni ('Vicis Andicus: Essay of Experimental Philology', *Helmantica* 45 (1994), 251-268) argues for the poet's birthplace as being near Castel Goffredo near Casalpoglio.
- ¹¹ For ancient forerunners of pesto, see M. Grant, *Roman Cookery: Ancient Recipes for Modern Kitchens* (London 1999), 103-4.
- ¹² E.g. J. Roth, *Weights and Measures [Das falsche Gewicht]*, translated by D. Le Vay (London 1982), 90-1.
- ¹³ P. Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis* (Cambridge 1988), 61-2
- ¹⁴ R.P.H. Green, *ibid.*, 8
- ¹⁵ R.P.H. Green, *ibid.*, 8
- ¹⁶ R.P.H. Green, *ibid.*, 7 and 8.
- ¹⁷ R.P.H. Green, *ibid.*, 26
- ¹⁸ R.P.H. Green, *ibid.*, 9
- ¹⁹ J. Sargeant, *The Trees, Shrubs and Plants of Virgil* (Oxford 1920), 2-3 remarks on this paucity of external nature in later poetry.