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VIRGIL'S HERITAGE ON THE FLOOR

Based on the publication and study of new fragments from Virgil's Georgics discovered in the uilla of Caserío Silverio in Cordoba, the author proposes for the first time a global interpretation of all the quotes from Virgil's works found on mosaic floors preserved all over the Roman world.

Keywords: Virgil's tradition, latin epigraphy, epigraphy on mosaic floors.

Some months ago I had the opportunity to publish and comment *in extenso* on the most recent find I know of with a mosaic inscription quoting lines from Virgil's poems¹. These were the remains of three verses that, in my opinion, are of considerable importance, as they contain fragments of Virgil's Fourth Georgic, seen for the first time on a mosaic. They are closely linked to the story of Aristaeus and Cyrene and offer the intuition of an iconic-literary catalogue of nymphs in a Late Antiquity setting: the *pars urbana* of the *uilla* of Caserío Silverio (Cordoba province) in which water is also present. This aquatic iconography is dominated by *Pater Tiberinus* in the setting of a peristyle and a well in a geographic zone that is also crossed by several watercourses. The quotes are:

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¹ *Virgilio musivo en Antequera*, in M.I. CISNEROS - L.-E. FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ - M. ROMERO PÉREZ, *La villa romana de Caserío Silverio*, Chapitel, Antequera, 2014, pp. 159-171. ISBN 978-84-616-7393-3.

A.1. [- - -]anto *Cyrene soror*

A.2. *Vnde pater Tiberinu[s - - -]*

A.3. [- - -]m per c[an?]d[ida- - -?]

A.1. corresponds to the last spondee of Verse 353, Book 4 of Virgil's *Georgics* and the spondee + dactylic sequence of v. 354. The text has an interruption in the part before ...*tanto*, meaning that we cannot rule out any hypothesis as to which part of the previous verse or verses was quoted. A logical syntactical sequence could have been *Et procul*: "*o gemitu non frustra exterrita tanto, // Cyrene soror* (vv. 353-354): *Ēt prōcūl: "ō gēmītū nōn frūstra ēxtērrītā tānto, // Cŷrēnē sōrōr, īpsē tībī, tūā mǎximā cūra*. From the epigraphic perspective, it is clear that the verse is interrupted after *soror* and that there is no desire to continue with Verse 354.

Text A.2. corresponds to the beginning of Verse 369, Book 4 of the *Georgics*. The conservation of the floor interrupts the text, so we do not know if the mosaic maker wished to continue Virgil's verse, and if so, until where. Metric logic (which does not continue in A.1 ...) would dictate that perhaps the entire verse had been copied here, because if we look at the caesuras, the grammatical sequence would have been interrupted after the trochaics. *Pater* marks the triemimer and -nus the trochaics: *Ůndě pătěr // Tīběrīnūs ēt ůnde Āniēnǎ flūēnta*. We cannot rule out, of course, that *Tiberinus* is the end of the composition, as its last (short) syllable coincides with the pause of the trochaics. From the point of view of the epigraphic arrangement it is clear that the verse begins from where we can read it and that there is no text before it. Given that A.1. ends abruptly, neither can we risk suggesting that A.2. would have ended with the complete verse: *Vnde pater Tiberinus [et unde Aniena fluenta?]*.

A.3. corresponds to the middle of v. 337, also from Book 4 of the *Georgics*. In what we can read of the fragment, the preposition *per* stands out, framed by the pentemimer and heptemimer caesuras of that verse: *Cǎsǎriēm ēffūsǎē nītīdām pēr cǎndīdǎ cōlla*. Judging by the preserved remains, it is possible that this verse at least was copied in full; from a grammatical point of view, it makes little sense to separate the adjective *nitidam* from its noun *caesariem*, which is also an accusative of relation of part of the preserved text, *per candida [colla]*.

When we come across new quotes from an author such as Virgil in a context that could appear to us (from the preserved archaeological and epigraphic remains known to date) to be original and with a chronology (in this case the 3rd century AD) that takes us closer to the original, the classical philologist tends to contextualise its comprehension.

This occurs, in the first place, due to knowing the use of Virgil's references: Is it original? What are its sources? Is he practising here as a *poeta nouus* or a *poeta eruditus*? Let's see.

For A.1.: the first author to use *Cyrene* as a *mater* or *soror* (she was both) is Virgil: in *G.*, 4, 321; *G.*, 4, 354; in *G.*, 4, 376 and in *G.*, 4, 530. Following him, STAT., *Silu.*, 2, 6, 67 (bears no relationship to the Virgilian context: toponym). STAT., *Silu.*, 5, 3, 108 and SIL., *Pun.*, 3, 252, follow in Cyrene's mythographic footsteps, while AVIEN., *Orb. terr.* 318, returns to toponymy. VICTOR., *Vita Dom.* 86 and PRISC., *Peri heg.*, 197, speak of the qualities of the area of Cyrenaica.

In his narration of the episode of Aristaeus in the passage of the Georgics from which our verse is taken, Virgil depicts Cyrene as a water nymph who lives under the waters of the river ruled by her grandfather Peneus, the place in which all the rivers meet before ascending and showing their course across the land (following verses, with the catalogue of rivers). Virgil, with the purpose of using the names *Cyrene* and *Tiberinus* in a water-themed mosaic such as that of Antequera, insists on Cyrene's status as the granddaughter of the river god Peneus and Creusa (or Phylira) and not on other circumstances of Cyrene's mythography, such as her establishment in Libya or her savage, hunter aspect.² Virgil is in fact the first Latin poet to speak of that family relationship of the nymph.

For A.2., and the use of *pater Tiberinus*, there are only two references: that of Virgil himself in that verse of *G.* and that of OV., *Epiced. Drusi*, 221, *Ipse pater flauis Tiberinus adhorruit undis*. Once again it is clear that it is Virgil's model that sets the framework for the subsequent tradition. It goes without saying that there are multiple references for *Tiberinus* and it is not necessary to quote them.

According to Mynors, the commentator of reference for Virgil's Georgics, "if Cyrene is a daughter of Hypseus king of the Lapithae, as in Pindar *Pyth.*, 9, 13-18, Peneus is her grandfather, and *genitor* (v. 355) expresses respect, as in A. 8.72 (of the Tiber). But Schol. in Ap. Rhod. 2. 498-527 a and c shows that some held him to be her father, and Hesiod in his catalogue of heroines may well have thought so... this is probably the form of the story which V. follows"³. Whether as the daughter of Peneus (in this case Virgil's source would have been Hesiod) or as the granddaughter of the same river god (the source in that case would have been Pindar), it is obvious (from the use of these Virgilian names to illustrate a story in mosaic) that the objective was to emphasise and eulogise the aquatic lineage so to speak. In a decorative aquatic context and, perhaps, in an archaeological context of thermal baths, the reference to the first Roman author to narrate in verse the story of the nymph Cyrene as the mother of Aristaeus and daughter or granddaughter of Peneus (the place where all the rivers meet before coming to the surface) manifests a high and allusive cultural level. In other respects, the reference to father Tiber, as well as other rivers, has its origin (as Mynors accurately

² P. GRIMAL, *Dictionnaire de la Mythologie grecque et romaine*, Paris 1979⁴, pp. 111 and 252.

³ R.A.B. MYNORS, *Virgil. Georgics. Edited with a Commentary*, Oxford 1994, pp. 304-5.

points out, pp. 305-6) in the model provided for Virgil by Homer in the *Iliad* (12, 20-22) and by Hesiod in the *Theog.*, 337-45, and which continued in use until at least Claudianus (1, 256-60).

As far as A.3. is concerned, the subject proposed by Verse 337 (and its context) accurately continues the mythological-aquatic thread of the Antequeran mosaic narration taken from Virgil. As Mynors points out, vv. 333 to 344 introduce a pause and lead the reader, gently and without them being really aware of it, from reality to the myth. From the azure depths of the waters, Cyrene hears Aristaeus' cry, as Thetis heard that of Achilles in HOM., *Il.*, 1, 357-358. However the scene Virgil proposes, and our mosaic appears to follow, is a different, renovated version compared to that of Homer. Virgil's is more domestic; the nymphs named in a catalogue around Cyrene are working wool in groups of four (in the text: who knows what the images of this mosaic would show us...). Virgil's catalogue has parallels of course (HOM., *Il.*, 18, 38-49; HES., *Theog.*, 240-264 and 349-361; HOM., *Hym. Dem.*, 418-423...), but his list is unique, with names we know only thanks to this text and whose roots are probably buried deep in the lost Hellenistic tradition (MYNORS, *op. cit.*, p. 302). The fragment of verse preserved (337, *caesariem effusae nitidam per candida colla*) otherwise corresponds faithfully to one of the habitual uses of a mosaic inscription related to iconography: it probably describes, with Virgil's invaluable help, the image of the nymphs around Cyrene, "with her loose hair surrounding their white necks".

Thus it does not appear to have been mere chance that the person or persons who conceived the mosaic floor in Antequera chose precisely those verses of Virgil in which, for the first time in Rome, mention is made of *Cyrene soror* and *Tiberinus pater* and moreover a unique catalogue of names of nymphs, grouped around Cyrene, is offered.

Secondly, what happened to the possible parallels of these new texts in the world of Latin metric inscriptions on mosaic? The quotes from Virgil transmitted by the preserved Roman tessellated floors constitute the other frame of reference we need to know in order to understand (with as much precision as the preserved remains allow) the use and value given to Virgil's texts in the daily life that took place on those floors, in other words, on the inscribed mosaic floors. The *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Musiua Orbis Romani* make up a database of information that has never before been published as such, although some of its results have⁴. There are other examples – although they are few and far

⁴ A database compiled by Judith Margalef while receiving an FI predoctoral grant from the Government of Catalonia at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) in 2000 and 2001, based on my earlier compilation and analysis work (J. GÓMEZ PALLARÈS, *Carmina Latina Epi-*

between – of the use of Virgil's writings in Roman mosaics and the ultimate objective of this article, based on the new evidence from Antequera, is to bring them together for the first time and to propose, if applicable, an idea of synthesis for something that has barely been studied: the new verses of Virgil from the *uilla* of Caserío Silverio, together with those we already know of from other parts of the Roman world. The latter are Latin metric inscriptions on mosaics that have been known for many years and have been studied and published and I therefore do not intend to comment on them extensively here, as that task has already been undertaken in other publications. In contrast, my aim is to see if a joint interpretation with the new texts from Antequera can give us any new ideas about Virgil and his dissemination. These are the texts:

B.1⁵. *En perfecta cito baiaru(m) grata uoluptas!*
Vndantesque fluunt aq(uae) saxi de rupe sub ima.
Nisibus hic nostris prostratus libor anhelat.
Quisquis amat fratrum ueniat mecumq(ue) laetetur!

At Sullethum (Proconsularis), in the *frigidarium* of a 3rd-century-AD thermal baths near the coast, which may have been used by a *sodalitas*⁶, we find this collection of dactylic hexameters that contain various Virgilian references: *en perfecta*, in A., 7, 545 and 8, 612; *Baiarum* in A., 9, 710 (*Baiarum litore* says Virgil). However, it should be pointed out that in this collection of verses *grata uoluptas* is also found in the same position at the end of the verse in OV., *Ars*, 1, 347 and 2, 687. *Rupe sub ima* is A., 3, 443.

B.2⁷. *Hinc ab al[to] aquosos amara [---] campos,*
in ar[ce]m instructam cernimus tec[ita] domorum,
classes nauium, certantur aequora remis
aquarum multarum, aiuntur multitudo pomorum.
Romani proles excitat fastigia tectis.

graphica Musiva et Depicta Buecheleriana, «Habis», 21, 1990, pp. 173-203; ID., *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Musiva et Depicta Zarkeriana*, «Fauentia», 12/13, 1990/1991, pp. 373-388; ID., *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Musiva et Depicta non Buecheleriana nec Zarkeriana. I.*, «Minerva», 7, 1993, pp. 165-222 e ID., *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Musiva et Depicta non Buecheleriana nec Zarkeriana. II.*, «Fauentia», 15/1, 1993, pp. 99-123) a systematic compilation of data from the yearbooks of new epigraphic discoveries.

⁵ A reading included in *Année Épigraphique* 1968, 610. In no case do I offer my own publication with these parallels, but rather I cite the source from which I offer the text.

⁶ Vid. *Africa*, tomes VII-VIII (1982), chapitre second, "Description de l'édifice", pp. 100-101 and note 67.

⁷ *CIL* VIII, 21510; E. BIANCHI, *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Africana*, «SIFC», 18, 1917 p. 52; R. CAGNAT, «Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques», 1889, pp. 368-370 and *CLE* 295.

At Cartenna (Caesariensis), dactylic hexameters without an exact dating from the floor of a room with sea views near the port. The anonymous mosaic designer makes use of Virgil's writings on several occasions: *certantibus aequora remis* in A., 3, 668; *fastigia tectis*: in A., 2, 302 we read *summi fastigia tecti* and in A., 8, 366, *subter fastigia tecti*.

B.3⁸. *Sae...*

...

... *us*

ra

m pote

tem

te veniente di[e] te decedent[e] canebam

This is an almost illegible inscription from Lambasa (near Timgad, Numidia) from between the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. According to Zarker (op. cit.), the mosaic would have been part of the *frigidarium* in a thermal baths. The last of the preserved verses quotes VIRG., G., 4, 466 (the context is that of Orpheus and Eurydice). Apart from the verses that are also quoted literally at Caserío Silverio, Lambasa is the only example of use of the Georgics.

B.4⁹. a) *Diuidimus muros et.../...oper singula.../*

b) *Nescis quid ... beret ossis uera somnia quam/
tibi condemna ca. tantum repones poes.*

One of the fragments of the mosaic found in Estada (Huesca, Caesaraugustanus), perhaps from a Roman *uilla* (although the excavation does not allow this to be confirmed) datable from the 4th century AD, is a literal quotation from VIRG., A., 2, 234: *diuidimus muros et moenia pandimus urbis*.

B.5¹⁰. *Invida si ta[uri] uidisset Iuno natatus
iustius Aeolias isset adusque domos.*

This case is different to the others. We have neither a literal quote, nor a generic use of the Virgilian legacy, but rather a mixture of the two. In it the anonymous artist combines the way of describing Aeolias' house and the torment caused by

⁸ E. ALBERTINI, *Une inscription sur mosaïque de Corneille (Algerie)*, «BCTH», 1927, p. 475-478; *AEP* 1927, 15; R. CAGNAT, *Rapport sur les travaux des fouilles*, «BCTH», 1926, p. 135; J. W. ZARKER, *Studies in the Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, Diss., Princeton 1958, n. 57.

⁹ J. GÓMEZ PALLARÈS, *Epigrafià cristiana sobre mosaico de Hispania*, Rome 2002, HU7, pp. 41-56.

¹⁰ ZARKER, op. cit. nota 8, n. 121.

Juno (in A., 1, 50 ss, which speaks of the house of the god of wind, *Aeoliam uenit*) with the movement caused on the surface of the sea by Jupiter's kidnapping of Europa, which Ovid explains in his *Fasti*. It is a floor in the *uilla* of Lullingstone Park, Britannia, in an apse-shaped representational room that can be dated to the 4th century AD¹¹.

It must be stated that few conclusions can be drawn from the use of Virgil's legacy in Roman mosaics, as there are very few examples of it. But I have presented and referenced those that there are as an assemblage in this article. Based on them we can propose the following:

1. Virgil's texts are almost always used to support the iconography proposed by the mosaic: A.1-A.3, B. and B.2 (partially because they are not literal quotes), B.3 and B.4 a). They are not isolated references, but rather should be read as a text in support of an iconography.
2. When we know the iconography of these mosaics well and can read and understand the Virgilian context used, what predominates is the aquatic element, either because the subject and the text propose it, or because the location of the floor suggests it. A.1.-A.3. would be the first case in an area distanced from the sea, but near various rivers. B.1 and B.2 would also be the first case, but near the sea.
3. No unique conclusions can be drawn as to why Virgil is quoted and not another author. Perhaps the general conclusion in this respect is that which I will propose at the end of this article. However, we can see two trends. In some cases, the literal quote from Virgil appears to be the cause, motive and theme of the iconography. For me, this clearly appears to be the case with A.1-A.3; if it were not for the catalogue of nymphs and the description of the meeting of rivers before coming to the surface together with Father Tiber, I doubt that an iconography such as that we can now partially admire at Caserío Silverio would have been proposed. I also believe that B.4. corresponds to the same criterion: if Virgil had not described in those terms the beginning of the fall of Troy at the moment in which the horse is taken inside the walled perimeter of the city, the anonymous mosaic artist would never have proposed an iconography such as the one we see in Estada (with the tremendous complexity that involved and which I do not go into here as I have already analysed it in depth in the study cited in Footnote 9). In those cases, therefore, it may be said that Virgil's text is an inspirer of iconographies, in addition to helping (with the presence of inscriptions) the reader/viewer's thorough comprehension of the mosaic assemblage.

¹¹ R. P. WRIGHT, *Roman Britain in 1949*, «JRS», 40, 1950, p. 117; *AEp* 1951, 131.

In contrast, there are other cases in which Virgil can clearly be understood as a complement, a didactic complement to an iconography that could easily stand on its own, aimed at giving it a more precise meaning for the viewer: I suggest B.1. and B.2. are along those lines.

4. Due to the small number of preserved references, I do not believe we can make any pronouncements as to why the Aeneid was quoted more often than the Georgics; or why we find no mention of the Bucolics... I fear that the whims of preservation and archaeological finds distort and determine what little understanding we have, beyond what is said in Point 3.
5. In terms of the chronology, I believe prudence dictates that we should make the same consideration as in Point 4. The general tendency of what is preserved in mosaic floors is maintained here (3rd-4th centuries AD), but the cases are so few that nothing can be confirmed.

The final conclusion on the use of Virgil's heritage in the tessellated floors of post-classical Rome contributes to reinforcing ideas that we have already documented and taken in to a large degree. On the one hand, that Virgil is the best known and most quoted Latin poet in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, as well as on mosaics;¹² on the other, that the Roman teaching model proposed the explanation and commentary of the great authors of Greece and Rome as a basic learning method.¹³ Among those authors, Virgil was the main protagonist in the schools, whatever the age or academic level of pupils and students. Virgil was present in all areas of civic life, simply because many had learned his verses by heart as they studied them. From the brick of Itálica¹⁴; the rock inscription of Peñalba de Villastar¹⁵; and B.4 in this article, to the Tavern of the Seven Sages in Ostia Antica¹⁶ (one of the paintings in the tavern states *Vergilium legis(se) pueris*), Virgil was quoted because he was part of the basic education of Rome. And his legacy was also on the floors they walked over and in the rooms they lived in.

¹² R.P. HOOGMA, *Der Einfluss Vergils auf die Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, Amsterdam 1959. To corroborate the state of affairs described by Hoogma, you only have to read the list of contents of *CIL* XVIII/2, on the *CLE Hispaniae*, whose material can be consulted at www.clehispaniae.com.

¹³ H.-I. MARROU, *Historia de la educación en la Antigüedad*, Buenos Aires 19763, pp. 342-246.

¹⁴ *CIL* II, 4967.

¹⁵ ZARKER, *op. cit.*, n. 55.

¹⁶ *AEp* 1939, 162; *AEp* 1941, 5; A. W. VAN BUREN, *New Items from Rome*, «AJA», 42, 1938, p. 409; CH. PICARD, *Hygiène et sagesse chez les Romains*, «RA», 6 ser., 12, 1938, p. 252; G. CALZA, *Die Taberne der Sieben Weise in Ostia*, «Die Antike», 15, 1939, p. 99-115.