THE LIFE OF VERGIL:
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE HISTORICAL SOURCES.

by

EDWIN STEPHEN RAMAGE

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
CLASSICS

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
September, 1952
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ABSTRACT

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We must depend mainly upon the so-called historical sources for the life of Vergil. These are divided into three groups—inscriptions, references in various writers and the Vitae Vergilianae. The first two groups are limited in their usefulness. Each of the Vitae has obvious flaws, the Donatus-Suetonius Life being the most complete. Our purpose will be to examine the many problems posed by these historical sources, offering solutions where possible, but always remembering that to most of the questions raised there is no satisfactory answer.

Vergil was born on the Ides of October (Suetonius, Vita Bernensis, Probus, Ausonius), in 70 B.C. (all the sources), somewhere near Mantua and perhaps at Andes. His father's name may have been either Maro, Vergilius, Istimichon, or Stimichon. His mother's name was Maia, Magia, or Magia Polla. His father was either a potter, a cultor agelli, or a hireling of Magius, being probably of Etruscan origin.

Vergil studied first at Cremona, going to Milan when he was fifteen or sixteen, and to Rome a short while later.

At Rome he studied under the Epicurean Siro (Focas, Servius) and perhaps under Epidius (Vita Bernensis).

His first piece of writing was a distich on Ballista and perhaps he wrote the Culex (Suetonius, Servius, Focas, Donatus Auctus, Martial, Statius) and maybe the Catalepton or part of them.

Soon he became involved in the confiscations. There
are a number of problems raised by the historical sources regarding this period of his life. Did these confiscations take place after Philippi, Mutina, or Actium? Were Pollio, Varus and Gallus in charge, or Pollio and Gallus, or Pollio and later Varus? Was the Mantuan land confiscated because of its proximity to Cremona, because the Mantuans were partisan to Antony, or because they had remained neutral? What were the circumstances surrounding the attack on Vergil's person? Did he win back his farm or was he reimbursed for the loss of it? Was there only one eviction or were there two?

He may have begun his Eclogues in 42 B.C., but he more probably began them in 41. The order of writing seems to have been: IX, I, IV, VI, VIII, X. The others cannot be dated.

Between 40 and 38 B.C. Vergil left Mantua for Rome and Naples, coming at this time into the Augustan Circle. He began his Georgics in 38 or 37 B.C. at Naples, and it took him seven years to complete them, for he travelled and also seems to have written at a very slow rate. They may have been read to Augustus after Actium (Suetonius).

About 30 B.C. Vergil began the Aeneid, which Augustus was eager to hear (Suetonius). In 26 B.C. Vergil read either the Second, Fourth and Sixth Books or the Third, Fourth and Sixth Books to him and Octavia.

Vergil travelled to Greece in 19 B.C. to revise his Aeneid, but Augustus, meeting him at Athens, persuaded him to return to Italy. Vergil fell ill at Megara and died at
Brundisium on September twenty-first (Suetonius, Filar-gyrius), 19 B.C. (Probus, Filargyrius, Jerome). Probably he was buried somewhere near Naples.

Vergil was a large man of dark complexion, with a somewhat rustic appearance and was never in perfect health. He was slow of speech, modest and restrained, but he had faults and even had made a number of enemies. In addition, he was not above retaliating when angered.
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The life of Vergil has from early times been a subject for much debate and as a result no one has ever succeeded in writing a complete or adequate biography of the great Roman poet. The main reason for the uncertainty that surrounds the life of Vergil is the lack of adequate source material. Though he wrote more than twelve thousand lines of poetry, most of them about his native Italy and many of them about his birthplace and the haunts of his youth and later years, Vergil makes no more than three or four direct references that are useful in determining events in his life.

Because of this objectivity of the poet, we must turn almost entirely from the Eclogues, Georgics and Aeneid to what we may call the historical sources to try to piece together a life of Vergil. The historical sources may be divided into three groups. In ascending order of importance they are first, inscriptions, secondly, references to
Vergil contained in the works of writers contemporary with and succeeding the poet, and thirdly, the Vitae Vergilianae.

It will perhaps be profitable to discuss these three sources in a general way before attempting to ascertain what facts we may gather from them. Inscriptions are useful mainly in attempting to determine the racial origin and the social standing of Vergil and his family. The Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum must not be relied upon, however, to answer by itself the questions that arise concerning the rank and stock of the poet. The information offered by the Corpus may be used only to augment that offered by the other historical sources and is, therefore, limited in its usefulness.

More important are the incidental references that are to be found in the various writers' works. This group of historical sources may be sub-divided in turn into two more groups, the one consisting of those writers who were contemporary with Vergil and the other of those who lived after the poet. The first sub-group is a rather small one, for Horace, Propertius and Ovid are the only contemporaries of Vergil who mention him in their works. Even here Ovid and Propertius, as we shall see later, offer us little information about the poet, while Horace, though in comparison with these other writers he seems to tell us a lot, could have told us a lot more. We find more evidence in the works of those writers who followed the poet. Among
the latter are Martial, Silius Italicus, Claudianus, Aulus Gellius, Ausonius, and Macrobius, though, of course there are many others. The number of writers who mention Vergil is fairly large, then, but each individual writer rarely makes more than one or two useful references.

The most important of the historical sources are the *Vitae Vergilianae*. It would be impossible to go into an exhaustive discussion here of the merits and demerits of each of the Lives. Dr. Ernst Diehl has edited the most important of them, adding a commentary in German, while Henry Nettleship has collected a fewer number of them, appending an English commentary and an illuminating essay on the life of Vergil. In Diehl's collection we find the 1 *Donatus-Suetonius Life*, the *Donatus Auctus Life*, the metrical version by Focas, those shorter *Lives* written by Servius, Probus and Filargyrius, as well as the *Vita Bernensis*, *Vita Monacensis* and the *Vita Noricensis*. Nettleship in his shorter collection has included the *Lives* by Suetonius, Servius and Probus, as well as the *Vita Bernensis*.

As we have said, it would be impossible in so short a time and so small a space to judge these *Lives* individually,

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1 Nowadays it is generally agreed that Suetonius and not Donatus was the author of this *Life*. Therefore, in the following pages, when reference is made to the *Life* written by Suetonius, that going under the name of Donatus-Suetonius in Diehl's collection will be the one that is meant.
but we may pause a moment to notice the obvious flaws in each of them. The Donatus-Suetonius Life seems to be the fullest and most reliable. It is true that superstition does enter this Life, but on the whole the writer is careful to put forward facts and not mere superstition. The Donatus Auctus Life, on the other hand, is next to useless for our study, for it is essentially the latter Life with superstitious anecdotes added at various points.

The Life alleged to be Focas' is fairly reliable, but because he has had to fit the facts into dactylic hexameters, Focas' version of the life of Vergil is for the most part rather vague.

Servius' Life is also fairly reliable, agreeing in most respects with Suetonius' Life, though it is not as complete as the latter. The Vita Bernensis and those of Filargyrius and Probus are, like the Servian Life, rather short and incomplete.

The Vita Monacensis and Vita Noricensis are apparently written in the accepted journalistic style of that time in order to catch the interest of the reader. The former contains a fair amount of superstitious lore and in addition is rather disorganized. The same is true of the Vita Noricensis, though in this Life the author tries to keep a little more to the facts.

It is for the most part impossible to determine upon what sources each of the authors of the Lives depended. Suetonius at times tells us on whom he is relying for what
he has to say, but such references are the exception rather than the rule.

We cannot here decide, either, which are the independent Lives and which Lives depend upon the others for their subject matter. But, as we have already said, the Donatus-Suetonius Life is the fullest and most reliable, and for that reason may be the parent of some or all of the others.

Here we have the historical sources, the material we must use in piecing together a life of Vergil. But, as we shall see, these sources often fail us, for at one time none of them will contain any reference to a certain phase of the poet's life, while at another time the evidence offered by one source will conflict with that put forward by another. It will be our purpose, then, to present these problems as we come upon them, offering plausible solutions where possible, but always remembering that to most of the questions raised there is no satisfactory answer.
Chapter II.

VERGIL'S BIRTH, FAMILY, AND RACIAL STOCK.

All the Lives, both those considered important and those considered unimportant, agree that Vergil was born in the year when Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus and Marcus Licinius Crassus were Consuls, or, in other words, in the year 70 B.C. Certain of the Lives go even further and give Vergil's day of birth as the Ides of October. In the latter group are the Donatus-Suetonius Life, the Vita Bernensis, and the Life prefixed by Probus to his Commentary on the Aeneid.

Not only are the authors of the Ancient Lives unanimous on the question of Vergil's birthdate, but they are in complete agreement with the other writers who make reference to the poet's birthdate. Saint Jerome in his edition of Eusebius' Chronicon gives Vergil's year of birth as 70 B.C.


2 Ernst Diehl, Die Vitae Vergilianae und ihre antiken Quellen, Bonn, A. Marcus and E. Weber, 1911, p. 8.

3 Ibid., p. 44. 4 Ibid., p. 45. 5 A. Abr. 1948.
Phlegon, Prosper Tiro, Bede, Julianus, and Maximinus, all of whom wrote after Suetonius and perhaps drew upon him, place the poet's birth in 70 B.C., as do the Chronica Gallica, the Chronicon Paschale and the Consularia Constantinopolitana.6

Regarding the actual day of Vergil's birth, Martial in one of his epigrams has the following lines;

\[
\text{Octobres Maro consecravit Idus.} \\
\text{Idus saepe colas et has et illas,} \\
\text{Qui magni celebras Maronis Idus.} \tag{7}
\]

Again, Ausonius tells us that

\[
\text{Octobres olim genitus Maro dedicat idus.} \tag{8}
\]

Therefore, we find that the amount of evidence in favour of placing Vergil's birth on the Ides of October, 70 B.C., is overwhelming and the complete lack of any evidence to the contrary leaves little doubt that this is the correct date.

Establishing the birthdate of the Roman poet is much easier than establishing his birthplace. All eight of the more important Lives agree that he was born in the vicinity of Mantua, while five of these state that he was born in a town or village called Andes. There seems to be, however, some disagreement amongst these Lives as to what kind of a settlement Andes was. The Donatus-Suetonius Life describes it as a pagus 9 as does Filargyrius 10 along with the authors

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7 Epigrams XII, LXVII, 11. 3-5. 8 Epistles 21, 1. 25.
9 Diehl, op. cit., p. 8. 10 Ibid., p. 45.
of the *Vita Monacensis* 11 and the *Vita Noricensis*. 12 Probus, however, a grammarian who is not prone to making mistakes, describes Andes as a *vicus*. 13 Now it may be that by the time the various Lives came to be written, the *pagus* and *vicus* which in classical times had been thought of as two different kinds of settlements had come to be regarded as being much the same. If this is the case, then this seeming disagreement between the Lives can be disregarded. On the other hand, it is equally possible that each word kept its original meaning and that the authors of the Lives were thinking of Andes in different terms.

The Ancient Lives, too, seem to be at variance as to the exact location of Andes. All agree that it was somewhere near Mantua, but the versions vary all the way from "*iuxta Mantuam*" of the *Vita Monacensis* 14 to the view of Probus who places Andes thirty miles distant from Mantua. 15

The *Donatus-Suetonius* Life gives Andes' position as "... a Mantua non procul," 16 while Filargyrius 17 and the author of the *Vita Noricensis* 18 place Andes "... haud procul a Mantua."

Probus' estimate of thirty miles as the distance between Andes and Mantua we must reject, for Mantua had only a small

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11 Loc. cit. 12 Ibid., p. 49, where St. Jerome is quoted.
13 Ibid., p. 43. 14 Ibid., p. 45.
15 Ibid., p. 43. 16 Ibid., p. 8.
17 Ibid., p. 45. 18 Ibid., p. 49.
territory. Therefore, if Andes had been thirty miles from that town, it is hardly possible that the poet would have written in his epitaph "Mantua me genuit" as some of the Lives suggest. Moreover, we should not expect Martial to make such statements as

Marone felix Mantua est.

and

Tantum magna suo debet Verone Catullo.
Quantum parva suo Mantua Vergilio,

if he was born a whole thirty miles from the latter town. Moreover, Apuleius describes Vergil as being "Mantuanus poeta," while Silius Italicus speaks of Vergil in the following terms:

Mantua mittenda certavit pube Cremonae,
Mantua, Musarum domus atque ad sidera cantu
evecta Aonio et Smyrnaeis aemula plectris.

Even as early as Ovid we find that Vergil is closely connected with Mantua.

The evidence, then, seems to point to a location for Andes fairly close to Mantua. According to tradition, the present-day Pietole stands on the spot where Andes once stood;

19 Henry Nettleship, op. cit., p. 33.
20 Diehl, op. cit., p. 18 (Donatus-Suetonius); p. 32 (Donatus Auctus); p. 43 (Servius); p. 44 (Probus); p. 45 (Filar-gyrius); p. 49 (Vita Noricensis).
21 Epigrams, I, LXI, 1.2. 22 Ibid., XIV, CXCV, 11. 1f.
25 Amores III, XV, 1. 7: Mantua Vergilio, gaudet Verona Catullo.
the latter in this case would have been only to or three miles from Mantua. Many attempts have been made to show that Pietole is not the site of his birth, \(^26\) but until more definite proof against this site is brought forward, we should perhaps follow tradition and place Andes here.

Having definitely established Vergil's birthdate from our historical sources and having accepted with certain limitations Andes in its traditional location as his birthplace, we may now pass on to a discussion of Vergil's family.

When attacking the problem of Vergil's family, we immediately are faced with a number of difficulties. First of all, our historical sources offer us little direct information. Except for an unreliable reference in Macrobius \(^27\) and another in Acron, \(^28\) we must once again depend mainly upon the Ancient Lives for our information. But the Lives in turn present us with another problem inasmuch as they do not agree on many points. For instance, Focas gives Vergil's father the name of Maro, \(^29\) while Servius says his name was Vergilius. \(^30\)


\(^27\) Saturnalia V,II, 1.


\(^29\) Diehl, op. cit., p. 37. \(^30\) Ibid., p. 40.
Suetonius, Filargyrius, and the *Vita Bernensis* do not even attempt to name the parent, while the *Vita Monacensis* calls him *Istimichon* 31 and the *Vita Noricensis*, *Stimichon*. 32

It is very probable, then, that by the time the various *Lives* came to be written it was not known for sure just what had been the name of Vergil's father. We may reasonably conjecture, however, that the father, following precedent, gave his own *nomen* and *cognomen* to his son. There is a slight possibility that an inscription allegedly found at or near the present site of Pietole refers to Vergil's father. 33 If so, then it would lend support to our conjecture. However, we cannot prove that it does refer to the poet's father. Perhaps it is best not to draw any conclusions on this point, but rather to agree with the author of the *Vita Noricensis* who says:

\[
\text{Quis pater eius fuit [sic] incertum est.} 34
\]

We have less trouble in determining the name of Vergil's mother from the *Lives*. The *Donatus-Suetonius Life* and the *Vita Bernensis* do not mention her by name; the *Life* which goes under the name of *Donatus Auctus* refers to her as *Maia*, 35

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31 Ibid., p. 45. 32 Ibid., p. 49.

33 C.I.L. V, 3827: M • VERGILIO • M • F
ANTHLOC • VNILENITIO
SIBI • ET • PAMPHILIO

34 Diehl, *op. cit.*, p. 50. 35 Ibid., p. 27.
as do the *Vita Monacensis* 36 and the *Vita Noricensis*, 37 while Focas says of her:

mater Polla fuit Magii non infima proles. 38

Servius gives her name as *Magia* 39 and Probus as *Magia Polla*. 40 Filargyrius, though he does not mention her name in his version of Vergil's life, in his *Commentary* refers to her as *Magia*. 41

The evidence, then, is for the most part in favour of her name being *Maia* or *Magia Polla*. *Maia* is probably a corruption of *Magia*, while the second name, *Polla*, given to her by some of the *Lives*, probably means "the younger."

Once again, however, as in the case of Vergil's father, we are plagued by a complete lack of any references whatsoever to his mother in the earlier extant literature: we have to accept the name *Magia Polla* on the authority of the *Lives* alone.

The task of identifying Vergil's parents is by no means an easy one, but even more difficult is that of identifying the other members of his immediate family: that is, if there were any others. 42 Our historical sources make little mention of Vergil's having any brothers and no mention at all of his

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36 Ibid., p. 45. 37 Ibid., p. 49. 38 Ibid., p. 38.
39 Ibid., p. 40. 40 Ibid., p. 43.
42 It is my personal belief that Vergil was an only son.
having any sisters. Suetonius alone states that Vergil had two brothers, Silo and Flaccus, both of whom died fairly early in life, and that Vergil is lamenting the death of the latter in Eclogue V. This is probably an assumption and we must be very careful of accepting as fact any assumption based upon an interpretation of any of the Eclogues. Perhaps Suetonius had other evidence which he thought proved that Vergil had two brothers who died early. However, we do not have this evidence or any suggestion that it ever existed and in view of the fact that Acron is the only other of our historical sources that even suggests that Vergil may have had a brother, we must be careful not to draw any conclusions.

Another vexing question to which the historical sources give us no satisfactory answer is that of the social standing of Vergil's family in their community. Evangelus, speaking of Vergil in Macrobius' Saturnalia, says with a note of contempt in his voice that Vergil was born "rusticis parentibus." Again, Suetonius at the beginning of the Life ascribed to him makes reference to the vocation of

43 Diehl, op. cit., p. 12.

44 Horace, Carm. I, XXIV, 11.5-12, speaks of a Vergilius grieving over the death of a Quintilius. Macleane in a note on this passage (op. cit., p. 55) says:

The Scholiast Acron says that some supposed that he was Virgil's brother, which notion plainly arose from the language Horace uses in this ode.

Macleane then goes on to say that Quintilius was a close neighbour of Vergil at Cremona.

45 Saturnalia V, II, I.
Vergil's father in the following terms:

P. Vergilius Mantuanus parentibus modicis fuit ac praecipue patre, quem ouidam opificem figulum, plures Magi cuiusdam viatoris initio mercennarum, mox ob industriam generum tradiderunt, egregiea substantiae silvis coemendis et apibus curandis auxisse reculam. 46

Focas also gives two different opinions as to the rank of the poet's father:

huic genitor figulus, Maro nomine, cultor agelli ut referunt alii tenui mercede locatus, sed plures figulum. 47

The Vita Monacensis states that the father of Vergil was a figulus, 48 while Servius and Filargyrius along with the authors of the Vita Bernensis and the Vita Noricensis do not mention his calling. According to the Lives that do mention the father's position, then, he was probably a potter: but it is also possible according to these Lives that he was either a merchant hired by a certain Magius or else that he was the proprietor of a small farm.

The latter alternative we can perhaps disregard, for would it not be impossible for a small peasant farmer to send his son to be educated at some of the best schools that Italy of that time had to offer? On the other hand, if he were a potter, it is possible that he would have the money necessary for the education of his son, since this trade was flourishing in northern Italy at this time. 49

account for a potter's marrying the daughter of a Magius, the member of a \textit{gens} famous throughout Italy? 50 Possibly he was no mere potter, but the proprietor of a factory. In this case he probably would have had business dealings with the Magii who are believed to have been closely connected with commerce. 51 Perhaps cleverest of all is Suetonius' second suggestion that the poet's father was in the beginning a hireling of Magius and that because of his industry he won the right to marry the latter's daughter. 52

Nettleship has put forward the interesting view that young Vergil's father may have bought up large tracts of forest land in the vicinity of Andes and Mantua. 53 Therefore, he may have been in the beginning a \textit{cultor agelli} and soon through his industry may have grown to be a landowner of fair means. However, the question of how he, a small farmer, managed to acquire the necessary capital to buy up this land cannot be answered.

Even if we decide that Vergil's father was poor before marriage, we may perhaps conjecture with some certainty that he was a little wealthier after marriage, for he was marrying into a branch of a family that gained importance in Augustus' system of government. 54 Suetonius' suggestion that Magius

\begin{itemize}
\item 50 Cf. \textit{C.I.L.} IX, 1125; 1140.
\item 51 Cf. Diehl, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 8 (Donatus-Suetonius). 52 \textit{Loc. cit.}
\item 53 Nettleship, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 33.
\item 54 \textit{C.I.L.} IX, 1125: M \cdot MAGIO \cdot M \cdot F \cdot MAXIMO
\item PRAEF \cdot AEGYPTI \cdot TARRACONENSES
\end{itemize}
was in a position to hire others would perhaps lend support to this view. Once again, however, it would be dangerous to draw any conclusions regarding the social position of Vergil's family. All we can do is guess, and even speculation raises many questions that cannot be answered.

Just as nothing can be proven about the social standing of the poet's family, so nothing definite can be proven about Vergil's racial origin. There are a number of theories that have been put forward, none of which we have neither time or space to examine here. A number of scholars believe Vergil may have been of Celtic stock, while others think his racial origin was Umbrian and still others, Etruscan. There have been theories proposed, too, to show that Vergil was Greek or, again, Ligurian. Most of these are based upon hypothetical derivations of the names Vergilius and Maro. Maro, for instance, may be a Greek name or, on the other hand, it may be Italian, coming from the native Italian stem Mar- which gives such native Italian names as Marus and Marius. But both Vergilius and Maro may be Ligurian names, for a Vergilius Proclus is found in the region where the Romans settled the Ligures Baebianæ and a P. Vergilius Laurea was a duumvir at Hasta, a Roman colony in Liguria. In addition,

57 Ibid., p. 3. 58 C.I.L. IX, 1455. 59 Ibid., V, 7567.
one of the family of the Titi Valerii who lived at the capital of the Ligures was called Maro. 60 Exponents of the theory that Vergil was of Celtic stock point out the fact that we find in one inscription the name Vergilia coupled with a Celtic name Catuilla 61 and in another inscription Vergilius and Gallus are joined. 62 From the foregoing examples we may see that there is little real evidence brought forward in support of these theories.

The evidence offered by our historical sources other than the Corpus point to an Etruscan origin for Vergil and his family. Eocas in his version of the poet's life says that the tellus...Tusca gave Vergil to the world, 63 and the author of the Vita Noricensis puts forward the same view only in different words. 64 Besides these important references in the Lives, there is one reference in Pliny's Natural Histories that is worth quoting here at length:

In mediterraneo regionis decimae coloniae Cremona, Brixia Cenomanorum agro, Venetorum autem Ateste et oppida Acelum, Patavium, Opitergium, Velunum, Vicetia, Mantua Tuscorum trans Padum sola reliqua. 65

The first two references, it is true, do not occur in the most reliable of the Lives, but we cannot ignore them. If we are going to disregard them, we must account for the occurrence in these Lives of references to the poet's racial origin which do not occur in any of the other extant Lives.

60 Ibid., V, 7681. 61 Ibid., V, 4137. 62 Ibid., IX, 1085. 63 Diehl, op. cit., p. 37. 64 Ibid., p. 50, 1.21. 65 Natural Histories III, 130.
Perhaps Focas is using a poetical generalization and is calling a part of Italy Etruscan which he knows is not Etruscan at all. But is it possible that he would call a land so far north of Etruria Etruscan, even if he were yielding to poetic license? It is possible that he knew of an established tradition that gave Vergil an Etruscan origin, or on the other hand he may have had access to some primary source which is now lost. All we can do is speculate, for to draw any conclusions about Focas' sources is completely impossible.

Paulus' Life again is on the whole not very reliable. However, in the last paragraph but one he offers us in the first sentence a short summary of Vergil's life. Here the facts put forward agree in the main with those put forward by the other Lives. It is significant that it is at this point in his Life of Vergil that Paulus makes mention of Vergil's being born genere Tusco.

We now come to the third reference in our historical sources, which is perhaps even more important than the other two. Pliny is on the whole a reliable author. Here he is merely cataloguing towns and adds by way of interest another piece of information. There seems to be no reason for us to disbelieve him when he says Mantua was a colony of the Tuscans.

We should perhaps accept as genuine these three references, for we possess nothing in either the Lives or

66 Diehl, op. cit., p. 50, l. 20.
in the other extant classical literature that refutes the statements of these three authors. The fact that Vergil was born in the territory of Mantua, an Etruscan foundation, would suggest, then, an Etruscan origin for the poet, although it proves nothing definite.

The Corpus lends additional support to the theory that Vergil was of Etruscan origin. There are in all ten Vergilii found in Etruria. 67 Four Vercili are found at Clusium, two of whom have the Etruscan names Vipinal and Thania. Again, at Ostia we find the name Vergilius coupled once with Leonas and again with Priape, both of which are possibly Etruscan names.

The name Maro, too, appears in a number of inscriptions. Miss. Gordon believes that it is a name which the Etruscans borrowed from the Umbrians or vice versa. 68 She goes on to say that the aedileship of the Etruscans seems to be closely connected with this name and that perhaps it originally stood for the name of a priesthood. However, we can prove nothing conclusive on this point.

Therefore, the arguments based upon inscriptions are as suggestive of a Ligurian or Celtic origin for Vergil as they are of an Etruscan origin. However, the two references in the Lives and the one in Pliny's work coupled with this evidence offered by the Corpus argue in favour of an Etruscan origin

67 I follow at this point Mary L. Gordon, op. cit., pp. 5f.
68 Ibid., pp. 3f.
We have now seen a few of the many problems that confront us when we examine the historical sources for the life of Vergil. Very little is known about the poet's birth and about his family. We have no difficulty in establishing his date of birth as the Ides of October, 70 B.C. and we do know that he was in all probability born at Andes. But what kind of a town was Andes and where was it situated in relation to Mantua? When we come to investigate Vergil's family we are once again at a loss on many points. Who was Vergil's father and what was the latter's calling? Did the poet have any brothers or sisters? These are all questions to which we can find no satisfactory answer in our historical sources. Vergil's mother, if we are to believe the Lives, was Magia Polla, a member of a gens well known in Italy. However, we know nothing more about her. The poet's family seems to have been of Etruscan stock, but once again we can find no evidence which shows conclusively that this is so.
Chapter III.

VERGIL'S EDUCATION AND EARLY WRITINGS.

The historical sources for the life of Vergil offer us no information regarding his life previous to his twelfth year. In that year, according to Jerome, the young poet was studying at Cremona. Presumably his mother and father had been able to give him what education he needed up to this time and now in 58 B.C. his formal education had begun. The Ancient Lives which make reference to his early education (though none of them mentions the actual year) agree that he received his first formal education at Cremona. Among these Lives are those of Suetonius and Servius along with the Vita Monacensis and the Vita Noricensis. The information offered by the latter Life we may disregard, for the author is merely quoting Jerome word for word. The Life attributed to Suetonius sheds a little light upon the length of time that Vergil studied at Cremona, for the author says:

initia aetatis Cremonae egit usque ad virilem

1 Chronicon, a. Abr. 1959.

2 Ernst Diehl ed., Die Vitae Vergilianae und ihre antiken Quellen, Bonn, A. Marcus and E. Weber, 1911, p. 49.
Servius, on the other hand, tells us nothing new when he states that Vergil et Cremonae...studuit. The author of the Vita Monacensis merely puts forward the same information in different words.

The evidence, then, points to Cremona as being the scene of Vergil's earliest formal education. We learn also from Suetonius that he stayed at Cremona until he donned the toga virilis, a view which is borne out by Jerome who says:

[Vergilius sumpta toga Mediolanum transgreditur.]

However, there arises at this point a minor difficulty, for Suetonius says that Vergil assumed the toga virilis when he was fifteen, or, in other words, in the year 55 B.C., while Jerome places Vergil's assumption of the toga virilis in his sixteenth year, or in 54 B.C. The Roman youth who was approaching manhood as a rule donned the toga virilis in either his fifteenth or sixteenth year; therefore either date may be the correct one. This discrepancy is not a very important one, however, and since none of the other historical sources offers any help on this point, it is

3 Ibid., pp. 8, 10. 4 Ibid., p. 41.
5 Ibid., p. 46: Hic primum Cremona civitate in Italia eruditus....
6 A. Abr. 1964.
impossible for us to determine which view we should accept.

The historical sources give us no further information regarding Vergil's early education at Cremona; they tell us nothing about his teachers or about his studies there. We may presume that he received much the same kind of an elementary education at Cremona as any other Roman boy of that time would receive; that is, he probably was taught the three R's and in addition a little Greek.

After completing his studies here he seems to have gone to Milan, his departure from Cremona taking place, as we have already seen, either in 55 B.C. or in 54 B.C. If our historical sources are correct, Vergil did not remain here long, for Jerome tells us that the poet moved to Milan and ...

...post breve tempus Romam pergit. 7

Suetonius, too, suggests that Vergil remained here for but a short time. 8 The author of the Vita Monacensis, evidently quoting from Jerome, mentions Vergil's going to Milan and his subsequent arrival at Rome post breve tempus. 9 These three authors are all rather vague as to how long Vergil remained here, but his stay probably did not exceed a year. What studies he pursued at this time we once again cannot tell.

Jerome, Suetonius and the author of the Vita Monacensis all agree that Vergil went from Milan to Rome to continue his

7 A. Abr. 1964.
8 Diehl, op. cit., p. 10: sed Vergilius a Cremona Mediolanum et inde paulo post transiit in urbem.
9 Ibid., p. 46.
studies. To these we may add the Vita Noricensis, where the author is still quoting Jerome, and the Life written by Focas where the latter says:

\[ \text{tum tibi Sirenem Maro contulit ipsa magistrum Roma potens...} \]

Filargyrius and Probus we may ignore, for they enlighten us not at all on this point. When we come to Servius, however, we find that he disagrees with these other versions by placing the scene of Vergil's studies after Milan at Naples. Now it is true that Vergil later in his life spent much time at Naples, and it is possible that during his stay here he carried on with his studies. It is probably this period in Vergil's life of which Servius is thinking and he is overlooking Vergil's period of study at Rome. At any rate, in view of the evidence to the contrary, we must presume that Servius is mistaken.

It was at Rome that Vergil for the first time came in contact with the Epicurean philosophy. Focas tells us that Siro, a leading Epicurean, was his teacher, as does Servius at

10 Ibid., p. 39, ll. 63f.

11 Ibid., p. 41: ...,et Cremonae et Mediolani et Neapoli studuit.


13 Diehl, op. cit., p. 39, ll. 63f.
two points in his *Commentary* on Vergil’s works. 14

According to the *Vita Bernensis*, he also studied oratory along with Augustus under Epidius, 15 while a statement of Probus would suggest that Vergil studied under other important teachers, whose names Probus does not mention. 16

His studies at Rome, then, consisted mainly of philosophy and probably included oratory. If we are to believe Suetonius, they included also medicine and mathematics, for the latter says that Vergil

*inter cetera studia medicinae quoque ac maxime mathematicae operam dedit.* 17

According to the same author, Vergil was being trained for the law courts and pleaded his one and only case at this time. 18

The poet had come to Rome in about the year 53 B.C. From that time to 43 B.C., except for what little information the historical sources have to offer regarding his education, nothing else is known about him. It is possible that during these years he toured Italy and became familiar with the Italian countryside to which he makes so many allusions in his poetry. It is possible, too, that during part of this

14 Comm. in *Verg. Aen.* VI, 264: *ex maiore autem parte Sironem, id est magistrum suum Epicureum sequitur.*

and Comm. in *Verg Buc.* VI, 13: *...nam vult exequi sectam Epicuream, quam didicerant tam Vergilius quam Varus docente Sirone.*

15 Diehl, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

16 Ibid., p. 43: *sed cum iam summis eloquentiae doctoribus vacaret, in belli civilis tempora incidit.*

17 Ibid., p. 12. 18 *Loc. cit.*
time he continued his formal education, learning Greek under Parthenius 19 and studying philosophy under Philodemus. 20

There can be little doubt that Vergil was writing poetry during his years of study, but there is much doubt as to which of the poems alleged to be his early efforts are really his. According to Suetonius and Servius, Vergil wrote a fair number of minor poems before attempting the Eclogues. Suetonius says that he wrote first a distich against Ballista:

\[ \text{monte sub hoc lapidum tegitur Ballista sepultus;} \]
\[ \text{nocte die tutum carpe viator iter.} \]

Then, according to Suetonius' Life again, he wrote the Catalepton, Priapea, Epigrammata, and Dirae, together with the Ciris and Culex, the latter when he was but sixteen years old. In addition,

\[ \text{scripsit...de qua ambigitur Aetnam. mox cum res} \]
\[ \text{Romanas inchoasset, offensus materia ad Bucolica} \]
\[ \text{transiit....} \]

Servius also gives to Vergil the couplet on Ballista and then goes on to say:

\[ \text{scripsit etiam septem siue octo libros hos: Cirin} \]
\[ \text{Aetnam Gulicem Priapeia [sic] Catalepton} \]
\[ \text{Epigrammata Copam Diras.} \]

The passage from Suetonius has been under suspicion and


23 Ibid., p. 41.
one writer has suggested that the whole passage following the
distich on Ballista and extending down to Suetonius' statement
about the Aetna is spurious. 24 On the other hand, Tenney
Frank accepts this whole passage as being Suetonian. 25 It is
perhaps better not to try to draw any conclusions about these
lines in Suetonius' Life, but to go on and examine the informa-
tion given by the other so-called historical sources.

Focas' Life and that going under the name of Donatus
Auctus are the only others of the Lives that mention Vergil's
early writings. In his Life Focas attributes to Vergil the
distich on Ballista and the Culex, adding an explanation of
each, 26 while in the Donatus Auctus Life the distich on
Ballista, the Moretum, Priapeia [sic], Epigrammata, Dirae,
and Culex as well as the Aetna, about which there is still
some doubt, and an early attempt at an epic are given as
Vergil's earliest poetry. 27

The other historical sources give us some information.
Martial and Statius both speak of the Culex as being Vergil's.
The former in one of epigrams has the following to say about
the poet:

Protinus ITALIAM concepit, et ARMA VIRVMQVE
Qui modo vix Culicem fleverat ore rudí. 28
In a later poem he offers advice to a student with the words:

Accipe facundī Culicem, studiōse, Maronis,
Ne, nucibus positis, ARMA VIRVMQVE legas. 29

Statius, too, in a passage in his Silvae attributes the Culex to Vergil:

haec primo iuvenis canes sub aeya, 30
ante annos Culicis Maroniani.

The only other reference to the Culex is found once again in Suetonius, but this time in his Life of Lucan where he says:

...ut praefatione quadam aetatem et initia sua cum Vergilio comparans ausus sit dicere:
'et quantum mihi restat
Ad Culicem?' 31

Evidence for Vergilian authorship of the Catalepton is found in the works of three authors only besides the Lives written by Suetonius and Servius. Ausonius makes mention of the Catalepta Maronis, 32 while Quintilian suggests that Catalepton II is of Vergilian authorship when he says:

multa alia etiam audentius inseri possunt
sed ita demum, si non appareat affectatio,
in quam mirifice Vergilius:
Corinthorum amator iste verborum,
Thucydides Britannus, Atticae febris,
Tau Gallicum, al, min, et sil ut male elisit;
Ita omnia ista verba miscuit fratri. 33

29 Ibid., XIV, CLXXXV, 11. 1f.
30 Silvae II, VII, 11. 73f.
Marius Victorinus suggests that Catalepton XIII is also Vergil's work. The historical sources make no other mention of the Catalepton.

Suetonius in the passage quoted earlier suggests that even in his time there was some doubt as to whether or not the Aetna was Vergilian. Servius in his Life also mentions it among Vergil's early writings, as we have seen. These are the only two of the sources that mention this poem as Vergil's.

Heyne quotes an obscure passage in the Ambrosian Manuscript which states that Parthenius first wrote a Moretum in Greek and that Vergil wrote in Latin an imitation of it. The only other reference to the Moretum that is to be found in the historical sources is that in the Donatus Auctus Life which we have already seen. We must be careful, then, not to accept this poem as being Vergil's on the basis of this very insubstantial evidence alone.

The rest of the minor poems mentioned by Suetonius and Servius (the Priapea, Epigrammata, Dirae, Ciris, and Copa) are not mentioned in any other of the historical sources as being of Vergilian authorship.

34 N.W. De Witt, review of Theodor Birt's Jugendverse und Heimatpoesie Vergils, AJP, vol.32 (1911), p. 449. (I have not had access to Victorinus' writings.)


We can draw no definite conclusions, then, about Vergil's early writings. If we are not going to dispute the passages in the Lives of Suetonius and Servius, we may accept as Vergilian all of the poems mentioned there. If, on the other-hand, we are going to view these passages with suspicion, then when we consult the other historical sources, we must conclude that certain of the poems listed in these Lives are probably Vergilian; for the evidence is strongly in favour of Vergilian authorship for the Culex and it is possible, too, that the poet did write the Catalepton, or at least part of it. There is a passage that suggests that the Moretum was early thought of as being Vergil's, but the evidence here is anything but conclusive. As far as the rest of the minor poems are concerned we can find no evidence for Vergilian authorship other than the passages in the Lives written by Suetonius and Servius.
In 43 B.C. Vergil seems to have returned to Mantua and to have begun there the composition of the Eclogues. Soon, however, as certain of the Eclogues suggest, he along with many other Mantuans was evicted from his farm. The historical sources for this period of Vergil's life are very few. In fact, the only information we have is that offered by the various Lives and Commentaries. Moreover, the little evidence that we can glean from these two historical sources in turn raises many problems.

There is some disagreement amongst these sources as to exactly when the confiscations took place. Suetonius suggests that they took place after the Battle of Philippi, 1 and Focas agrees with him. 2 If this is the case, then we may date the confiscations as late 41 B.C. or more probably early 40. On the other hand, if we are to believe Probus, the evictions in question took place after the Battle of Mutina in 42 B.C.: 3

1 Diehl, op. cit., p. 14.  2 Ibid., p. 39, ll. 69-76.  3 Ibid., p. 43.
in this Commentary, however, this same writer places them after Actium. The authors of the Vita Monacensis and Vita Noricensis place them after the Battle of Actium. The latter view we must disregard, for the evidence offered by the Eclogues shows that they were written at the time of the confiscations, but also that they were written before 37 B.C. and there is no reconciling this evidence with 31 B.C., the date of the Battle of Actium. Moreover, there is no suggestion of confiscations after the Battle of Actium, but rather there seems to have taken place under Octavian's management an orderly settlement of the veterans.

There were confiscations after both Mutina and Philippi, but these two series of evictions took place under different circumstances. After Mutina the triumvirs, Antony, Octavian and Lepidus, all of whom were in Italy at that time, did the proscribing and evicting; but after Philippi Octavian alone did the confiscating while Antony patrolled the East. There is no suggestion in any of the Lives or Commentaries that the triumvirs together did the evicting, but all these sources state that Octavian alone directed the confiscations. Therefore, it is perhaps best to place after Philippi these evictions in which Vergil became involved.

4 Eol. praef., quoted by Diehl, op. cit., p. 52.
5 Diehl, op. cit., p. 46. 6 Ibid., p. 49.
However, the problem is not completely solved, for Servius in his version of Vergil's life says of the confiscations:

...ortis bellis civilibus inter Antonium et Augustum, Augustus victor Cremonensium agros, quia pro Antonio senserant, dedit militibus suis. 8

Servius does not appear to be thinking of the rehabilitation of the veterans that took place after Actium. It is more probable that he is thinking of the troubled years around 40 B.C. when the Roman world was taking sides for the coming civil war between Octavian and Antony and is somehow identifying the confiscations after Philippi with a defeat of Antony. However, we are once again merely guessing.

A second problem raised by our historical sources is the problem of determining who were put in charge of the confiscations. Suetonius says that Asinius Pollio, Alfenus Varus and Cornelius Gallus were in charge, 9 while the author of the Vita Monacensis states that Augustus sent only Cornelius Gallus and Asinius Pollio to oversee the confiscations. 10 The Commentary going under the name of Servius Auctus suggests that Asinius Pollio was put in charge, but was then relieved by Alfenus Varus. 11 The writer of the Scholia Bernensis agrees. 12

8 Diehl, op. cit., p. 41.  9 Ibid., p. 14.  10 Ibid., p. 46.
11 Ad Ecl. IX, 27, quoted in Diehl, op. cit., p. 52.
12 Ecl. IX praef., quoted in Diehl, op. cit., pp. 52f; ad Ecl. VIII, 1.6, in Ibid., p. 53.
Pollio was probably in charge in 41 B.C., but because of the tension which was building up in Italy between Octavian and the partisans of Antony, Octavian thought it best to relieve Pollio since the latter was strongly pro-Antony. He probably then put Alfenus Varus in charge. This supposition would perhaps take care of Suetonius' suggestion that Pollio, Varus and Gallus were in charge and would also account for the statements made in the Servius Actius Commentary and in the Scholia Bernensis.

The reason for the confiscation of the Mantuan land is another point about which there seems to be some disagreement amongst the historical sources. Basing their views upon a statement which Vergil makes in the Eclogues, 13 most of the writers give the proximity of Mantua to Cremona as the reason for the eviction of the Mantuans. Suetonius, for instance, says on this point:

...non sufficiente agro Cremonensium Mantuani quoque, in quibus erat etiam poeta Vergilius, maximam partem finium suorum perderent eo quod vicini Cremonensibus fuerant. 14

Focas also gives this reason for the Mantuans' losing their property. 15 Servius, too, tells us that since the fields of Cremona were not sufficient to accommodate the veterans

...his agris addidit agros Mantuanos, sublatos non propter civium culpam, sed propter vicinitatem

13 Eclogues IX, 1. 28: Mantua vae miserae nimium vicina Cremonae.
In his Commentary Servius also asserts that it was not *propter culpam sed propter vicinitatem* that the Mantuans lost their land. The authors of the *Vita Monacensis* and *Vita Noricensis* do not speak as explicitly when they suggest that the Mantuan fields were annexed because those of Cremona were not sufficient, but they do not suggest that the Mantuans had done anything to deserve such treatment.

There are suggestions in the Lives and Commentaries, however, that there may have been other reasons for the seemingly unfair treatment of the Mantuans. The writer of the *Vita Bernensis* tells us that the Mantuans as well as the people of Cremona had been partisan to Antony and had deserved this treatment. Probus in his preface to the Eclogues brings to light a still different reason for the confiscation of the property of the Mantuans:

\[
\text{Italae ergo civitatibus adversas \[div-ed::pr\] partes sequentibus Cremonenses et Mantuani neutri sunt auxiliati: sed hoc Augustus indignatus veteranis, quorum operam in bello habuerat, agros Cremonensium dividi iussit et, si non suffecissent, Mantuanos adiungi.} \]

16 Ibid., p. 41.

17 *Buc. praef.*; there is a second reference to the confiscations in Servius' Comm. in Verg. Buc. IX, 28, in which he gives once again this same reason for the confiscations.

18 Diehl, op. cit., p. 46 (*Vita Monacensis*) and p. 50 (*Vita Noricensis*).

19 Ibid., pp. 44f: *...unde cum omnibus Mantuanis agri auferrentur, quod Antonianis partibus favissent*...=

20 Quoted in Diehl, op. cit., p. 52.
According to the writer of the Scholia Bernensis, personal motives played their part in the confiscations, for it seems that Alfenus Varus who succeeded Pollio was angry with the Mantuans because

Octavius Musgə...civis Mantuanus idemque magistratus, cum tributum ab Augusto fuisset indictum, pecora Vari capta pignori tam diu in foro clausa tenuit...donec inedia morerentur, unde molestiam Mantuanis super amittendis agris intulit Varus.

The great weight of evidence is in favour of the first view that the Mantuans lost their land because they happened to be neighbours of the people of Cremona. However, it is important to notice that possibly there were other more important reasons for the Mantuans' losing their fields.

Another problem presented by the historical sources is that of how Vergil managed to recover his losses. Suetonius says that Vergil wrote the Eclogues in honour of Pollio, Varus and Gallus

...quia in distributione agrorum...indemnem se praestitissent,

and that then the poet wrote the Georgics in honour of Maecenas who had helped him escape the violent attack of a certain veteran.  

A little later in his version of Vergil's life, Suetonius mentions once again the assistance these four offered the poet. Probus in his Life agrees with Suetonius

24 Ibid., p. 24. 25 Ibid., p. 43.
and in his Commentary mentions a second time that Gallus gave a helping hand to Vergil. 26 In his Life Servius makes no mention of Varus or Gallus, but states that it was through the patronage of Maecenas and Pollio that Vergil recovered his losses. 27 Focas, as happens most of the time, is vague at this point in his version of the life of Vergil and merely suggests that it was the doctissima turba potentum that gave Vergil aid. 28 In the Vita Monacensis there is a long list of persons who persuaded Vergil to go to Augustus, but the author seems to give most credit to Pollio for Vergil's success in winning back his farm. 29 The author of the Vita Noricensis, not to be outdone, suggests that it was through Aemilius Macer, Quintilius Varus, Maecenas, Gallus and Pollio that Vergil was reinstated. 30 Finally, the Scholia Bernensis suggest that Pollio restored Vergil's land, that Varus took it away and that the poet, after taking the advice of Cornelius Gallus and Macer, went to Rome to try to gain an interview with Octavian. 31

Pollio, then, seems to have helped Vergil, since most of the historical sources for this phase of Vergil's life mention his aiding the poet. Probably Gallus, too, helped Vergil. Varus may have aided Vergil in keeping his property

26 Ecl. praef., quoted in Diehl, op. cit., p. 52.
27 Diehl, op. cit., p. 41. 28 Ibid., p. 40, l. 86.
29 Ibid., p. 47. 30 Ibid., p. 50.
31 Ecl. IX praef., quoted in Diehl, op. cit., p. 53.
after Octavian had restored it. Very probably Maecenas had a hand in getting back Vergil's farm, for it seems possible that it was he who introduced the poet to Octavian.

In addition, there is the suggestion that the little poetry that Vergil had written up to this time had some influence with Octavian. Perhaps Pollio, after realizing that Vergil had poetic talent, had introduced him to Maecenas who in turn introduced him to Octavian. However, we cannot say definitely that this is what happened.

Still another problem posed by the historical sources is that of the circumstances surrounding the attack made on Vergil's person. There can be little doubt that such an attack was made, for it is mentioned in the Lives of Suetonius 32 and Focas 33 and in the Vita Monacensis. 34 Servius mentions the attack in his Commentary, 35 as does Probus 36 and the writer of the Scholia Bernensis. 37 But these versions disagree as to the name of the attacker and the reason for the attack. Suetonius merely says that it was a veteran who nearly killed Vergil in altercatione litis

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34 Ibid., p. 47.
35 Comm. in Verg. Buc. III, 94 and IX, 1; Buc praef.
36 Ecl. praef., quoted in Diehl, op. cit., p. 58.
37 Ecl. IX praef., quoted in Diehl, loc. cit.
and in a later passage he states that Vergil had to swim a river to escape. Focas suggests that Vergil barely escaped death when attacked by someone wielding a sword. The author of the *Vita Monacensis* asserts that the attack was made by a Claudius Arrio and that Vergil escaped by swimming the river. Servius in his *Commentary* gives the attacker's name as Arrius and his rank as that of centurion and informs us also that Vergil escaped by swimming the Mincius. On the other hand, Probus in his *Commentary* gives the name of the veteran in question as Milienus Toro, and his rank as that of *primipilare*. In the *Scholia Bernensis* we find a still different version, the attacker's name being Claudius and his rank that of a mere *miles*.

Probably, then, the attacker was a soldier, but to name him or to give him his true rank is out of the question, for the versions are not in the least consistent regarding these details.

Another question raised is whether Vergil won back his

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39 Ibid., p. 24: but it should be noticed that Suetonius here is interpreting as allegory *Ecloc.* III, 95: *ipse aries etiam nunc vellera siccat.*

40 Ibid., p. 39, l. 82-3. 41 Ibid., p. 47.

42 *Comm. in Verg. Buc.* IX, 1 and III, 94; *Buc praef.*


44 *Ecloc. IX praef.*, quoted in Diehl, *loc. cit.*
farm or whether he was reimbursed for the loss of it. Once again there is disagreement amongst the historical sources. Suetonius says definitely that Vergil \textit{agros recepit}, \textsuperscript{45} and Focas seems to agree. \textsuperscript{46} Servius in his \textit{Life} \textsuperscript{47} would have us believe that the poet deserved the return of his fields and in his \textit{Commentary} he states that Vergil did receive back his farm. \textsuperscript{48} Probus is vague at this point in his \textit{Life}, but suggests in his \textit{Commentary} that the poet was restored to his farm. \textsuperscript{49} The passage in the \textit{Vita Monacensis} dealing with the success of Vergil in recovering his losses is rather ambiguous, for the author says that Vergil sought out \textit{hereditatem suam} and finally won it back. \textsuperscript{50}

Vergil makes no specific statement in the \textit{Eclogues} regarding the question at hand. However, the general impression one gets from these poems is that Vergil's farm was restored. The evidence offered by the \textit{Lives} and \textit{Commentaries} is often rather ambiguous, but perhaps suggests that the farm was restored. On the other hand, the fact that Vergil spent most of his life following this episode at Rome and Naples in the south causes one to wonder whether he did

\textsuperscript{45} Diehl, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 40, l.89: \textit{Caesaris huic placido nutu repetuntur agelli}.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ecl. praef.}, quoted in Diehl, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 51f.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Ecl. praef.}, quoted in Diehl, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{50} Diehl, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 47.
receive his farm or whether he received a sum of money from Octavian in place of it. It is much easier, however, to agree with Suetonius and Focas in assuming that the farm was restored.

There is one other major problem that presents itself and that is the question of whether or not Vergil was evicted from his farm a second time. There is no suggestion in Suetonius' *Life* that Vergil's farm was twice confiscated. If we are to follow the course of events as set forth by the latter, we find that Vergil tried to obstruct the veteran who had to come to take over his farm. After barely escaping with his life, the poet made a trip to Rome and subsequently regained his property. 51 Focas also suggests that Vergil was obstinate and that after being driven from his farm he went to Rome to appeal to Augustus. 52 Servius in his *Life* says:

*amissis ergo agris Romam venit et usus patrocinio Pollionis et Maecenatis solus agrum quem amiserat meruit.* 53

However, he says at two or three points in his *Commentary* on the *Eclogues* that Vergil after returning from Rome was chased by a certain Arrio:

*post acceptos agros ab Arrione centurione paene interemptus.* 54

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51 Ibid., p. 24. 52 Ibid., pp. 39f, 11. 81-88.
53 Ibid., p. 41.
At another point this commentator mentions Vergil's returning to Rome after clashing with an Arrius. 55 Probus does not give any second eviction and neither does the _Vita Bernensis_, _Vita Monacensis_ or the _Vita Noricensis_. The _Scholia Bernensis_ contains perhaps one of the most important pieces of evidence in favour of a second eviction, for here the commentator says:

...quidam autem dicunt, primitus agros ab Pollione Virgilio redditos. postquam autem Varus successit Pollioni, adempti sunt.

The order of _Eclogues_ I and IX proves to most scholars that Vergil was twice driven from his farm. If the two poems are taken in their present order, then they do suggest two evictions. If, on the other hand, the Ninth _Eclogue_ is taken as being written before the First, then there could have been only one eviction. Since there is evidence to prove that the _Eclogues_ are not now in their order of composition, there is no reason for us to suppose that the First _Eclogue_ was composed before the Ninth merely because it comes first.

It is extremely difficult to draw any conclusions. Probably if we were to weigh all the evidence, we should find it in favour of only one eviction, but there still exists the possibility that Vergil's farm was twice confiscated.

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55 Comm. in Verg. Buc. IX, I: ...Vergilius postquam paene occisus est ab Arrio centurione, Romam revertens, mandavit procuratoribus suis ut tuerentur agros....

Because of these many unsolved problems it is possible only to conjecture what were the events of Vergil's life during these years. In 43 B.C. he probably returned from Mantua and was engaged perhaps in as early as 42 in writing the Eclogues. In 40 B.C., however, after the Battle of Philippi, there took place the confiscations in which many Mantuans lost their farms. The farmland of the people of Cremona had not been sufficient to rehabilitate all the veterans, and the Mantuans, because their fields bordered on those of the latter people, had to give up some of their land also. However, there may have been other reasons for this seemingly unprovoked confiscation.

Among those Mantuans losing their property was the poet Vergil who was more fortunate than the others inasmuch as he had Pollio, Gallus and Maecenas to help him. While trying to prevent a veteran from taking over his farm, Vergil was chased, barely escaping with his life. Then, at the insistence of Gallus and perhaps Macer, he made a trip to Rome. Pollio introduced him to Maecenas and the latter presented him to Octavian. Octavian, probably influenced to a certain extent by Vergil's early attempts at poetry, gave him back his farm, or at any rate reimbursed him for it.
Chapter V.

THE ECLOGUES, GEORGICS AND AENEID.

During the year of the confiscations and perhaps even earlier Vergil was engaged in composing the Eclogues. Probus gives Vergil's age when he began his pastoral poems as twenty-eight years. ¹ Therefore, according to Probus, Vergil would have begun his Eclogues in 42 B.C. This is not in itself impossible, but the Lives of Suetonius and Servius along with the internal evidence of the Tenth Eclogue show that Probus is probably wrong. Suetonius ² and Servius ³ assert that Vergil composed these poems within a three-year period and in view of the fact that the Tenth Eclogue may be dated as 38 B.C., it is difficult to accept Probus' statement. ⁴ We should perhaps be correct, then, in placing the first of the Eclogues in 41 B.C. This date is even more acceptable if we take into account what Suetonius and Servius go on to say,

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¹ Diehl, op. cit., p. 44. ² Ibid., p. 14. ³ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴ That is, if we are correct in assuming that 11. 46-49 refer to Agrippa's expedition to Gaul in 38 B.C. Cf. Conington, P. Vergili Maronis Opera, London, Whittaker and Co., 1831, vol. 1, p. 110.
for they both tell us that the *Georgics* were composed in a seven-year period and the *Aeneid* in eleven years. If we take 41 B.C. as the *terminus a quo* of the *Eclogues*, then the poet would have completed work on the *Aeneid* late in 20 B.C. or early in 19. The latter year, according to all our historical sources, was the year in which Vergil actually did stop writing and made his fateful trip to Greece.

The *Eclogues*, according to this calculation, were composed between the year 41 and 38 B.C. If there was only one eviction, the *Ninth Eclogue* was probably written late in 41 B.C. or early in 40 B.C., the year of the evictions, and *Eclogue* I followed a few months later. *Eclogue* IX may without hesitation be dated as 40 B.C., for it treats of Pollio's consulship which the latter held in this year. We may also date the *Sixth Eclogue* as 40 B.C., for it was probably in this year that Vergil came in contact with Varus. *Eclogue* VIII was probably written in 39 B.C.: that is, if the early part of it refers to Pollio and his campaign in this year, while *Eclogue* X, for the reason which we have already seen, we may assign to 38 B.C. The *Second*, *Third* and *Fifth Eclogues* we cannot date, except to say that the *Second* and *Third* were written before the *Fifth*, since the latter contains a direct reference to each of the other two. It is impossible to tell anything at all about the date of *Eclogue* VII.

5 Ll. 6-13. 6 Ll. 86-87.
Very possibly one of Eclogues II or III, or perhaps both of them, were written before the period of the confiscations, near the beginning of 41 B.C. Then there would have been some poems of Vergil, besides his earlier attempts, to recommend him to Pollio and Maecenas. However, this is mere speculation once again and we shall probably never know the exact date of the Eclogues in question.

Sometime between 40 and 38 B.C. Vergil probably left Mantua for Rome and then perhaps went on to Naples where he completed the Eclogues and revised them.

At Rome and Naples Vergil, along with the other promising young poets of the day, enjoyed the patronage of Maecenas. Here he came in contact with Plotius Tucca, who must have been a talented poet, and the epic poet Varius. Vergil, in addition, was on very intimate terms with Horace, whom he had introduced earlier to Maecenas.

7 Cf. Diehl, op. cit., p. 10, where Suetonius says that the poet was rarely in Rome and ibid., p. 47 (Vita Monacensis): 'Bucolica et Georgica in Parthenope civitate, quae Cuma et Neapolis et Necapolis vocatur.'

8 Cf. Martial, Epigrams I, CVII, ll. 1-4; VIII, LVI, ll. 5-24; XII, IV, ll. 1f.

9 Cf. Horace, Satires I, V, ll. 40ff:

Plotius et Varius Sinuessae Vergiliusque occurrunt, animae, qualis neque candidiores terra tullt neque quis me sit devinctior alter.

and Odes I, III, ll. 1-8, where Horace shows great concern for the safety of a Vergilius, probably the poet, who is making a voyage to Greece.

10 Cf. Horace, Satires I, VI, ll. 52-55.
Propertius and Vergil were fairly good friends, inasmuch as they were both members of the Augustan Circle. Propertius seems to have been present at the readings which Vergil gave. The poet, Cornelius Gallus, was a close friend of Vergil after the evictions at Mantua, but probably this friendship cooled when Gallus lost the favour of Augustus. Aemilius Macer also, as we have already seen, had helped Vergil earlier and probably had become Vergil's friend for life. Quintilius Cremonensis, about whom very little is known, was perhaps a very close friend of Horace and

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11 Cf. Propertius, Elegies III, XXIV, 11. 65f:

*cedite Romani scriptores, cedite Grai: nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade.*

Propertius' statement would suggest that as early as 26 B.C., the year in which this Elegy was probably written, he had heard some of the Aeneid.

12 Ammianus Marcellinus, XVII, 4, 5, gives what he considers the reason for Gallus' falling out of favour with Augustus:

*Longe autem postea Cornelius Gallus Octaviano res tenente Romanas, Aegypti procurator, exhausit civitatem plurimis interceptis, reversusque cum furtorum arcesseretur, et populaeae provinciae, metu nobilitatis acriter indignatae, cui negotium spectandum dederat imperator, stricto incubuit ferro. Is est (si recte existimo) Gallus poeta, quem flens quodam modo in postrema Bucolicorum parte Vergilius carmine leni decontat.*

Vergil. Maecenas, then, Augustus' trusted advisor, took care of the needs of these young poets. Probably the only rule by which they had to abide was that they should say nothing against the Empire, but rather they should speak in praise of Augustus and his regime whenever it was possible.

It was in this kind of an atmosphere that Vergil began his *Georgics* in 38 B.C. or early in 37. These poems he composed probably while in residence at Naples. It is impossible to assign each of these poems to its year of composition. There are passages which suggest by their tone that they were composed in certain years, but it is perhaps best here to refrain from such guesswork.

During these seven years, Vergil, of course, did not spend all his time writing poetry. Horace tells of meeting Plotius, Tucca, Varius and Vergil at Sinuessa, probably in 37 B.C. The same poet in one of his *Odes* prays for the well-being of a Vergilius who is making a trip to Attica. This Ode was certainly written before 19 B.C. and cannot refer to the trip Vergil made just before his death. Therefore, it

14 Suetonius (Diehl, op. cit., pp. 10, 12) suggests that Maecenas and Augustus more than took care of Vergil's needs.


16 *Satires* I, V, ll. 31-51.

17 The Ode in question is I, III, where MacLeane in a note says that this refers to a voyage earlier than the one on which Vergil died, probably taken sometime during the composition of the *Aeneid*. Papillon, however, in the introduction to his edition of Vergil's works (p. xvii) says that the visit came probably before *Georgics* III, 10ff.
may refer to an earlier voyage which took place during these years.

We do have some evidence, then, that Vergil travelled as well as wrote poetry between 38 and 31 B.C. Indeed, it is hard to believe that the *Georgics*, perfect though they may be, took seven years of constant work to finish. Probably travelling, as we have seen, took up some of his time and probably, too, Vergil worked at a very slow rate. Suetonius quotes a tradition that

\[
\text{cum Georgica scriberet...cotidie meditatos mane plurimos versus dictare solitus ac per totum diem retractando ad paucissimos redigere, non absurde carmen se more ursae parere dicens et lambendo demum effingere.}
\]

Aulus Gellius, too, suggests that Vergil worked slowly, though his statement applies not only to the *Georgics*, but to the poet's other works as well. 19

The *Georgics*, Suetonius tells us, were read to Augustus when the latter returned to Italy after the Battle of Actium and was delaying at Atella *reficiendarum faucium causa*. 20 The reading took four days, with Maecenas spelling off the poet from time to time. 21 No other of the *Lives* mentions

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18 Diehl, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Nettleship, *Ancient Lives of Vergil*, p. 15, n. 5, believes that the idea of Vergil's reducing a large number of verses to as few as possible may have come from the memoir of Varius and he cites Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.* X, III, 8: *Vergilium quoque paucissimos die composuisse versus auctor est Varius.*


this reading and since Augustus seems to have spent a short time at Brundisium before carrying on his pursuit of Antony and to have been nowhere near Atella after Actium, we must be careful of accepting what Suetonius says. 22

Probably about 30 B.C. Vergil made a start on the Aeneid. It seems that the Romans expected it to be a great poem, for, as Suetonius says,

\[
\text{Aeneidos vixdum coeptae tanta extitit fama, ut Sextus Propertius non dubitaverit sic praedicare: 'cedite, Romani scriptores, cedite Grai: nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade'...} 23
\]

In this Life also we find the suggestion that the Aeneid was written first in prose and then transformed into verse. 24 This idea appears nowhere else in the historical sources and we must take it or leave it on the evidence of Suetonius alone.

Maecenas had been the instigator of the Georgics, but did anyone suggest an Aeneid to Vergil? Servius says that Augustus suggested it, 25 while the author of the Vita Monacensis states that the Roman people clamored for Vergil

22 Diehl, op. cit., p. 17, in a note on this passage says:

\[
\text{ein aufenthalt Oktavians in Atella nach Aktium hat nicht stattgefunden, aber mit Atella verbanden den kaiser noch ungeklärte beziehungen: er soll nach Atella eine colonie geführt haben (Lib. colon. grom. lat. I s. 230), sogar in Atella verstorben sein (Eutrop. 7, 8 Hier. chron. a. Abr. 2029)}
\]

and cf. Georgics II, 39ff where it is suggested at any rate that Maecenas helped Vergil recite.

to write it. 26 Probably it was Vergil's ambition from earliest youth to write a Roman epic, for, as we have seen, there is evidence to show that he had earlier made an attempt at such a poem before he had come to know Maecenas and Augustus.

The emperor, as was only natural, was eagerly waiting to hear the poem or some portion of it. In 29 B.C., while away on the Cantabrian expedition, Augustus

...supplicibus atque etiam minacibus per iocum litteris efflagitaret, ut 'sibi de Aeneide', ut ipsius verba sunt, 'vel prima carminis ὑπογραψῃ vel quodibet κἀκεῖνη mitteretur'. 27

Macrobius preserves an answer made by Vergil to one of these letters:

...ego vero frequentes a te litteras accipio et infra de Aenea quidem meo, si mehercle iam dignus auribus habere tuis, libenter mitterem, sed tanta inchoata res est, ut paene vitio mentis tantum opus ingressus mihi videar, cum praeertim, ut scis, alia quoque studia ad id opus multoque potiora impertiar. 28

At long last, probably three years later, he read a part of the Aeneid to Augustus. Suetonius says that Vergil read the Second, Fourth and Sixth Books to Augustus and Octavia and that the latter, when Vergil came to that celebrated line, tu Marcellus eris, fainted away. 29 That readings such as this took place we cannot doubt, but Suetonius may here be following tradition when he tells of the fainting

26 Ibid., p. 47. 27 Ibid., p. 16.
28 Saturnalia I, XXIII, 11. 29 Diehl, op. cit., p. 16.
of Octavia. Therefore, it is perhaps best for us not to
draw any conclusions regarding the circumstances sur­
rounding this reading, but merely to assume that Vergil
did read part of his Aeneid to Augustus in 26 B.C. 30
We cannot even be sure what parts of the Aeneid Vergil
read at this time. Suetonius, as we have already seen,
suggests the Second, Fourth and Sixth Books. Servius also
states that he read the Fourth and Sixth Books, but
mentions the Third as the other read. 31

The Historical sources offer us no other information
regarding the life of Vergil during his years of composing
the Aeneid. Probably he was sojourning at Naples, for he
seems to have disliked the hustle and bustle of Rome. 32
It is also probable that during these years he read parts
of his Aeneid to others besides Augustus and that Vergil
in turn listened to their poetry. 33 However, we shall
probably never know.

30 The date is here fixed by the death of Marcellus in
26 B.C.

31 Comm. in Verg. Aen. IV, 323.

32 Cf. Tacitus, Dialogue XIII and Diehl, op. cit., p. 10
(Donatus-Suetonius).

33 Cf. Horace, Satires I, IV, l. 73: nec recito cuiquam
nisi amici...
Chapter VI.

VERGIL'S DEATH.

In 19 B. C., after completing the *Aeneid*, he decided to make a trip to Greece in order to carry out the revision of it by visiting in person the places that he mentions in his poem. Suetonius, who gives the most complete story of Vergil's last days, says that the poet

Anno aetatis quinquagesimo secundo inpositurus Aeneidi summam manum statuit in Graeciam et in Asiam secedere triennioque continuo nihil amplius quam emendare....

Focas in his characteristically vague manner also makes mention of this trip of Vergil and gives essentially the same reason for his making it:

sed loca quae vulgi memoravit tradita fama aequoris et terrae statuit percurrese vates, certius ut libris oculo dictante notaret.

Here we have all the evidence that the *Lives* have to offer regarding such a trip.

The two authors, in the passage quoted above, are quite definite as to the reason for Vergil's making such a trip.

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1 Diehl, *op. cit.*, p. 16. 2 Ibid., p. 40, ll. 102ff.
However, there was probably another reason for the poet's going to Greece besides the revision of the *Aeneid*. It is highly probable that he was in need of a rest. At no time in his life had he ever enjoyed perfect health, and now after undergoing the ordeal of writing this great epic, he surely must have needed a change.

If we are to believe Suetonius, Vergil did not succeed in going beyond Athens, for it was there that Augustus, returning from the East, met him and persuaded him to return to Italy. Suetonius is the only authority that mentions this incident, for not even Focas makes reference to this meeting.

Immediately a number of questions arise: What was Augustus' purpose in having Vergil return to Italy? Why did Vergil return if the revision of his *Aeneid* was as important as his later actions would suggest? And how much revision had he done by the time he met Augustus? To these questions we have no answers and we shall be at a loss to answer them until such time as new evidence is discovered.

Suetonius goes on to say that it was at Megara that Vergil *languorem nactus est* as a result of too much sun.

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3 *Ibid.*, p. 16: *sed cum ingressus iter Athenis occurrisset Augusto ab oriente Romam revertenti destinaretque non absistere atque etiam una redire...* Cf. also Dio, LIV, 10, where the writer tells of Augustus' returning to Rome from the East in 19 B.C.

This *languor*, as Suetonius calls it, was probably sunstroke. During the homeward journey Vergil's condition grew steadily worse so that *aegrior aliquanto Brundisium aepelleret*.

Focas also states in his *Life* that the poet was smitten with some kind of a malady, but does not say exactly what the sickness was. One manuscript of the *Life* by Servius refers to Vergil's sudden attack with these words:

*valetudinem ex solis ardore contraxit.*

Once again sunstroke is suggested. Vergil was never in perfect health, as we shall see later, and overexposure to the sun coupled with the effects of the return journey to Italy could easily have meant the end for him.

His condition grew gradually worse, until on the twenty-first day of September in this year, after managing to get as far as Brundisium, he died. This is the Suetonian version and it is the generally accepted one. The historical sources are nearly all in agreement as far as the date of Vergil's death is concerned. Probus says that the poet

*decessit... annum agens quinquagesimum et primum,*

thus placing his death in 19 B. C. Filargyrius, in his *Life*
is even more specific:

...Vergilius moritur XI k. Oct. Sentio Saturnino et Lucretio Cinna consulis nono Ptolomaei regis anno, cui apud Aegyptum Cleopatra in regnum successit, Augusti Caesaris XXVI regni anno, ante annos XVI Christi nativitatis. 10

Of the historical sources other than the Lives, Jerome is the only one which dates the death of Vergil, giving it as the year in which Sentius Saturninus and Lucretius Cinna were consuls, or, in other words, 19 B.C.

The Vita Bernensis, however, seems to place the death of Vergil in 18 B.C., for the author says of the poet:

vixit annos LII amicitia usus imperatoris Augusti et aliorum complurium probatissimorum virorum. 12

The great weight of evidence favours 19 B.C. as the year of Vergil's death. Two of the Lives, those of Suetonius and Filargyrius, are even more explicit and place the poet's death on the twenty-first of September of this year.

Suetonius, as we have seen already, gives Brundisium as the scene of the poet's death. Most of the other Lives also place his death in southern Italy, though Filargyrius is the only author who agrees with Suetonius that Vergil died

10 Ibid., p. 45. It is rather difficult to see how Cleopatra can come in here.


12 Diehl, op. cit., p. 45. Is it possible that the writer here is misinterpreting Suetonius' statement that Anno aetatis quinquagesimo secundo impositurus Aeneidi summam manum statuit in Graeciam et Asiam secedera?
at Brundisium. Focas and Probus both tell us that
Vergil died in Calabria, though these writers do not say
exactly where.

Besides these statements of the Lives, we have the as-
sertion of Jerome that *Vergilius Brundisi moritur*.

The only evidence to the contrary is that offered by the Dresden
Manuscript in which the writer says that Vergil *perit...*

All the evidence, then, points to southern Italy as the
scene of the poet's death, and we are probably safe in
assuming further that the poet died at the city of Brundisium.

Suetonius, after giving the place and date of Vergil's
death, goes on to say that the poet's remains were taken to
Naples

...*tumulogre condita qui est via Puteolana intra*
*lapidem secundum, in quo distichon facit tale:*  
'Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc
Parthenope; cecini pascua rura duces.'  

Probus also places Vergil's tomb on the *via Puteolana*
and quotes the same epitaph. Filargyrius, in his *Life*,
agrees that Vergil's remains were taken to Naples and

13 Ibid., p. 45. 14 Ibid., p. 40, l. 105. 15 Ibid., p. 44.

16 It is probable that they are drawing their information
from the epitaph which is in itself vague.


18 Quoted in Diehl, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

19 Diehl, *op. cit.*, p. 18. 20 Ibid., p. 44.
...in secundo ab urbe miliario sepeliuntur titulo huiusmodi superscripto, quem ipse moriens dictavit; there then follows the distich quoted also by Suetonius and Probus. The Dresden Manuscript, though we should perhaps not rely too much on the authority of so late a source, is a little more vague, contending that Vergil was buried at Naples

in cuius tumulo ab ipso compositum est tale distichon:
'Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc Parthenope: cecini pascua rura duces.' 22

Others of our historical sources also suggest that the poet was buried near Naples. Jerome, in his edition of Eusebius' Chronicon, says that the poet's bones

...Neapolim translata in secundo ab urbe miliario sepelluntur titulo istius modi superscripto quem moriens ipse dictaverat:

then comes the epitaph.

The Younger Pliny hints that in the first century A. D. Naples was generally accepted as the site of Vergil's tomb, for in telling of the habits of Silius Italicus, the writer says:

Multum ubique librorum, multum statuarum, multum imaginum, quas non habebat modo, verum etiam venerabatur, Vergili ante omnes, cuius natalem religiosius quam suum celebrabat, Neapoli maxime, ubi monumentum eius adire ut templum solebat. 24

21 Ibid., p. 45. 22 Quoted in Diehl, op. cit., pp.42F.

23 A. Abr. 1999. The similarity between this passage and that of Filargyrius suggests a relation between the two.

24 Letters III, VII.
There is the strong possibility that those authors of the Lives and the other writers who mention merely that Vergil was buried at Naples are drawing this conclusion from the epitaph alone and are not basing their statements on any other information. However, the statements made by Suetonius, Filargyrius and Jerome to the effect that Vergil was buried in secundo ab urbe miliario hint that there was another source at hand. Suetonius may have used it and Jerome and Filargyrius may have copied him. At any rate, there is no evidence that would suggest that Naples was not the poet's resting place and, inasmuch as he spent most of his later life there, it is highly probable that one of his last wishes was to be buried near that city.

We have yet to consider Vergil's will and the story of the poet's dying wish that the Aeneid should be burned. Suetonius is the only one of the ancient authorities that mentions the terms of Vergil's last will and testament. Earlier in his version of Vergil's life, this writer hints that the poet had amassed a fair-sized fortune, for he says of Vergil:

\[\textit{possedit prope centiens sestertium ex liberalitatisbus amicorum habuitque domum Romae}\]

25 Diehl, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 18.

26 Ibid., pp. 10, 12, and cf. the statement of Probus, \textit{ibid.}, p. 44, that Vergil for beginning the Aeneid \textit{ab Augusto usque ad sestertium centes honestatus est}. Horace also, \textit{Epistles II, I}, 11. 245ff would suggest that Vergil had received fair-sized sums of money from Augustus.
Esquillus iuxta hortos Maecenatianos, quamquam secessu Campaniae Siciliaeque plurimum uteretur.

Though this is the only statement of Vergil's financial status which we possess, it is very probable for a number of reasons that he had amassed a large amount of money and property. He was very close to two of the wealthiest men of the time, Augustus and Maecenas. In addition, he was somewhat reserved and does not seem to have been given to spending money on expensive luxuries. Moreover, it was becoming more and more the practice at Rome for wealthy people to will part of their property to men in the public eye whom they admired. If we may believe what Tacitus has to say about the poet, then we must assume that Vergil was very popular with the masses and could expect to fall heir to numerous legacies.

According to Suetonius once again, Vergil in his will left one-half of his property to his half-brother Proclus, one-quarter to Augustus and one-twelfth to his patron Maecenas, while Lucius Varius and Plotius Tucca shared the one-sixth remaining. Probus also asserts that the poet willed his fortune to Augustus, Maecenas and Proclus, a younger brother, although this author does not give the exact terms of the will.

There is also the story in Suetonius' Life of Vergil's last wish that the Aeneid should be burned. The writer of

27 Dialogue XIII. 28 Diehl, op. cit., p. 44.
this *Life* says that even before leaving for the East, Vergil
egerat cum Vario...ut siquid sibi accidisset, Aeneida combureret; at is ita facturum se per-
egarat.... 29

Now on his deathbed the poet

...assidue scrinia desideravit, crematurus ipse; verum nemine offerente nihil quidem nominatim de ea cavít.

Finally, seeing that his friends would not burn the *Aeneid* and that they would not let him burn it,

...eidem Vario ac simul Tuccae scripta sua sub ea condicione legavit, ne quid ederent, quod non a se editum esset.

Servius also makes reference to this dying wish of Vergil when he states that the poet *eam* [i.e. *Aeneidem*]
30 moriens praecipit incendi. Probus gives us a little information, telling us that Vergil in his will forbade the publishing of those verses which he had not edited.

There are references in certain others of the historical sources to this desire of Vergil to see his *Aeneid* destroyed. Pliny's *Natural Histories* contain a reference to Augustus' forbidding the burning of this poem *contra testamenti eius verecundiam*. Macrobius also mentions this wish of Vergil, when he depicts Evangelus as saying that the poet moriens *poema suum legavit igni*. A third author, Aulus Gellius,

33 *Saturnalia* I, XXIV, 6.
makes the point that Vergil

...cum morbo obpressus adventare mortem viderat, petivit oravitque a suis amicissimis impense, ut Aenida, quam nondum satis elimavisset, anylere...34

Accordingly, Suetonius says, Varus edited the Aeneid

...auctore Augusto...sed summamim emendata, ut qui versus etiam imperfectos sicut erant reliquerit....35

Here the author only suggests that Augustus ordered the editing of the poem. Probus, too, is rather vague on this point, but we may presume from what he says that Augustus did give an order that the Aeneid should be preserved.

From Servius' Life we learn that

Augustus vero, ne tantum opus periret, Tuccam et Varium...iussit emendare....37

Here too there is at least the suggestion that Augustus forbade the destruction of the epic poem.

The Elder Pliny states quite definitely that Augustus did give such an order.

There are a few poems written by so-called scholastic poets which allude to Vergil's attempted burning of the Aeneid. Suetonius quotes a certain C. Sulpicius Apollinaris who tells us that Vergil had ordered Tucca and Varius to

34 Attic Nights, XVII, X, 7. 35 Diehl, op. cit., p. 20.

36 Ibid., p. 44: Aeneis servata ab Augusto, quamvis ipse testamento damnat, ne quid eorum, quae non edidisset, extaret....

37 Ibid., p. 41.

38 Natural Histories VII, 114: Divus Augustus carmina Vergilii cremari...vetuit.
burn the epic poem, but that they had refused and Augustus in addition had forbidden the burning of it. There is also another poem extant which hints that the Emperor issued such orders.

There were probably two reasons then for Vergil's failing to have his *Aeneid* burned. In the first place, he was unable to persuade Varius and Tucca that it should be destroyed and, what is more, Augustus forbade its burning.

Varius and Tucca then went ahead and edited the *Aeneid*, but very carefully, leaving the unfinished parts as they were, but evidently removing what they considered unnecessary. If we are to believe Suetonius, the order

39 Diehl, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 20:

\[
\text{'iusserat haec rapidis aboleri carmina flammis Vergilius, Phrygium quae cecinere ducem. Tucca vetat Variusque; simul tu, maxime Caesar, non sinis et Latiae consulis historiae, infelix gemino cecidit prope Pergamon igni, et paene est alio Troia cremata rogo.'}
\]

Probus, *ibid.*, p. 44, quotes the first four lines, but gives them to Servius Varus.


41 Diehl, *op. cit.*, p. 18 (Donatus-Suetonius); p. 41 (Servius); p. 50 (Vita Noricensis). But cf. *ibid.*, p. 20, where Suetonius hints that Varius alone was the editor.

42 For the tradition that the *Aeneid* originally did not begin with *arma virumque cano*, *vide* the *Life* written by Suetonius in Diehl, *op. cit.*, p. 20, and that by Servius in *ibid.*, pp. 41f.
of certain of the books was changed, although it is hard to believe that Augustus would allow the editors to do anything so drastic.

The Aeneid, then, very nearly did not survive, and we have the editors, Tucca and Varus, and also Augustus to thank that it did come down to us.

43 Diehl, op. cit., p. 20.
No biography is complete if it does not contain an account of the personal appearance and personal characteristics of the person whose life is being set forth. However, in the case of Vergil, we are once again faced with difficulties that arise from a lack of material. Suetonius is the only ancient authority that makes reference to Vergil's appearance, and what source he relied on we do not know. He tells us that Vergil was

\[
\text{corpore et statura...grandi, aquilo colore, facie rusticana....} \]

Vergil, then, was a large man, probably of dark complexion, with a kind of rustic appearance. It is an adequate picture, of course, for we have no trouble in visualizing the poet's appearance, but can we accept Suetonius' description? Probably the writer is using a portrait or a bust of Vergil as his source, for there is some evidence to show that such likenesses of the poet were in existence. There has come

1 Diehl, op. cit., p. 10.
down to us a mosaic portrait of Vergil found at Hadrumentum, which agrees fairly well with the general description given by Suetonius. In addition, Martial speaks of one such portrait in an epigram:

quam brevis inmensum cepit membrana Maronem!
ipsius et vultus prima tabella gerit. 2

Aelius Lampridius, speaking of Severus Alexander, mentions the fact that the latter

Vergilium autem Platonem poetarum vocabat
eiusque imaginem cum Ciceronis simulacro in
secundo larario habuit....3

Probably it was one of these portraits upon which Suetonius based his description of Vergil.

He goes on to tell us that Vergil enjoyed varying health,

...nam plerumque a stomacho et a faucibus ac
dolore capitis laborabat, sanguinem etiam saepe
reiecit. 4

Horace, in the Satire in which he tells of his meeting Tucca, Varius and Vergil at Sinuessa, hints that Vergil was not in the best of health:

lusum it Maecenas, dormitum ego Vergiliusque;
namque pila lippis inimicum et ludere crudis. 5

Probably it was partly because of his poor health that Vergil shunned Rome with its noisy, jostling mobs of people.

Suetonius, quoting as his source Melissus, tells us also that Vergil was very slow of speech so that he seemed

2 Epigrams XIV, CLXXXVI. 3 Severus Alexander XXXI, 4.
4 Diehl, op. cit., p. 10. 5 Satires I, V, 11. 48f.
almost like an unlearned person and Seneca hints also that the poet's speech was faulty. This hesitation must have occurred only in the law court, however, for later in his version in the poet's life Suetonius, quoting Seneca this time, asserts that

...Iulium Montanum poetam solitum dicere, involaturum se Vergilii quae Dam, si et vocem posset et os et hypocrisin: eosdem enim versus ipso pronuntiante bene sonare, sine illo inanes esse mutosque. 8

Perhaps Vergil's poor health had something to do with his inability to speak fluently in the court room, but probably, too, his reserved nature and natural modesty at times left him tongue-tied. Tacitus tells us that he preferred a retreat to living amid the hustle and bustle of Rome. Perhaps his physical condition had much to do with his staying away from the large city, but it is equally possible that he by nature preferred the quiet retreat where he would be away from the prying eyes of the Roman populace.

Vergil soon became known for his modesty and restraint.

6 Diehl, op. cit., p. 12: ...et in sermone tardissimum <eum> ac paene indocto similem fuisse Melissus tradidit.

7 Excerpta Controversiarum III, praef. 8: ...Vergilium illa felicitas ingenii <in> oratione soluta reliquit....

8 Diehl, op. cit. p. 16. 9 Dialogue XIII.

10 Cf. Diehl, op. cit.; p. 10, where Suetonius says of Vergil;...ac si quando Romae, quo rarissime commeabat, viseretur in publico, sectantis demonstrantisque se subterfugaret in proximum tectum.
Suetonius and Servius both tell us of his being given the cognomen Parthenias as does Ausonius. It was this modesty and restraint, much exaggerated, of course, that caused later ages to look upon Vergil as a kind of Saint.

We must not, however, make the mistake of thinking that Vergil could do no wrong. The second of his Eclogues is usually interpreted as the poet's confession of love for a boy, Alexander. Suetonius, who may be generalizing from this one poem, tells us that Vergil was

\[\ldots\text{libidinis in pueros pronioris, quorum maxime dilexit Cebetem et Alexandrum, quem secunda Bucolicorum egloga Alexim appellat\ldots utrumque non ineruditum, Cebetem vero et poetam.}\]

Servius, in his Life, also makes reference to this vice of the poet. There is in addition the story of his affair with Plotia Hieria which, according to Suetonius, Asconius Pedianus had refuted.

Whether Vergil was immoral to the extent that he suggests in the Second Eclogue, we shall probably never know, but, as we have seen, the tale of the affair with Plotia Hieria even in Suetonius' time had been proven false.

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11 Ibid., p. 10.  12 Ibid., p. 41.


15 Ibid., p. 10: vulgatum est consuess\emph{\textit{e}} eum et cum Plotia Hieria. Sed Asconius Pedianus adfirmat, ipsam postea maiorem natu narrare solitam, invitat\emph{\textit{um}} quidem a Vario ad communionem sui, verum pertinacissim\emph{\textit{e}} recusasse.
Vergil had many friends, it is true, but he also had made a number of enemies. The *Vita Monacensis* gives us a list of these people whom he disliked and who in turn must not have felt very kindly towards him. Among these are the two Antonian poets Maevius and Baevius, for whom, as Vergil himself tells us, he had an intense dislike. Probably, if the anecdote about Nola as told by Servius and Aulus Gellius is based on fact, Vergil was not above retaliating when he was angered.

But the poet, as we have already seen, had made many friends among the poets of the time. Horace was one of his closest friends and at all times shows great admiration and respect for him. In one of his *Odes* Horace addresses himself to Vergil's ship when the latter is going to Greece. The poem is essentially a prayer for Vergil's safe return and during the course of it, the writer calls him *animae dimidium meine*. At one point in his *Satires* he describes Vergil, Plotius Tucca and Varius as

\[... \text{animae, qualis neque candidiores}
\text{terra tulit neque quis me sit devinctior alter.}\]

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16 Ibid., p. 47: *isti inimici Virgilii adversabantur illi: Cornificius, Clodius, Mebeus, Vabeus, Archades, Vavius et Mevius.*


19 *Attic Nights*, VI, 20, 1. 20 *Odes* I, III, 1. 8.

21 *Satires* I, V, 11. 41F.
In another of his *Satires* Horace uses the adjective *optimus* to describe Vergil, while in another of his *Odes* he attempts to console the poet who is grieving over the death of a Quintilius. It is a pity that the works of Tucca and Varius have not survived, for these poets too probably put into words the admiration they felt for their fellow poet.

Here, then, we have Vergil the poet and the life he led, or, at any rate, as much of his life as we are able to piece together. As we have seen, too little information about the poet can be gleaned from the historical sources and at times what pieces of evidence they do offer us may conflict. The result is that the biography of Vergil is fraught with problems from beginning to end. To many of the questions raised we can offer answers based on conjecture, but at no time is conjecture very satisfying. Therefore we shall have to wait to solve these many problems until such time as fresh evidence is brought forward which suggests the solutions to some or all of them.

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