

THE SECOND GEORGIC: THE SOWING OF A REPUBLIC¹

In Book 2 of the *Republic*, Cicero indicates that the land itself and its cultivation play a major role in the establishment of a state, and he adds significance to this view by using an agricultural metaphor to comment on Romulus' plans for the establishment of a *res publica*:

urbi autem locum, quod est ei qui diuturnam *rem publicam* serere conatur diligentissime providendum, incredibili opportunitate de legit. (2.5)

In *Georgic* 2 Vergil adopts and expands upon this Ciceronian metaphor of the sowing of a *res publica*. On a literal level Vergil is concerned with the cultivation of the vine², the civilizing gift of Bacchus, but poetically and symbolically he is concerned with the growth and development of civilization. While Cicero in *Republic* 2 delineates the establishment and development of the city of Rome in her advantageous location on the Tiber, Vergil in *Georgic* 2 enlarges the scope to examine Italy, the *Saturnia tellus*, and her strategic position in the world. Vergil emphasizes a broader Italian patriotism and nationalism by describing the ascendancy of Italy, her men, and her civilization over the rest of the world in three significant passages: the *laus Italiae* (136—173), the *laus veris* (315—345), and the *laus ruris* (458—542). The

¹ An earlier and somewhat different version of this paper was read at the meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle-West and South, Detroit, Michigan, 12—14 April, 1973. All Latin quotations from Vergil and Cicero are from the following texts: Vergil, *Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: 1969); Cicero, *De Re Publica*, ed. K. Ziegler (Leipzig: 1969).

² K. D. White, „Vergil's Knowledge of Arable Farming”, *PVS*, 7 (1967—1968), 11—22; P. D'Herouville, „Virgile Poète de l'Olivier”, *REL*, 19 (1941), 142—146. See especially pp. 142 and 145, where D'Herouville remarks that after stating in the third line of Book 2 that the book will be particularly concerned with the olive, as well as about the vines and other trees, Vergil mentions it very rarely. He concludes that it would be almost useless for Vergil to advise the Italians about growing olives, since it was something they did so well.

first passage (the Praise of Italy) emphasizes the ascendancy of Italy and her civilization because of the effort and hard work of the farmer; the second passage (the Praise of Spring) amplifies to universal and cosmic dimensions the eternal spring achieved in Italy through the farmer's *labor* by describing the genesis of the world; and the third passage (the Praise of Country Life) praises the superiority of the country life in Italy. These three passages elaborate the unique achievements of Italy and her civilization in terms of the land — basic, essential, and very Italian.

In the *Republic*, in Cicero's brief account of the birth, growth and maturity of the Roman state, *cultus* is a very important word, used each time in relation to the land. It appears first when Cicero writes of the rescue and upbringing of Romulus whom the shepherds rescued and brought up in the cultivation (*cultus*) and *labor* of the country-side:

pastoresque eum sustulissent et in agresti *cultu*
laboreque aluiissent. (2.4)

This agricultural heritage of Romulus resulted in his superiority not only in physical form, but also in mental agility, so that he became the leader of the rural district. Cicero also notes Romulus' wisdom in locating Rome on the banks of a river so that

eodemque ut flumine res ad victimum *cultumque* maxime
necessarias non solum mari absorberet, sed etiam
invectas acciperet ex terra, ut mihi iam tum divinasse
ille videatur hanc urbem sedem aliquando et domum
summo esse imperio praebituram. (2.10)

Furthermore, Cicero gives as one of the causes of Rome's destruction of Corinth and Carthage in 146 B.C. their abandonment of the cultivation of their fields in favour of maritime trade:

... quod mercandi cupiditate et navigandi et *agrorum*
et admorum cultum reliquerant. (2.7)

And finally, in elaborating the benefits of Numa Pompilius to the *res publica*, Cicero associates the *cultus agrorum* with the achievement of *pax* and *otium* which enables *Iustitia* to flourish and prosper:

Ac primum agros, quos bello Romulus ceperat, divisit
viritim civibus, docuitque sine depopulatione atque
praeda posse eos colendis agris abundare commodis

omnibus, amoremque eis otii et pacis iniecit, quibus facilime *iustitia* et *fides* convalescit, et quorum patrocinio maxime *cultus agrorum* perceptioque frugum defenditur. (2.26)

This flourishing prosperity of the *res publica* (Rome) Cicero traces to the *ars* and *ingenium*, not of one man, but of many men. In particular, Cicero pays heed to the *ars* and *ingenium* of the early kings who laid the foundation roots of Rome and firmly established her institutions. Romulus had *divinum ingenium* (2.4), and although Servius Tullius was a slave as a child he grew up to be king not only because he never hid the *ingenium* he possessed (2. 37), but also because he had been instructed in all the *artes* by Lucius Tarquinius:

qui (Servius) cum famulorum < in > numero educatus ad epulas regis adsisteret, non latuit scintilla ingenii quae iam tum elucebat in puerō; sic erat in omni vel officio vel sermone sollers. itaque Tarquinius, qui admodum parvos tum haberet liberos, sic Servium diligebat, ut is eius vulgo haberetur filius, atque eum summo studio *omnibus iis artibus* quas ipse didicerat ad exquisitissimam consuetudinem Graecorum erudiit. (2.37)

Cultus, *ars* and *ingenium*, therefore, appear as significant factors in the early development of Roman civilization in Cicero's view, a view which looks back to the ideal of Scipionic Rome.³

In the *Georgics*, however, Vergil has redefined the Ciceronian *res publica* and the growth of Roman civilization in terms of empire, for the imagery and meaning of the *Georgics* is never far removed from the decade of the 30's and the contemporary political struggle between Antony and Caesar Octavian. In *Georgic*, 2, which may well have been modelled on the second book of the *Republic*, Vergil describes how to sow a new civilization that will endure. What is needed in order to achieve this is an application of *cultus*. At the beginning of *Georgic* 2 Vergil's initial appeal to the farmers exhorts them to learn the *cultus* of all different types of plants, fruits and trees:

Quare agite e proprios generatim discate *cultus*
agricolae, (35—36)

³ W. W. How, „Cicero's Ideal in his *De Republica*”, *JRS*, 20 (1930), 24—42. Cf. also E. Meyer, *Caesars Monarchie und das Principat des Pompejus* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: 1919), esp. pp. 5 and 176.

Although on a literal level Vergil is concerned with the *cultus* of plants and trees, poetically his choice of language suggests a symbolic expansion to man's civilization.⁴ This becomes clear in the passage on the grafting of trees, where through *cultus frequens* the trees exhibit a remarkable potential for education, and readily follow any *artes* that the farmer might wish them to learn:

... tamen haec quoque, si quis
inserat aut scrobibus mandet mutata subactis,
exuerint siluestrem animum, *cultuque frequenti*
in quascumque uoles *artis* haud tarda sequentur.
nec non et, sterilis quae stirpibus exit ab imis,
hoc faciat, uacuos si sit digesta per agros; (49—54)

Furthermore, the fields are endowed with *ingenium* and other human attributes:

Nunc locus aruorum ingeniis, quae robora cuique,
quis color et quae sit rebus natura ferendis. (177—178)

Although *ars* and *ingenium* indicate the human qualities of skill and talent, Vergil has applied both to trees, fields and to the cultivation of the land. Thus it would seem that he is writing not merely about horticulture, but about man and his civilization as well.

According to Vergil's concept of *cultus*, the reaping of fruits and the prosperity of any cultivation or civilization depends largely upon one important factor: *uariatio*, a theme diversely treated at considerable length in *Georgic* 2. *Uariatio* is introduced immediately following the introduction to the second *Georgic*:

Principio arboribus uaria est natura creandis. (9)

Although two ways of propagating trees are discussed, one natural⁵ and the other artificial, Vergil concentrates on the artificial methods and *artes* of propagation. Vergil refers to

⁴ In the third *Georgic*, although Vergil appears to be describing the life cycle of the animals, he is in fact describing in bucolic terms the life of man in his struggle to control by reason the irrational and Pandean nature of his character. Cf. W. Liebeschuetz, "Beast and Man in the Third Book of Virgil's *Georgics*", *G&R*, 12 (1965), 64—77.

⁵ In the section on natural propagation (2.10—21) Vergil states that certain trees such as the osier, poplar and willow spring up *sponte sua* (10—13); the chestnut and oak, Jupiter's tree, propagate by seed (14—16); finally, cherries, the elm, and the Parnassian laurel send up small shoots from their roots which develop into another tree (17—21).

six artificial methods of propagation employed by man to supplement the natural method of reproduction.⁶ Of these *artes*, the process of grafting is described at length:

Nec modus inserere atque oculos imponere simplex.
 nam qua se medio trudunt de cortice gemmae
 et tenuis rumpunt tunicas, angustus in ipso
 fit nodo sinus; huc aliena ex arbore germen
 includunt udoque docent inolescere libro.
 aut rursum enodes trunci resecantur, et alte
 finditur in solidum cuneis uia, deinde feraces
 plantae immittuntur: nec longum tempus, et ingens
 exiit ad caelum ramis felicibus arbos,
 mirata estque nouas frondes et non sua poma. (73—82)

The combining of two types of trees to form a third variety results in a better tree, and this represents a significant theme in Vergil's concept of *cultus*: the *agricola*, who after all is the *cultor agrorum*, must learn this art of ingrafting if he wants to produce the best crops.

Similarly, a civilization or state can exist and prosper only if the art of ingrafting is practiced. In *Republic* 2, Cicero had recognized the importance of combining with what is native to Italy whatever is best in other cultures, and he employs the image of a mighty river of culture and learning flowing from Greece into Rome:

influxit enim non tenius quidam e Graecia
 rivulus in hanc urbem, sed abundantissimus
 amnis illarum disciplinarum et artium. (2.34)

Vergil, however, uses the agricultural metaphor of sowing to describe the same phenomena:

iuuat Ismara Baccho
 conserere atque olea magnum uestire Taburnum. (37—38)

The single appearance of *conserere* (38) in the *Georgics* both establishes the sowing metaphor and illustrates the concept of cultural transplantation and ingrafting, by urging the farmers to sow the vine, native to Italy, on Ismara, a hill in southern Thrace, and to plant the olive, native to Greece,

⁶ 22ff. The various *artes* which man acquired through *usus* when Jupiter removed the Golden Age (1.133) are now put into practice. Man's ability to transplant suckers (23—24) or to graft the apple—shoot on to the plum—trunk (32—34) emphasizes not only the various methods of propagation but also the numerous *artes* which man has mastered.

on Taburnus, a hill in southern Campania. It is for this reason that in his catalogue of vintages and trees (83—135), Vergil includes wines not only from Italy but also from Greece,⁷ and some eastern varieties of trees, such as the ebony from India and the acanthus from Egypt.⁸ The combination of non-Italic varieties of wines and trees with those which are indigenous is what makes Italy the very fertile and prosperous country described in the passage referred to as the *laus Italiae* (2. 136—176).

Vergil's invocation to Bacchus at the beginning of *Georgic* 2 introduces this concept of combining the non-Italic with the indigenous. Twice addressed as *pater o Lenaee*, Bacchus is invoked as the protector of the vine and the producer of wine. In this role Bacchus is not the Greek Dionysus worshipped by Bacchants in wild mountain orgies,⁹ but the god with the function of the Italian *Liber pater*, whose original agricultural competence as an Italian grain spirit has been merged with that of the Greek Dionysus, as god of the vine.¹⁰ Since this old Italian deity *Liber pater* had no mythology of his own, the characteristics and rites of the Greek Dionysus were ingrafted onto the native stock, with the result that the function and character of Bacchus emerges in *Georgic* 2 as a conflation of two different gods and as a better god because of this dual heritage.

The transplantation of Bacchus to Italian soil brought numerous cultural benefits and gifts:

huc, pater o Lenaee: tuis hic omnia plena
muneribus, tibi pampineo grauidus autumno
floret ager, spumat plenis uindemia labris; (4—6)

quid memorandum aequa Baccheia dona tulerunt? (454)

⁷ See W. P. Richter, *Vergili Maronis Georgica*, (Munich: 1957), 159ff.

⁸ See T. E. Page, *Vergili Maronis Bucolica et Georgica*, (London: 1898), commentary on lines 109—135. See also Richter (above, note 7), 199.

⁹ *Georgics* 4.520—522; *Aeneid* 4.301—303; 7.385—389.

¹⁰ C. Bailey, *Religion in Vergil*, (Oxford: 1935), 150: „The whole book is full of this conception of Bacchus, which, though it is clothed with Greek cult titles... is really Italian in idea“. See also W. W. Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic*, (London: 1899), 54—57. Vergil has already suggested the native Italian nature and role of Bacchus Lenaeus in the opening prologue of the first *Georgic* where *Liber* is invoked along with *alma Ceres*, an ancient Italian deity (7).

Among the *Baccheia dona* Vergil includes the Fescennine verses:

non aliam ob culpam Baccho caper omnibus aris
 caeditur et ueteres ineunt proscaenia ludi,
 praemiaque ingenii pagos et compita circum
Thesidae posuere, atque inter pocula laeti
 mollibus in pratis unctiones saluere per utres
 nec non Ausonii, *Troia gens missa*, coloni
 uersibus incomptis ludunt risuque soluto,
 oraque corticibus sumunt horrenda cauatis,
 et te, Bacche, uocant per carmina laeta, tibique
 oscilla ex alta suspendunt mollia pinu.
 hinc omnis largo pubescit uinea fetu,
 complentur uallesque cauae saltusque profundi
 et quocumque deus circum caput egit honestum.
 ergo rite suum Baccho dicemus honorem
 carminibus patriis lancesque et liba feremus,
 et ductus cornu stabit sacer hircus ad aram
 pinguiaque in ueribus torrebitimus exta columnis.

(380—396)

In this passage the origin of Attic tragedy is closely connected with the origin of Roman drama: according to Vergil, when the goat was sacrificed to Bacchus because it ate the vine (371—378), the Athenians (*Thesidae*, 383) instituted rustic festivals at which prizes were given for *ingenium* displayed in the dramatic productions (382—383). At the Italic festivals too, dramatic contests were held in honour of Bacchus. The *versus incompti* and *risus solutus* (386) are the *Fescennini versus*, which consisted of repartees exchanged among the participants at village festivals. Traditionally viewed as the product of native *genius*,¹¹ these rude verses are represented by Vergil as being developed by the Ausones, a transplaited race: *Troia gens missa* (385). Here Vergil is alluding to the combination of Trojan stock, *coloni Ausones*, with the people who originally inhabited Italy.¹² It is not only plants and trees, therefore, which Vergil emphasizes as being composites of two or more varieties, but people and their cultures as well. Thus Vergil has moved from the basic technical advice to the *agricolae* on the grafting of trees and vines to a significant statement on the nature of civilization.

¹¹ Livy, *AUC*, 7.2; Horace, *Epist.*, 2.1.145—155.

¹² In the *Catiline* Sallust emphasizes the composite nature of the Romans (6.1—3) and also suggests in the speech assigned to Caesar that what has made Rome great is the fact that the people were never afraid to incorporate honourable foreign institutions into their own system (51.37): *maiores nostri, patres conscripti, neque consili neque audaciae umquam egere; neque illis superbia obstabat, quo minus aliena instituta, si modo proba erant, imitarentur.*

In order to establish firmly in the reader's mind the importance of grafting and transplanting in a civilization, Vergil applies his own precept to the *cultus* of his poetic art. The Golden Age theme, which eulogizes the achievement of civilization in Italy, is a conflation of two separate and distinct literary traditions, one Greek and one Roman. In the *laus Italiae* Vergil follows Ennius in calling Italy the *Saturnia tellus*,¹³ suggesting, as in the case of Bacchus and Liber, transplanted Greek and native Italian elements in Saturn. First of all, and most obviously, Saturn is identified with the Greek Kronos, who ruled during the Golden Age in Hesiod's *Works and Days*; in the Euhemeristic tradition, Saturn was also said to have been an early king of Italy.¹⁴ Varro in the *De Lingua Latina* (5.64) says that the name Saturn seems to have been derived from the root *satus* meaning „sowing” or „planting.” Furthermore, one version of Saturn's story made him the *auctor* of agriculture, with the result that Ianus ordered him to be worshipped as if the *auctor* of a better way of life.¹⁵ The early conflation of Saturn with Kronos resulted in a mythology which, like that of Bacchus and *Liber pater*, was almost indistinguishable from that of his Greek counterpart. Although Vergil wants the reader to link Saturn with Kronos, this association is firmly ingrafted on to Saturn's original Italian function as the god of planting and sowing. To make this point of transplantation even more dramatic, Vergil concludes the *laus Italiae* by acknowledging his poetic debt to Hesiod, and by emphatically proclaiming that he is transplanting Hesiod to Italian soil, for he carefully points out that he is Romanizing the theme:

Ascreaumque cano Romana per oppida carmen. (176)

Thoroughly Italianized by the grafting process, Hesiod's ideal Golden Age becomes a real *Saturnia tellus* set in contemporary Italy.

Vergil's claim to be Italianizing Hesiod and his theory of civilization, the composite heritages of Bacchus and *Liber pater* and of Kronos and Saturn, and the *coloni Ausones*, a transplanted race who ingrafted their cultural background on to the indigenous Italian Stock — all these diverse aspects of the *cultus* of Italy have one thing in common: the constant and repetitive emphasis on the westward direction of the transplanting or grafting process, whether literary, poetic or cultural.

¹³ *R. O. L.*, ed. E. H. Warmington, I, frag. 26.

¹⁴ I. S. Ryberg, „Vergil's Golden Age”, *TAPA*, 89 (1958), 126. See also Bailey (above, note 10), 104.

¹⁵ Macrobius *Sat.* 7.6.18: *observari eum maiestate, religionis quasi vitae melioris auctorem.*

This westward transplanting process has significant contemporary political implications. In the *laus ruris* Vergil contrasts the life of the farmer in the *Saturnia tellus* with the lives of those who, no longer satisfied with life in Italy, rejoice in civil bloodshed, and also seek wealth and a new homeland under a foreign sun, *sub alio sole* (512). During this period the most prominent Roman who might be so characterized was Antony, whose reported desire to transfer the Roman capital to Alexandria, and his marriage to Cleopatra, caused great alarm.¹⁶ The struggle between Antony and Cleopatra and the younger Caesar for Caesar's power is the fundamental fact of the decade of the *Georgics*. This polarization, reflected in Antony's fascination with the East and Caesar Octavian's association with the West, is accentuated even more by the establishment of Italy as common ground between them. This political reality is ironically reflected in the *laus Italiae*, where Vergil locates the *Saturnia tellus* at the center of the world, and as symbolic of the centricity of Italy, describes the *aesculus*, which stands at the center of the universe:

altior et penitus terrae defigitur arbos,
aesculus in primis, quae quantum vertice ad auras
 aetherias, tantum radice in Tartara tendit.
 ergo non hiemes illam, non flabra neque imbræ
 conuellunt: immota manet multosque nepotes,
 multa uirum uoluens durando saecula uincit,
 tum fortis late ramos et bracchia tendens
 hoc illuc media ipsa ingentem sustinet umbram.

(290—297)

The roots of the *aesculus* reach as far down into the center of the earth as its branches extend up to the heavens (291—292); since no winter storms or rains can uproot it (293—294), the *aesculus* remains strong and enduring, while many generations of men are born and die (295). In Italy, men, like the *aesculus*, can sink their roots down into the earth and forget about wars and storms ever uprooting them again. Furthermore, the *aesculus* stands at the center of the *Mediterranean* world. Italy, in fact, occupies that region of the universe between the two extremes of hot and cold which Vergil, in the first *Georgic*, said was granted to man by the grace of the gods:

has inter mediæque duæ mortalibus aegræ
 munere concessæ diuum,

(237—238)

¹⁶ Dio Cassius 50.4.1: . . . δτι καὶ τὰλλα τὰ θρυλούμενα ἀληθῆ εἴη, τοῦτ' ἔστιν δτι, ἀν κρατήσῃ, τὴν τε πόλιν σφῶν τῇ τε Κλεοπάτρῃ χαριεῖται καὶ τὸ κράτος ἐξ τὴν Αἴγυπτον μεταθήσει

Suetonius *Iul.* 79.3, reports a similar story about Julius Caesar. Cf. also Horace *Carm.* 3.3.17. Nicholas of Damascus, however, says that this was proved false by Caesar's will (20).

Thus, this sturdy oak, whose branches reach as far towards the sky as its roots extend into the soil, symbolized Italy, a place where plants, men and civilization can take root, grow and mature.

In the final lines of *Georgic* 2 Vergil pictures the type of *cultus* he envisions as flourishing in the *Saturnia tellus*:

hanc olim ueteres uitam soluere Sabini,
 hanc Remus et frater; sic fortis Etruria creuit
 scilicet et rerum facta est pulcherrima Roma,
 septemque una sibi muro circumdedit arces.
 ante etiam sceptrum Dictaei regis et ante
 impia quam caesis gens est epulata iuuencis,
 aureus hanc uitam in terris Saturnus agebat;
 neendum etiam audierant inflari classica, neendum
 impositos duris crepitare incudibus ensis. (532—540)

The Sabines, a traditionally strong and sturdy race, whom Cicero calls the *florem Italiae ac rei publicae robur* (*Lig.* 11), and Romulus and Remus, who were nurtured and reared in close relation to the land, represent the strong, vigorous life of Italy's earlier days; and the *mores* engendered by their agricultural life were a basic foundation of Rome's ability to rise to greatness. In this passage, the growth and development of these two races is underscored in the verbs *coluere* and *crevit*, two words whose many derivatives in this *Georgic* emphasize the Vergilian concept of *cultus*, and call to mind Cicero's agricultural metaphor for Romulus' plans for sowing a *res publica*. Furthermore, the early syncretism of the Sabines and the Etruscans accentuates Vergil's regard in this *Georgic* for *uariatio* and transplantation as significant parts of *cultus*, for what made Rome all that she became was that Rome did not grow out of a single hill fortress, but out of seven. This composite heritage of Rome, and as Cicero stressed, the *artes* and *ingenium* of many men, were principally responsible for the beginning and growth of Rome's greatness.

Although Vergil recognizes this fact, his subject in this *Georgic* is not Rome, but Italy, the *Saturnia tellus*. For the type of *cultus* achieved in Etruria and Rome Vergil indicates was already a *de facto* achievement by *aureus Saturnus*. Standing between the future Golden Age predicted in *Eclogue* 4.6 and the principate of Augustus described in *Aeneid* 6.791—794 as embodying all the qualities of the Saturnian age, the *Saturnia regna* are represented in this *Georgic* as being an attainable reality with the proper application of *cultus*. And in the second *Georgic* Vergil has delineated the type of *cultus* required to sow his state by redefining the Ciceronian *res publica* in terms of empire.