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SELF-PRESENTATION AND AGRICULTURE IN PLINY *Epistle 5.6*

1. Plin. *Ep.* 5.6.4–11 (text and app. Mynors 1963, translation Walsh 2006):

[4] caelum^a est hieme frigidum et gelidum; myrtos oleas quaeque alia adsiduo tepore laetantur, aspernatur ac respuit; laurum tamen patitur atque etiam nitidissimam profert, interdum sed non saepius quam sub urbe nostra necat. [5] aestatis mira clementia: semper aer spiritu aliquo mouetur, frequentius tamen auras quam uentos habet. [. . .] [7] regionis forma pulcherrima. imaginare amphitheatrum aliquod immensum, et quae sola rerum natura possit effingere. lata et diffusa planities montibus cingitur, montes summa sui parte procera nemora et antiqua habent. [8] frequens ibi et uaria uenatio. inde caeduae siluae^b cum ipso monte descendunt. has inter pingues terrenique colles^c (neque enim facile usquam saxum etiam si quaeratur occurrit) planissimis campis fertilitate^d non cedunt, opimamque messem^e serius tantum, sed non minus percoquunt.^f [9] sub his per latus omne uineae porriguntur, unamque faciem longe lateque contexunt; quarum a fine imoque quasi margine arbusta nascuntur. [10] prata inde campique, campi quos non nisi ingentes boues et fortissima aratra perfringunt:^g tantis glaebris tenacissimum solum cum primum prosecatur^h adsurgit, ut nono demum sulcoⁱ perdometur.^j [11] prata florida^k et gemmea^l trifolium^m aliasque herbas teneras semper et molles et quasi nouasⁿ alunt. cuncta enim perennibus riuis nutriuntur^o; sed ubi aquae plurimum, palus nulla, quia deuexa terra, quidquid liquoris accepit nec absorbit, effundit in Tiberim.

4 oleas βγ : tilias et M 8 caeduae Mβ : crebrae γ 8 perquoquunt βγ : decoquunt M
11 florida βγ : frigida M

[4] The climate in winter is cold and frosty, so it repels and rejects myrtles, olives, and other trees which delight in continual warmth. However, it bears with laurels and yields most handsome ones, though from time to time it kills them but not more often than happens in the neighborhood of Rome. [5] In summer it is remarkably temperate; the air is constantly stirred by currents, but more often they are light breezes rather than winds. [. . .] [7] The appearance of the area is very beautiful. Think of some massive amphitheatre, one which nature alone can fashion. The broad and expansive plain is ringed with mountains, on the topmost levels of which are glades of tall and ancient trees. [8] A good deal of varied hunting is available there, and woodland suitable for felling descends with the mountain slopes. Between these areas of woodland are hills whose soil is rich and fertile (no outcrop of rock readily meets the eye anywhere, even if you are looking for it); they do not yield in fertility to the broadest plains. The harvests that ripen there are rich; true, they arrive rather late, but they are no smaller in size. [9] Below them, vineyards extend on every flank, presenting an identical appearance as they interweave far and wide. At the lowest level below them plantations grow, and [10] adjoining them are meadows and fields—fields which only strapping oxen and the strongest plows can break through, for when the ground is first plowed, the soil cleaves fast, and comes out in such great clods that it is only finally subdued when turned over nine times. [11] The meadows bloom with flowers like jewels; they nurture trefoil and other delicate plants which are always soft and fresh-looking, for they are all nourished by streams all the year round. Yet where much water gathers, there is no marshland because it lies on a slope, and any water which is attracted there and fails to be absorbed pours into the Tiber.

2. Sky and Land (§§4–7)

On the situation (*situs*) of the farm, see Theophr. *Caus. pl.* 3.6.2–9, Cato. *Agr.* 1.2, Col. *Rust.* 1.3.1–3, 3.1.6–7. For an epitome of these loci, cf. Vergil *Georgics* 1.50–53:

ac prius ignotum ferro quam scindimus aequor,
uentos et uarium caeli praediscere morem
cura sit ac patrios cultusque habitusque locorum
et quid quaeque ferat regio et quid quaeque recuset.

3. Farming Business (§§8–11)

Cato *Agr.* 1.7 (cf. Varro *Rust.* 1.7.9) as touchstone for Pliny's farm:

praedium quod primum siet, si me rogabis, sic dicam: de omnibus agris optimoque loco iugera agri centum, uinea est prima, uel si uino multo est; secundo loco hortus irriguus; tertio salictum; quarto oletum; quinto pratium; sexto campus frumentarius; septimo silua caedua; octauo arbustum; nono glandaria silua.

4. Species of Agricultural Language in *Ep.* 5.6.4–11

TECHNICAL TERMS

- a) *caelum*: see *OLD* s.v. 7a, which, does not, however, give a sense of how common the usage of “climate” is among the agronomists. From Col. *Rust.* alone, add 1.1.6, 2.10.4, 3.1.10, 3.2.16, 4.10.3, 4.17.7, 4.19.2, 11.2.41, etc.
- b) *caeduae siluae*: see *TLL* 3/0.64.1–14 (Hoppe), *OLD* s.v.
- e) *messem*: but in the agronomists more often of the harvest (or time of harvest) than the grain itself (see *TLL* 8/0.856.35–857.3 [Rubenbauer]).
- f) *percoquant*: rare, but see *OLD* s.v. 2.
- i) *sulco*: a long and narrow trench for planting or other purposes, see *OLD* s.v. 1a, 2, and cf., e.g., Cato *Agr.* 40.1, 43.1, Col. 3.13.4, Varro *Rust.* 1.37.4.
- m) *trifolium*
- o) *nutriuntur*

“PSEUDO-TECHNICAL”

- g) *perfringunt* = *scindunt*: in this sense only here and Stat. *Silu.* 3.1.113, see *TLL* 10/1.1407.28–31 (Wirth).
- h) *prosecatur* = *proscinditur*: in this sense only here, see *TLL* 10/2.2180.70–3 (Pieroni).
- j) *perdometur*: not in the agricultural authors.

NON-TECHNICAL

- c) *pingues terrenique colles*: but *pinguis* technical of “fat” soils in the agronomists (see White 1970:99–101).
- d) *fertilitate*
- k) *florida*

l) *gemmea*

n) *teneras semper et molles et quasi nouas*

5. Sen. *Ep.* 86.17–21: Another Kind of Agricultural Language

[17] ad oliuetum reuertar, quod uidi duobus modis positum: magnarum arborum truncos circumcisis ramis et ad unum redactis pedem cum rapo suo transtulit, amputatis radicibus, relicto tantum capite ipso ex quo illae pependerant. hoc fimo tinctum in scrobem demisit, deinde terram non adgessit tantum, sed calcuit et pressit. [18] negat quicquam esse hac, ut ait, pisatione efficacius. uidelicet frigus excludit et uentum; minus praeterea mouetur et ob hoc nascentes radices prodire patitur ac solum adprendere, quas necesse est cereas adhuc et precario haerentes leuis quoque reuellat agitatio. rapum autem arboris antequam obruat radit; ex omni enim materia quae nudata est, ut ait, radices exeunt nouae. non plures autem super terram eminere debet truncus quam tres aut quattuor pedes; statim enim ab imo uestietur arida et retorrída erit. [19] alter ponendi modus hic fuit: ramos fortes nec corticis duri, quales esse nouellarum arborum solent, eodem genere posuit. hi paulo tardius surgunt, sed cum tamquam a planta processerint, nihil habent in se abhorridum aut triste. [20] illud etiam nunc uidi, uitem ex arbusto suo annosam transferri; huius capillamenta quoque, si fieri potest, colligenda sunt, deinde liberalius sternenda uitis, ut etiam ex corpore radicescat. et uidi non tantum mense Februario positas sed etiam Martio exacto; tenent et complexae sunt non suas ulmos. [21] omnes autem istas arbores quae, ut ita dicam, grandiscapiae sunt, ait aqua adiuuandas cisternina; quae si prodest, habemus pluuiam in nostra potestate.

6. Select Bibliography

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