

## Praise of Labor: A Reevaluation of Vergil's *Laudes Italiae*.

Vergil's praises of Italy (2.136-176) have attracted broad attention through a narrow purview, namely regarding its sincerity. Skepticism about the genuineness of this laudatory piece stems from an apparently unrealistic representation of Italy that requires readers either to ignore a number of outright lies or to accept that Italy exhibits numerous deficiencies. This paper addresses this piece and its praises in a broader context, arguing that Vergil's praises remain sincere and that each bit of praise, when understood holistically of the poem, suggests neither a typically idyllic land nor a typical golden age, but an exultation to labor and the celebration of a uniquely Roman identity. Inasmuch as the *laudes Italiae* mirror themes of the second *Georgic*, that book and even the complete *Georgics* may supply meaning to the many ambiguities of the *laudes Italiae*. Thereby, the signification of key words – such as spring, Saturnian, and *labor* – as they occur beyond the piece may lend a wholly new meaning to the *laudes Italiae*, one that only “he who can recognize the causes of things” will recognize (2.490).

This paper will first explore Vergil's golden age, which, contrary to its Hesiodic counterpart, is characterized by labor and its rewards. Second, this reading of golden age and labor will be applied to the *laudes Italiae* to show both that Vergil's praise is confined to aspects of labor and that such a golden age may repeat itself with the correct application of efforts. In turn, the two persistent backdrops to the *Georgics*, Roman identity and exceptionalism, feed into this broader reading of the *laudes Italiae* as an expression of anti-expansionist sentiments.

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