

## The significance of Virgilian intertext in the ninth-century poem *Hortulus*

Virgilian reception has a long history. Carolingian manifestations of this are evident in the work of the ninth-century poet, Walahfrid Strabo, who alludes to the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid* in his poem *Hortulus*. Virgil's authority lends gravitas and depth to Walahfrid's poetry, even when Walahfrid advances Christian themes. Three examples from the *Hortulus* illustrate this: the discussions of fennel, iris, and pennyroyal.

The Carolingian abbot Walahfrid Strabo composed sacred and secular texts in both poetry and prose. His *Hortulus* is a hexameter poem in four hundred and forty-four lines divided into twenty-seven strophes which describe the art of gardening and discuss twenty-four separate plants flourishing in Walahfrid's garden. This poem is largely influenced by the *Georgics* but also has connections to the *Aeneid*. In my work I have analyzed this poem and other poetry of Walahfrid, searching for Virgilian intertext, its form, function, and use. Commentaries by Dümmler (1884), Roccaro (1979), and Feiss (2019) among others have noted instances of Virgilian intertext in this poem but with little analysis and minimal interpretation.

In the *Hortulus* Walahfrid likens the **fennel** (*Hort.* 208-11) to Virgil's oak, (*Georg.* 2.294-7), which in turn is symbolic of Christ. Walahfrid's fennel spreads its branches wide (as does Virgil's oak) symbolizing Christ spreading his arms wide on the cross. Fennel also gives sight to those who are in shadow and heals the sick (other Christ-like features). Walahfrid uses his description of the **iris** (*Hort.* 219-223) to allude to Palas (*Aen.* 11.67-70), cut down in his prime, symbolic of both Christ and the monastery students who are called to die to the world upon taking their vows. In this strophe Walahfrid's description of Hyacinthus alludes to Virgil's Palas, both tragically slain in their youth. Walahfrid claims this plant makes garments shining white,

symbolic of Christ's forgiveness of sins. In his discussion of **pennyroyal** (*Hort.* 300-327), through allusion to Virgil (*Georg.* 1.268-9), Walahfrid argues that classical and Christian learning can be mingled. This is the first strophe in which Walahfrid mentions the Christian God overtly; in it he also refers to Pliny the Elder's uses of pennyroyal. In so doing, classical and Christian teachings are mixed.

In this paper I will analyze these three allusions that underscore Walahfrid's mixing of classical, specifically Virgilian, learning to add weight and authority to his own words, illustrating this particular form of Virgilian reception.

#### Select Bibliography

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