

Virgil's Fourth *Eclogue* and Universal Histories of the First Century

Studies of the models and intertexts for Virgil's Fourth *Eclogue* have a long and well documented history. This paper does not propose to add to the discussion by proposing a relationship with a specific text, but rather argues that the poet's engagement with the topics of time and historical process (both fundamental components of the poem) in many ways intersects with, and emerges from, contemporary treatments of these same topics in the first century. While critics such as Hardie (2006) have recognized the relevant points of contact with authors such as Lucretius, mostly overlooked are the connections with historians such as Nepos, Atticus and Varro. These authors, however, made the important attempt to understand and articulate how developments such as Pompey's eastern conquests, and the enlargement of the Roman world in general, impacted Roman time and history, and how the timelines of the different communities involved might exist and cohere with one another. The framework in which these authors explore the issues, incorporating such features as an expanded temporal scope, synchronization, and an interest in the interrelationship between time and space, is also, I argue, comparable to Virgil's historical narrative in the fourth *Eclogue*.

These similarities suggest Virgil's participation in an important cultural preoccupation of the late Republic. But I also argue that closer scrutiny of some of the underlying motivations for the writing of universal histories provides further insight into Virgil's poem. The universal historians mentioned above, in addition to related authors such as Polybius, Diodorus and Florus, frequently exhibit the conviction that an expanded, inclusive, and diachronic framework offered a crucial perspective for understanding an increasingly complex world. A similar premise, I argue, underpins Virgil's efforts to place recent Roman events within a cosmic time frame that extends far in all directions. The comparable use of biological metaphors and metaphors of the

human body by both Virgil and these other authors to underscore the interconnectedness of historical events and readers' interpretation of them, moreover, further supports the idea of common participation in an ongoing cultural debate.

Bibliography

Hardie, Philip. 2006. "Cultural and historical narratives in Virgil's *Eclogues* and Lucretius," in Brill Companion to Greek and Latin Pastoral, ed. M. Fantuzzi and T. Papanghelis, 13-40. Leiden: Brill.