

Spoliation and the Georgics

This paper proposes to examine *Geo.* 3.1-48, Virgil's 'temple' to Octavian, through the lens of 'spoliation:' the practice of looting architectural elements from ruins and reusing them in a new building. Many understandings of this passage look 'forwards,' considering it in the light of the *Aeneid* (Thomas 1985), but I intend in this paper to consider it in its context and especially consider why the 'temple' was an apt way to frame both Virgil's and Octavian's triumphs.

I will initially define my understanding of 'spoliation,' grounding myself in the archaeological literature (Brilliant 1982; Kinney 1997; 2001; 2006; 2011; Davies 2017) and taking into account previous applications of the concept to literature, including discussions of this passage (Biggs 2018; Haimson Lushkov 2018). I will then apply this definition to elements of the 'temple' to Octavian: naturally to visible elements, such as the *spirantia signa* and the depictions of Rome's enemies, but also to less obviously visible elements, such as the intertextuality in this passage with Ennius, Lucretius, and Callimachus (Thomas 1986; 1988; Hinds 1998; Gale 2000). This will be set against the common Republican practice of dedicating spoils in the form of a temple, paying close attention to M. Fulvius Nobilior, noble patron of Ennius. A brief overview of Republican votive temple architecture will clarify the tradition which Virgil was evoking with his temple, focusing particularly on marble, and taking as a case study Fulvius Nobilior's Temple of Hercules Musarum (Martina 1981; Marabini Moevs 1981), particularly associated with poetry. I will then argue that the *Georgics* consciously evoke this tradition, for example in its use of marble (3.13; c.f. (Davies 2013; 2014) on the valence of marble).

Having established that spoliation is a powerful metaphor to apply, the second part of this paper will investigate how this affects our interpretation of the *Georgics*. It naturally

supports Hinds' (1998, 53–54) and Thomas' (1988, *ad* 3.11) observation that Virgil 'triumphs' over Ennius, and the insertion of Ennian references into the 'temple' like looted columns strengthen Virgil's claim to victory. But Virgil's claim to triumph over the Roman Ennius is disturbing in the war-ridden context, and Virgil's particular choice of intertexts—Lucretius and Ennius from Rome, and Callimachus, closely associated with Egypt—remind the reader uneasily of Mark Antony's Roman-Egyptian alliance against which Octavian was fighting. A triumph over Ennius, the celebrator *par excellence* of the Roman Republic, is particularly troubling in this regard. The fact also remains that neither Virgil nor Octavian had won their wars when this poem of victory was written—for Octavian was still fighting in the east, and, following the scholarly orthodoxy that Virgil's temple represents the *Aeneid*, it also had yet to be written. The overall effect is to invest a superficially hopeful piece of poetry with a distinct note of pessimism.

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