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Carving More Trees. Memory and Environment in Virgil and Calpurnius Siculus

Abstract Although the ancient pastoral setting is often considered harmonious, this view can be challenged by examining poems in which trees are used by shepherds for writing (Verg. ecl. 5, Calp. ecl. 1 and 3). Usually seen as metapoetic elements, these carvings can be considered products of a poetic memory and, at the same time, examples of a violent relationship established by humans with their environment. In order to understand these aspects, I analyze the occurrences of inscribed trees in Virgil and in Calpurnius Siculus as representations of a continuous transformation of cultural memory through the exploitation of natural elements. Within this perspective, my purpose is to read Roman pastoral poems as texts with a reciprocal construction of a discourse, thus avoiding Virgil as a primary source of meaning.

The environment has always been a major topic in studies of Roman bucolic poetry. Nonetheless, some natural features in these poems have not been thoroughly examined from an intertextual point of view with attention to cultural memory and environmental humanities. Taking these fields into account can establish new perceptions of Virgil and Calpurnius Siculus, especially in poems in which the act of carving trees is relevant. Usually read

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as a metapoetic feature, this act can also be the basis for different views on environment and memory in these two poets' works.

A famous example of tree carving is found in Virgil's Eclogue 5, a poem which begins with an elder Menalcas inviting a younger Mopsus to play the flute among hazels and elm trees while he sings¹. In response, the latter takes a humble stance and gladly accepts the invitation, suggesting another place for their activity, a cave, instead of "the uncertain shadows" (*incertas umbras*) of trees². Menalcas states that only Amyntas is better than Mopsus, who answers that "that one" (*idem*), i.e. Amyntas, aims to beat Phoebus in the art of singing³. Finally, the elder peasant asks Mopsus to continue and speculates on the subject of the verses of his fellow shepherd. It is an abrupt change in Menalcas's plans: after putting forward the idea of singing while Mopsus plays the flute, he implies that the young shepherd could take the lead in his place⁴. Nonetheless, Mopsus, responding to Menalcas's encouragement, decides to put a song of his own to the test:

Immo haec, in uiridi nuper quae cortice fagi
carmina descripsi et modulans alterna notauī,
experiar. tu deinde iubeto certet Amyntas.⁵

Indeed these songs, which I just now wrote out
on verdant bark of beech and marked in measuring shifts
I'm going to try out: you then bid that Amyntas challenge⁶.

Firstly, what is important here is that Mopsus decides to read out a 25-verse song that he had written down in the bark of a tree, something unprecedented in the ancient bucolic tradition. Although there are other mentions of carving in the *Bucolics*, only this poem names the carved tree species and presents the inscribed song. The tree is a beech with "verdant bark" which reveals, with the adverb *nuper*, how recent is Mopsus's creation. The adverb contrasts with *iampridem*, used by the elder Menalcas in verse 55 to set the moment of creation of the poem he will sing to Mopsus⁷. The fact that

1 Verg. ecl. 5, 1–3.

2 Verg. ecl. 5, 4–7.

3 Verg. ecl. 5, 8–9.

4 Verg. ecl. 5, 10–12.

5 Verg. ecl. 5, 13–15.

6 Translated by Van Sickle 2011, 92.

7 Lee 1977, 65.

the young shepherd has not yet recited his creation may be the reason he declares that he is going to “try it out”⁸. Mopsus’s song is presented as something unusual, an experiment so innovative in pastoral that he had to write it down⁹. What stands out as new, therefore, is not only the song’s content, but also the act of writing it down. In addition, scholars usually pay attention to the fact that the tree chosen for the inscription is a bucolic element *par excellence*¹⁰, a species considered wild and very resistant in Antiquity¹¹, and the paradigmatic tree of the *Bucolics*¹². Thus, Mopsus’s creation could at the same time metapoetically represent a new poet, Virgil, and an innovation in ancient pastoral landscape.

There are other consequences of writing such a long poem on beech bark: from a contemporary botanical point of view, it could kill the tree¹³. However, would a poet like Virgil have had this in mind? Would shepherds have been aware of that? Before proceeding, it is necessary to consider two factors: the first one is that Virgil probably knew about this danger, given the extensive study of trees done by ancient Greeks and Romans up to that time. Theophrastus, for example, describes ways of violently damaging a tree and points out the possibility of killing trees due to extensive perforation¹⁴, an effect that is probably expected from carving a 25-line song. Furthermore, since Virgil’s vocabulary for trees and other plants is similar to texts like Cato’s *De agri cultura*, especially in the *Georgics* but also in the *Bucolics*¹⁵, it is likely the poet was familiar with arboriculture technical terms like other Greek and Roman authors of his time¹⁶. Despite these elements, it could be asked, why he would let his Mopsus write on a tree if he knew this action could put an end to it? Regarding this matter, Servius gives an answer by posing a question: *ubi enim debuit magis rusticus scribere?* (“where else would a peasant write?”)¹⁷. His comment has been interpreted as an assertion that Mopsus could only use a tree as a medium for writing due to the absence of alternative materials in the rural environment. However, a different interpretation is that the beech is the sole option for a shepherd due to the

8 Von Albrecht 2007, 25.

9 Putnam 1970, 169.

10 Lipka 2001, 168.

11 Theophr. h. plant. 3, 10, 1.

12 Verg. ecl. 1, 1, georg. 4, 566.

13 For a detailed explanation, see Buckler – Hay 2018, 43.

14 Theophr. c. plant. 5, 16.

15 Lipka 2001, 167.

16 Henkel 2009, 156.

17 Serv. ecl. 5, 13 Thilo I.

conventions of the bucolic genre. At this moment, it is worth noting that Pliny the Elder states that country people used to write messages to each other on beech bark or use it for ritual purposes, killing the tree as a result¹⁸. It is not clear if the bark is removed from the tree in these situations¹⁹, a doubt that could be applied to the Virgilian setting too. This practice is a possible option in Eclogue 5, since Pliny also mentions how trees were often destroyed due to the removal of their bark²⁰. Thus, some peasants might not have seen any problem in using this tree species at will, without considering the effects of their use on the trees' health. Virgil's shepherds could have the same attitude towards a beech, even if recent scholars find it a "barbarism" and thus unlikely to be true²¹, a modern assumption based on current concerns about the environment. There is a possibility that Mopsus would not think about the consequences of his action, because he does what other peasants would usually do to a tree.

Another important factor is the content of the poem that is written on the beech. It deals with the subject of Daphnis's death, an event responsible for putting all activities in the country on hold, making even animals weep because of his departure²², which highlights his double nature as god and human²³. Analyzing this poem, scholars have mostly focused on the association of Daphnis with Julius Caesar²⁴. Besides the possibility of this allegory, Daphnis is also considered "archetypal for bucolic song"²⁵, since he is an authority on many matters of a shepherd's life, a possible reason for being chosen as a subject by Mopsus. While presenting himself as a contender to Amyntas, the young shepherd chooses such an important symbol of poetry in order to stand as the bearer of his legacy and, consequently, become more like Daphnis. He also offers in his poem a sample of his abilities to Menalcas, someone already respected for his talent. Additionally, the "lament for Daphnis", apparently composed in response to a previous song by Menalcas, is an attempt to secure immortality for the poetic tradition of this shepherds' community by marking the surface of a tree²⁶. Alternatively, the consequence of his action is that, just like its honored figure, the song's medium of memory,

18 Plin. nat. 16, 14.

19 For a footnote on this matter, see Rackham 1945, 410.

20 Plin. nat. 17, 234–238.

21 Coleman 1977, 157.

22 Verg. ecl. 5, 20–29.

23 Buisel 2024, 129–130.

24 Lee 1977, 62; Cucchiarelli 2017, 282.

25 Davis 1987, 80.

26 Papaioannou 2006, 5.

the beech, could die due to the extensive carving²⁷, creating the need for another way to preserve the text. Poetry, thus, expresses how death continues to reign in everyday life, even when the shepherds try to avoid it, and it continues lurking the countryside in other passages of the *Bucolics*. At the end of his lament, Mopsus states that they must make a tomb for Daphnis and add two verses created by their idol over it²⁸. Possibly aware of the impermanence of his writing, the young shepherd suggests that his master's words, the words that Mopsus as a pupil has allegedly carved in wood, should be preserved in stone. Therefore, instead of a tree whose shadow is so appropriate for a *locus amoenus*, the shepherds would, surprisingly, find a tombstone.

With this in mind, it is possible to reflect on two more aspects related to the tree species that Virgil chose for his Eclogue 5. The first one is the common reading of *fagus* as a new version of the Theocritean φηγός, an oak. Some scholars see *fagus* as a play on words with φηγός²⁹, because of their similar pronunciation, and even argue that it is impossible to read the Latin word merely as “beech”, because it could also mean “oak”³⁰. Others consider *fagus* a mere mistake by Virgil, who could have incorrectly understood the meaning of φηγός in Theocritus³¹. The possibility of reading it just as “oak” due to an affiliation to Hellenistic love poetry was postulated too³², although it depends on a reading that does not take wordplay into account in these poems³³. Nevertheless, linguists have concluded that both the Latin and the Greek words come from different stages of development of the Proto-Indo-European *b^hāgō-, having a primary meaning in common applied to divergent species in each context³⁴. Despite this distinction, there is still a possibility of reading *fagus* in a double way, both as a tree equivalent to the one in Theocritus and as a different tree, which is, to a certain extent, also possible apart from the wordplay ambiguity as a metapoetic feature³⁵. It is important to remember that this transient meaning of *fagus* is based on the fact that intertextuality is a procedure of “absorbing and transforming another

27 Buckler – Hay 2018, 43.

28 Verg. ecl. 5, 43–44.

29 Williams 1968, 318f.; O’Hara 1996, 63.

30 Chandler 2010, 88f.

31 Williams 1968, 318.

32 Lipka 2002, 137; Cucchiarelli 2017, 290; Paraskeviotis 2020, 39f.

33 Kenney 1983, 50.

34 Lane 1967, 211; Blažek 2002, 209.

35 Henkel 2009, 35f.

text”, turning the literary discourse into a “mosaic of quotations”³⁶. That is, a reading process in which “meaning is realized at the point of reception”³⁷, dependent on the reader’s perspective. It is for this reason that the ambiguity generated by the contrast between *fagus* and φηγός is so productive among Virgilian scholars. However, it should be noted that, during the reading process, it is necessary to deal with other possible ways of understanding a poem, thus avoiding the elimination of some of them to make it easier. Thinking of more connections established in Virgil’s Eclogue 5, the relation of *fagus* to *quercus* should be considered, which certainly means “oak” and occurs in the *Bucolics* too. Some oaks destroyed by lightning are mentioned because of a prophecy alluded in Eclogue 1: *de caelo tactas memini praedicere quercus*³⁸ (“I see that often oaks foretold / by bolts from heaven struck”)³⁹. Just like the presence of the verb *memini* is relevant because it makes us imagine a past for the poem’s narrative, it is also important that *quercus* could represent Theocritus’ φηγός. Thus, this remembrance would be of both the prophecy and Theocritean poetry, creating a double meaning for *fagus* as continuity and rupture at the same time. Significantly, in this tree, not in a *quercus*, Mopsus writes his poem. The opposition created in the pastoral world between the remembered but eliminated oak and the beech displayed as a new shelter is already noticeable at the beginning of Eclogue 1⁴⁰: *tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi*⁴¹ (“you – lying back beneath a broad beech lid”)⁴². Here the beech represents a new pastoral ideal, without, however, excluding the reminiscence of a Greek one. It is also worth mentioning the description of old broken beeches in Eclogue 9: *veteres, iam fracta cacumina, fagos*⁴³ (“beeches – old at last, tops broken”)⁴⁴. Taking the textualization⁴⁵ of the Virgilian book as an intertextual reading guideline, it is possible to notice that a continuity is first established by the transition from oak to beech and then from beech to a future tree whose species is still unknown.

36 Kristeva 1969, 146.

37 Fowler 1997, 24.

38 Verg. ecl. 1, 17.

39 Translated by Van Sickle 2011, 77.

40 Saunders 2008, 85.

41 Verg. ecl. 1, 1.

42 Translated by Van Sickle 2011, 76.

43 Verg. ecl. 9, 9

44 Translated by Van Sickle 2011, 107.

45 According to Greimas – Courtés 1982, 341, textualization “is the set of procedures (making up textual syntax) the end product of which is a discursive continuum”.

The second matter which should draw attention is the material consequences of Mopsus's writing on the tree besides its death. A common hypothesis for his decision to write on wood is that it would be an "aid to memory"⁴⁶. It could be stated that this action is an appropriation of a natural element by a human. The beech is now dominated by humans because it is now part of pastoral culture, a medium of memory. It is used as a tool for human purposes at the expense of its own survival. The effects of Mopsus's action permeate Virgilian poetry. The beech has become a tame and useful tree⁴⁷, not wild and resistant as Theophrastus described it, and suffers changes throughout the *Bucolics*. In addition, the *Georgics* turn it into working material, but at the same time, a symbol of pastoral poetry through intertextual reading⁴⁸ and reference to the poet's past activities⁴⁹. From this point of view, in the *Bucolics* the beech is a species that serves the shepherds, while others are still untamed. In fact, it is working material in the hands of the poet Mopsus. In a way, Virgil's depiction of trees reflects the tendency among Romans, e.g. Cato, Varro, Pliny the Elder and Columella, to describe natural elements mainly through their human usage. Theophrastus also dedicated large portions of his work to these uses, but his descriptions also emphasize how people can endanger trees. For example, after defining the beech in detail⁵⁰, he highlights limitations for both cutting and removing its bark⁵¹. Nevertheless, despite some possible exceptions, most of these authors reveal a prevailing extractivist thinking towards the environment.

The effects of carving on the health of ancient pastoral trees have not been a subject for many scholars, even those close to the environmental humanities⁵². A possible reason for this is a common reading of the *Bucolics* which assumes the environment as a stable reality in Virgil⁵³, as a poetic space where harmony reigns⁵⁴. Because of this, the act of carving trees in Virgil is usually understood only as a metaphor to writing⁵⁵. In a way, this conclusion is based on the fact that it is impossible to distinguish the tree from its use as a writing material in the Virgilian pastoral world due to the

46 Clausen 1994, 157.

47 Armstrong 2019, 197.

48 Armstrong 2009, 43–45.

49 Verg. georg. 4, 566.

50 Theophr. h. plant. 3, 10, 1.

51 Theophr. h. plant. 5, 12.

52 For example, Jones 2011 and Armstrong 2019.

53 Newlands 1987, 221; von Albrecht 2007, 40.

54 Poggioli 1975, 20.

55 Henkel 2009, 44–45.

fact that the term *cortex* defines both a part of a tree and the human products made of it. It is important to remember that the *Bucolics* is a book from a genre being established in the Roman literary culture, a genre that was written in books despite its “evocation of a naive performative tradition in its past”⁵⁶. The need to document poetry through writing is a premise represented in Eclogue 5.

Memory is an important issue in pastoral poetry. Virgil’s time is often considered a transitional period in which keeping events in mind becomes an issue in literature⁵⁷ and is seen as a reason to write poems, a motivation that blends social memory into poetic memory⁵⁸. Shepherds often forget things and try to remember them in the *Bucolics*. Remembering implies that the thing remembered is not completely lost. An answer to instability and failure of memory is writing, a way to establish a connection with the past⁵⁹ and to create material conditions necessary for a lasting *fama*, for one’s immortality as a writer⁶⁰. Certainly, Mopsus had the stability of writing in mind when he carved his newly-composed poem on a tree. However, the tree could potentially die, making his medium of memory disappear. Even if its bark were not removed, an action which would speed up the tree’s death⁶¹, it would deteriorate over time if not properly treated. From this point of view, writing could not help to prevent the inevitable loss of memory, as opposed to Horace’s idea of the permanence of poetry⁶². Thus, instead of remembrances, the danger of silence lurks around the pastoral landscape⁶³, and the only solution to avoid it is to keep creating memory.

Violently carving a tree as Mopsus does could be seen as an expression of “the inevitability of decay”⁶⁴, but also an example of how ancient Romans dealt with the environment, through its continuous exploitation. Opposed to that, there is the shepherds’ cultural memory, especially their poetic memory, which is collectively transmitted and repurposed, with vestigial components of other artistic expressions being incorporated into their creations. Vestiges imply recollection, a way of perpetuating fragments of a long gone

56 Breed 2006, 335.

57 Meban 2009, 102 f., Hulsenboom 2013, 18.

58 Papaioannou 2006, 4–5.

59 Meban 2009, 119.

60 Assmann 1999, 181 f.

61 Buckler – Hay 2018, 42 f.

62 Hor. *carm.* 3, 30.

63 Meban 2009, 112.

64 Buckler – Hay 2018, 43.

past⁶⁵. Perhaps, what Mopsus did with his lament is related to this: an effort to create ways to preserve vestiges of the shepherds' culture and partially avoid its demise. If the inevitable decay of memory is considered, the young shepherd might not rely so much on *fama*, being so dependent on oral tradition, to preserve his song. Instead, Mopsus tries to make his work last longer through writing. Similarly, the permanence of Daphnis's epitaph, apparently composed by himself, cannot rely on their heirs and must be set in stone.

The struggle against an eternal silence echoes in Calpurnius Siculus's Eclogue 1. In this text, two shepherds, Corydon and Ornytus, discuss where they can take shelter from the sun to sing, and decide to enter a cave⁶⁶. Once they arrive there, Ornytus notices something odd:

O. Et iam captatae pariter successimus umbrae,
sed quaenam sacra descripta est pagina fago,
quam modo nescio quis properanti falce notauit?
aspicis ut uirides etiam nunc littera rimas
seruet et arenti nondum se laxet hiatu?
C. Ornyte, fer propius tua lumina: tu potes alto
cortice descriptos citius percurrere uersus⁶⁷

O. Now we have both come beneath the shade we sought. But what legend is this inscribed upon the hallowed beech, which someone of late has scored with hasty knife? Do you notice how the sheet still preserve the fresh greenness of their cutting and do not as yet gape with sapless slit?
C. Ornytus, look closer. You can more quickly scan the lines inscribed on the bark high up⁶⁸.

Before these lines, the beech is mentioned right after *pineae silua* ("pine forest")⁶⁹, which is a possible reference to *πίτυς* ("pine")⁷⁰, a tree very relevant for the understanding of Theocritus' Idyll 1. The Virgilian tree, *fagus*, is the tree chosen to be carved by Faunus, inhabitant of the cave the shepherds have decided to enter. Not only is the tree species given of the inscription, but it is also described as "sacred" (*sacra*) to Ornytus. Additionally, it should

65 Assmann 1999, 211.

66 Calp. ecl. 1, 8–12.

67 Calp. ecl. 1, 19–25.

68 Translated by Duff – Duff 1934, 221 and adapted.

69 Calp. ecl. 1, 9–11.

70 Davis 1987, 39; Beron 2020, 23.

not be forgotten that “sheet” (*pagina*) is a rare poetic word that means the material (the tree itself), its use, and its content at the same time⁷¹. Regardless of the date of his poetry⁷², Calpurnius Siculus wrote it at a time in which writing was already deeply consolidated in Rome and, of course, in the pastoral poetic memory. A novelty in Virgil here is common practice. Ornytus is not surprised by seeing something written in a tree. He is amazed because it is sacred and he does not know who (*nescio quis*) carved (*notauit*) it so quickly with a knife or scythe (*properanti falce*). He notices that the letters still have green grooves (*uirides rimas*) that have not dried out yet. After this, Corydon asks him to check the verses (*uersus*) cut into the bark (*cortice*).

There are a few important elements here. The first is that, like Mopsus’s poem in Virgil’s Eclogue 5, the *sacra pagina* is quite recent. However, it is a novelty inscribed in a pastoral element that is not new: the beech. Unlike Mopsus’s poem, the author of the song found here is still unknown. The act of writing on a tree is referred to by the same verb used in Virgil: here it is *notauit*, there it is *notauit*⁷³. The difference between the two forms draws attention to another point: in Virgil, Mopsus has carved something, but in Calpurnius Siculus someone who does not participate in the shepherds’ dialogue has written it. Some readers feel frustrated due to the lack of an amoebean exchange, or a poem written by the shepherds in the poem. This absence may work as an indication of the participation of someone outside the shepherds’ dialogue, like Faunus, or – on another diegetic level – the presence of a poet who came earlier, such as Virgil⁷⁴. Despite there being no specific reference to him, there is indeed recognition of a character from the past.

Virgil’s Eclogue 5 sheds light on this passage and vice versa. This two-way movement happens because the relationship between two texts covers the comprehension of both of them⁷⁵. As a consequence, both poems are reevaluated together on the same level, making their meaning always transient and multiple. When dealing with intertextuality, there is no need to separate the reader from the philologist, since the latter must be still a kind of reader, a reader with a historical, social and cultural background who

71 Beron 2021, 165.

72 There is still no consensus regarding the date of composition of Calpurnius Siculus’ work. Although most scholars agree with a Neronian dating (e.g. Mayer 2006, Karakasis 2016), some argue for other options (e.g. Baldwin 1955, Horsfall 1996). For an updated summary of this debate, see Beron 2021, 30–40.

73 Verg. ecl. 5, 14.

74 Slater 1994, 73.

75 Barchiesi 1997, 211.

incorporates the aesthetic perspective of the text and participates in the construction of its meaning through other texts as well⁷⁶. In order to deal with the complexity of an artistic work through intertextuality, it is necessary to envision other possible ways of understanding it in a literary system, ways that perhaps do not immediately come to mind. Evidently, this complexity is only available if the reader assumes a “certain level of trust” in the poet’s skill⁷⁷. Thus, it is important to work with the premise that Calpurnius Siculus, despite all the negative criticism his poetry has received, stands a chance in this game which he plays aware of the implications of referencing earlier poets in his work. With this in mind, it is worth examining the shepherds’ comments on the carving:

O. non pastor, non haec triuiali more uiator,
 sed deus ipse canit: nihil armentale resultat,
 nec montana sacros distinguunt iubila uersus.
 C. mira refers; sed rumpe moras oculoque sequaci
 quamprimum nobis diuinum perlege carmen⁷⁸.

O. These be no verses in wayside style by shepherd or by traveller: ’tis a very god who sings. No ring here of cattle-stall; nor do alpine yodellings make refrains for the sacred lay.

C. You tell of miracles! Away with dallying; and at once with eager eye read me through the inspired poem⁷⁹.

Ornytus describes the poem which he quickly reads and declares that no shepherd (*pastor*) and no passer-by (*uiator*) has written it, because this is a song by a god (*deus*) whose name is Faunus, information given a little later in the poem. According to Ornytus, the poem does not say anything about country life (*nihil armentale*). Here there are at least two major differences to Virgil’s Eclogue 5: while Daphnis was a godlike shepherd who sang about the country and did not leave anything written behind, Faunus is indeed a divine entity who has chosen to carve on a beech a song on matters not related to the rural area. A consequence of this action is that, unlike Mopsus, neither Ornytus nor Corydon would be able to write anything down and tell everyone that they are the bearers of Faunus’s legacy. Their only possible reaction

76 Edmunds 2001, 43.

77 Barchiesi 1997, 221.

78 Calp. ecl. 1, 28–32.

79 Translated by Duff – Duff 1934, 221.

now is to be amazed. Therefore, Corydon answers Ornytus by claiming that he tells him wonders (*mira refers*) and urges the shepherd to read the divine poem (*diuinum perlege carmen*), which is very long: it has 55 verses, 10 more than Mopsus's lament and much more than the two-line Daphnis epitaph.

Some scholars consider such a large inscription unlikely in Virgil and even more "absurd" in the context of Calpurnius Siculus' Eclogue 1⁸⁰. Contemporary botany, however, demonstrates that carving a poem of that size on a tree is possible⁸¹. Yet, it is worth noting the different lengths of Faunus's and Mopsus's songs. Additionally, there is a difference in the definition of the latter, a divine poem inscribed on a beech, even though a prophetic characteristic was actually related to the oak (*quercus*) in Virgil's Eclogue 5, as mentioned before, and in the *Georgics*⁸². Perhaps Calpurnius Siculus refers to the ambiguity of *fagus* in Virgil. Nevertheless, what is most relevant here is the effect of the absence of pastoral matters in a song that is actually a panegyric. The dialogue before it creates a contrast between pastoral and panegyric that can be seen throughout the book⁸³. The song carved on the tree and selected to be preserved in a medium of memory establishes a relation to the bucolic tradition and to the panegyric at the same time, unlike the "lament for Daphnis", and clearly refers to a knowledge shared by the community. That is why the shepherds decide to show the divine song to "Augustan ears" (*augustas aures*) at the end of the poem. For this reason, it is possible to state that there is evidence of social memory both in Virgil and in Calpurnius Siculus, especially in the so-called political Eclogues (Eclogues 1, 4 and 7)⁸⁴.

Bucolic space can be seen as a kind of literary garden, with its own vegetal and animal features, and "an inner-outer division"⁸⁵, like a *hortus* surrounded by an imaginary fence. Similarly, the Roman garden, although shaped by other natural forces, is created by human motivation in a specific place and is cultivated in order to last as long as its caretakers want it to last as a "powerful setting in which societies embed beliefs, myths and fictions"⁸⁶. In the bucolic garden, memory is controlled mainly by the shepherds, who decide which natural element, for example, a tree, will become a feature to preserve beliefs, myths and fictions. Despite the action of carving a long song

80 Coleman 1977, 157; Fey-Wickert 2002, 181.

81 Buckler – Hay 2018, 45.

82 Verg. georg. 2, 16.

83 Paschalis 2016, 303.

84 As opposed to Hulsenboom 2013, 26.

85 Jones 2011, 17f.

86 Austen 2023, 4.

on a beech tree, poetry survives through writing in the worlds of Virgil and Calpurnius Siculus. Even though their material support would deteriorate with time, the songs are perpetuated in cultural memory, creating a need to deal with them altogether. Calpurnius Siculus's relationship with Virgil becomes more complex when considering another tree carving in Eclogue 3. In this poem, two shepherds called Lycidas and Iollas discuss ways of attracting Phyllis, Lycidas's object of passion:

L. iam dudum meditor, quo Phyllida carmine placem.

forsitan audito poterit mitescere cantu;
et solet ilia meas ad sidera ferre Camenas.

I. dic age; nam cerasi tua cortice uerba notabo
et decisa feram rutilanti carmina libro⁸⁷.

L. Long have I been pondering with what song I am to pacify Phyllis.

Mayhap, when she hears my lay, she can be softened: and it is her way to laud my poetry to the stars.

I. Come, speak – for I will carve your words upon the bark of the cherry-tree and then cut away the lines on the red rind and take them to her⁸⁸.

The first difference here is that this time the carving is not ready. Lycidas has been thinking about a song to please his love, Phyllis, and he refers to the poem he will sing as something that could calm her down. Iollas encourages him to sing and states that he will carve his words upon the bark of a cherry tree. Not on the bark of a beech or an oak, but on a cherry tree, a tree that does not appear in the early ancient bucolic tradition. Besides the species chosen for the carving, there is another important feature: the verb in Eclogue 1 and in Virgil's Eclogue 5 is used here too, but in a different tense, the future indicative, and in the first-person singular (*notabo*). Calpurnius Siculus presents here a character who wants to do something new in ancient pastoral tradition: writing on a cherry tree. Aware of the unstoppable transformation and loss of memory, Iollas intends to preserve his fellow shepherd's song on wood, a different kind of wood from a tree that, much like the beech, was known among Romans for its wide-reaching shadow⁸⁹. Additionally, he chooses this writing material for the song right after Lycidas states that his *Camena*, a metonym for his poems, may reach the stars, an image often

87 Calp. ecl. 3, 40–44.

88 Translated by Duff – Duff 1934, 239.

89 Plin. nat. 17, 17.

associated with success in Latin poetry since the Augustan period⁹⁰ and also present in Virgil's Eclogue 5, referring to Daphnis's legacy⁹¹.

This passage demonstrates a violent attitude of the shepherds towards the environment: Iollas plans to remove the bark from the tree where he will inscribe the poem, an action that, of course, may kill the cherry tree. In addition to the aforementioned remarks on endangering trees (and in line with current botanical knowledge)⁹², Theophrastus explicitly underscores the perilous nature of bark removal for the species in question, since the removal of a large piece of its bark would threaten the cherry tree's health⁹³, a problem that can be avoided if only its surface is detached⁹⁴. However, he and Pliny the Elder describe how popular this species was as a material for writing on, due to its easily removable bark⁹⁵ and its similarity to layers of a papyrus⁹⁶. Perhaps for this reason Iollas offers the option of carving on this tree and extracting its surface, even though this action harms it. Due to the elegiac background of Eclogue 3, the act of writing down someone's message and taking it to his beloved is not surprising either, since it was a common practice in Roman elegy⁹⁷. This kind of generic interaction is also explored in Virgil's Eclogue 10, in which Gallus wants to cut his loved ones into tender trees (*tenerisque meos incidere Amores / arboribus*)⁹⁸. His erotic poems are not referred to by a common word like *carmina* or *uersus*, nor by a poetic word like *Camena*, because they are a specific kind of poem, maybe different from others in the countryside. The intention is bringing to the bucolic space love matters treated in the same way as poets in an urban context do, even though suffering comes as a result of this decision⁹⁹. As a positive parallel to Gallus's attitude in Virgil, Calpurnius Siculus does not avoid any elegiac content in his poems and develops it throughout his book, always dealing with it in a different way¹⁰⁰. Gallus's "tender trees" have been understood as delicate saplings¹⁰¹, an aspect constantly associated with the Callimachean

90 Fey-Wickert 2002, 180.

91 Verg. ecl. 5, 51.

92 Buckler – Hay 2018, 49.

93 Theophr. c. plant. 3, 18, 3.

94 Theophr. h. plant. 4, 15, 1

95 Theophr. h. plant. 3, 13, 1–2.

96 Plin. nat. 16, 55.

97 Karakasis 2016, 135 f.; Baraz 2023, 242.

98 Verg. ecl. 10, 53–54.

99 Fonseca Junior 2020, 10.

100 Baraz 2023, 237.

101 Coleman 1977, 290.

action of carving love poems on trees¹⁰². However, reading them together with the Calpurnian Eclogue 3, they can be considered a new kind of tree in the bucolic landscape, whose species does not yet have a name. The option given by Calpurnius Siculus as a development of Gallus's introduction of elegy into the pastoral world is the cherry tree.

Moreover, Iollas's suggestion can be seen as an indication of how written poetry at that time was a common response to the need of preserving cultural memory, a desire still innovative in the Augustan context¹⁰³. Using cherry bark, as indicated by Pliny, was a popular method. Nevertheless, Iollas takes a step further when he states the possibility of carving a whole poem on the cherry tree and then detaching the bark. Therefore, it seems as if a tree's life is endangered in order to document human culture just like Mopsus might have done in Virgil's Eclogue 5. Evidently, characters in ancient poetry did not have a modern environmental consciousness. It is important to see the absence of this kind of perception as an expression of the ancient Romans' relationship towards the environment and consider its "cultural ecological implications"¹⁰⁴. Both shepherds have the same view as Pliny, who describes trees as material sources for human usage¹⁰⁵: people should not care for the livelihood of a vegetal being, because human culture must live at its expense.

In line 44 of the selected passage, *rutilanti libro* is noteworthy, with a participle that defines the "bark" or "book" by the color of cherry tree wood. Its bark is not verdant like beech bark is, a difference that reflects on the intertextual dynamics of Roman pastoral. Firstly, it is important to remember that the poem will be written on bark (*cortice*) and, after being removed, taken as a book (*libro*)¹⁰⁶. Once again, shepherds are carving songs on trees, reading them and eventually creating books by themselves¹⁰⁷. The process of creating and preserving their culture continues, becoming even more complex through the variety of media of memory. According to the common interpretation of Calpurnius Siculus as a poet who is so anxious of Virgilian influence that he decides to extinguish bucolic poetry, the addition of the cherry tree to the landscape is considered a replacement of the beech and, metaphorically, of the ancient pastoral world¹⁰⁸. However, the situation is

102 Clausen 1994, 307; Paraskeviotis 2020, 469 f.

103 Cucchiarelli 2017, 290 f.

104 Schliephake 2020, 28.

105 Plin. nat. 12, 2.

106 Vinchesi 1991, 268.

107 Baraz 2023, 243.

108 Buckler – Hay 2018, 54.

not that simple. The first evidence for this is the fact that, in the Calpurnian Eclogue 4, Amyntas praises an unnamed divinity who has brought peace to the mountains and allowed him to inscribe songs “in a verdant book” or “bark” (*uiridante libro*)¹⁰⁹. Of course, the tree in question cannot be a cherry due to the color of its bark. Additionally, this specific color, green, invites the reader to establish a connection to the Virgilian *fagus*, as it was possible in Eclogue 1¹¹⁰. The cherry tree is just an additional element that could be a realistic yet imperialistic representation of the introduction of this species in Italy by the Romans at that time¹¹¹. Its color could also be an allusion to the color of a papyrus¹¹², an aspect that, of course, highlights the consolidated role of writing in post-Augustan poetry. It may also reiterate how the cherry tree is not a totally new element in the bucolic landscape: since it is a well-established writing material, it is not “new” and “tender” anymore, as opposed to the trees craved by Gallus in Virgil’s Eclogue 10. It is a tree species that, just like the beech, was tamed and has also become a part of human culture.

Even though beech trees were considered “old” with “top broken” in Virgil’s Eclogue 9, they still live in the poetic memory, preserved in the bucolic poems as a motif. By introducing the cherry tree as a new medium of memory, Calpurnius Siculus assumes that the Virgilian *fagus* represents a writing material of the past that persists, but which might die through its carving and, metaphorically, because it was already used as working material by a previous poet. As an alternative (not a substitute), the Calpurnian *cerasus* is introduced into the pastoral world and is then brutally appropriated by the shepherds. Just like other media of memory, its fate is to perish, thus creating yet another stratum of poetic memory. However, in the meantime, it still has a purpose: to become a book and transmit the shepherds’ poetic memory as long as possible. Since loss of culture and loss of biodiversity usually coincide in history¹¹³, it comes as no surprise that the dynamics of documenting memory in Roman pastoral suffers from the same struggle as the extensively carved trees. In reality, according to the notion of storied ecology, even modern challenges in the transmission of ancient cultural memory are indeed examples of this struggle¹¹⁴.

109 Calp. ecl. 4, 127–130.

110 Schröder 1991, 192; Slater 1994, 78.

111 Fey-Wickert 2002, 182.

112 Korzeniewski 1971, 93; Vinchesi 1991, 268; Baraz 2023, 243.

113 Emmett – Nye 2017, 11.

114 Schliephake 2020, 11.

In their own garden of beliefs, myths, and fictions, Virgil and Calpurnius Siculus recreate the problems and solutions of preserving culture in a scenario and a landscape that is not harmonic at all. For this reason, ancient pastoral is still a challenge for the environmental humanities and all studies of natural elements in these poems, even though many scholars do not agree¹¹⁵. Despite the fact that modern media of memory, unlike the shepherds', tend to preserve culture for a long time, memory is not completely and simultaneously available to everyone. In an intertextual approach, the act of reading all strata of memory depends on how the reader takes part in the process. When dealing with environment and memory in ancient pastoral, it is important to not favor one poem over another and establish it as the source of a primary meaning. The contemporary perspective of any text in history is "affected by traces of the source texts even though the latter are modern constructions"¹¹⁶, since they were edited after Antiquity. Finally, these traces are recollected by readers in the process of reading throughout cultural memory.

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115 Gifford 2017, 159 f.

116 Fowler 1997, 26.

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