



CSCP Support Materials for Eduqas GCSE Latin

Component 2: Latin Literature and Sources (Themes)

Theme A: Romans in the Countryside

Virgil: A self-sufficient farm

For examination in 2024-2026

Teachers should not feel that they need to pass on to their students all the information from these notes; they should choose whatever they think is appropriate.

The examination requires knowledge outside the text only when it is needed in order to understand the text.

The Teacher's Notes contain the follow:

- An **Introduction** to the author and the text, although students will only be asked questions on the content of the source itself.
- **Notes** on the text to assist the teacher.
- **Suggested Questions for Comprehension, Content and Style** to be used with students.
- **Discussion** suggestions and questions for students, and overarching **Themes** which appear across more than one source.
- **Further Information and Reading** for teachers who wish to explore the topic and texts further.
- **Acknowledgement** of resources used in preparing these notes.

Virgil: *Georgics* 4.125-143 – A self-sufficient farm

The green fingers of the happy old Cilician gardener

Publius Vergilius Maro (70-19 BC) was born in Mantua in northern Italy (then Cisalpine Gaul). Virgil was in his 20s during the turmoil and uncertainty created by the Civil War (though he took no part in them), before seeing the elevation of Augustus into the role of *princeps*.

Virgil's father's land was confiscated in the redistribution of land following the Civil War. This would explain a certain fondness for the life of a farmer as well as his highlighting of the negative impact of war on the countryside in the *Aeneid*, the epic poem for which Virgil is best known. Virgil wrote under the patronage of Maecenas who oversaw literary endeavours during the Augustan principate. The *Georgics* – a didactic poem on farming - was Virgil's second major work and is usually dated to 29 BC.

The following text is a digression from Virgil's main focus on bee-keeping in book 4. He imagines the way of life of an old gardener from Cilicia (southern Turkey) who rescues abandoned land, growing all manners of vegetables, flowers and trees through sustained labours. His work proves productive, as he collects honey from the bees, feasts on his produce, and reaps much fruit from his trees.

Text

namque sub Oebaliae memini me turribus arcis,
qua niger umectat flaventia culta Galaesus,
Corycium vidisse senem, cui pauca relict
iugera ruris erant, nec fertilis illa iuvenis
nec pecori opportuna seges nec commoda Baccho. [5]
hic rarum tamen in dumis olus albaque circum
lilia verbenasque premens vescumque papaver
regum aequabat opes animis seraque revertens
nocte domum dapibus mensas onerabat inemptis.
primus vere rosam atque autumnno carpere poma, [10]
et cum tristis hiems etiamnum frigore saxa
rumperet et glacie cursus frenaret aquarum,
ille comam mollis iam tondebat hyacinthi
aestatem increpitans seram Zephyrosque morantes.
ergo apibus fetis idem atque examine multo [15]
primus abundare et spumantia cogere pressis
mella favis; illi tiliae atque uberrima pinus,
quotque in flore novo pomis se fertilis arbor
induerat, totidem autumnno matura tenebat.

Notes

metre: hexameter (each line has six feet)

| — *vv* | — *vv* | — *vv* | — *vv* | — *vv* | — *v* |

1 namque: introduces an independent episode from the main topic of bees in book 4 of the *Georgics*.

Oebaliae: this is *periphrasis*. Instead of saying Tarentum directly, Virgil indicates the place by naming Oebalus, a king of Sparta. Spartans founded Tarentum. It gives the location of the digression an other-worldly feeling, one placed in the mythical past.

memini me: *memini* 'I remember(ed)' introduces an indirect statement. The infinitive *vidisse* to accompany the accusative *me* does not appear until line 3. 'I remember that I saw...'. Virgil adds extra detail to the location of his imagination before relating what he saw 'beneath the towers...'. Adding '*memini me*' means we are invited into Virgil's imagination, it is intimately personal. The private account of the gardener matches the personal nature of the gardener's work apparent in the rest of the digression.

2 Galaesus: rivers are often used to place the location of a poem.

3 Corycium: a man from Cilicia. The man is not given a name, in marked contrast to the great effort put into locating the place. It appears the location is important but *any* man could be the gardener. It is debated who the man is. One theory is it is a Cilician pirate resettled by Pompey after he cleared them from the Mediterranean in 67 BC. Another theory is simply that Cilicians were known to be good gardeners.

senem: the one detail we are given of the Cilician is his old age.

3-4 cui ... erant: *cui* is a possessive dative followed by *erant*, literally translates as 'to whom there were' but has the meaning 'to whom belonged'.

4-5 nec ... Baccho: supply *erat* and pair *illa* with *seges* '*nec illa seges [erat]*' = 'nor was that crop.' *Seges* usually means crop but here refers to the land, such as a cornfield. *Nec* is repeated three times in a *tricolon* (list of three) to emphasise how difficult this land was for any kind of farming.

4 iuencis: oxen are used to plough the land so that it is ready for seed.

6-14 hic ... morantes: if Virgil's poetic language is stripped back, this section can be split into the following practical activities the farmer undertook.

- a) First the gardener clears some of the brambles.
- b) He plants annual plants - vegetables, flowers and herbs.
- c) He has his first harvest (his 'unpurchased feast')
- d) He prunes dead foliage to encourage greater growth in the coming summer
- e) He collects honey which the bees have produced using the flowers in his garden.

This is at least one year of work as evidenced by the passing of the seasons.

- 6 **hic**: 'he' (this man)
- 6-7 **hic ... papaver**: a list with many conjunctions: -que is repeated three times (*polysyndeton*) to demonstrate the growing variety of plants he was able to farm.
- 7 **lilia**: used to make ointment and oil (Pliny *Natural History* 2.1.23). Bees adore them (Virgil *Aeneid* 6.709).
- verbenas**: it is worth looking at an image of these as they will be recognisable. These were herbs used for medicine and magic as well as in truce ceremonies. They are also frequented by bees.
- papaver**: poppies produce lots of pollen and so are useful to bees.
- 8 **regum ... animis**: this comparison of the riches of the farmer with the riches of the king demonstrates the value the farmer puts on his crops. Virgil's sincerity could be doubted here. If Virgil is taken seriously, it pitches the life of the farmer in contrast to the life of *regiae*.
- sera**: the farmer works long hours to be self-sufficient.
- 9 **nocte**: ablative of time when 'at night'
- domum**: accusative of motion – towards 'to his house'
- dapibus mensas onerabat imemptis**: the translation is: he used to load his table (**onerabat mensa**) with an unbought feast (**dapibus inemptis**). The first three words are emphasising how much he has, with the final word 'unbought' demonstrating to us the benefits of farming. This final word also begins to show the solitude of the farmer who does not appear to engage with family or friends and here does not turn to commerce either. This echoes the personal touch at the beginning of the passage brought to mind by '*memini me*'.
- 10 **primus**: his dedication to farming is evident from the fact he is the first to undertake tasks (echoing the *sera* in line 8).
- primus ... poma**: supply *erat* followed by *carpere* 'he was the first to gather', both *rosam* and *poma* are objects after *carpere*.
- 10-14 **vere ... aestatem**: Virgil skilfully weaves every season into 4 lines. The farmer works all year round.
- 11-12 **cum ... aquarum**: While both spring and autumn are dealt with in one line, the winter has two lines. This exaggeration of winter is even more surprising given the climate of Tarentum. The winters are not as cold as in England, with the lowest temperatures of around 7 degrees (the highest we should expect in January in the UK!). Winter is also described as *tristis* 'gloomy'. The harsh description of winter as sad, rock-breaking and icy reminds the reader of the dedication and graft of the farmer who works all through this.

- 13 ille ... hyacinthi:** Presumably this means trimming back dead foliage in order to allow better growth in summer. The *iam* adds to *sera* (line 8 and 14) and *primus* (line 10) to show the diligence and hard work of the farmer. In particular, the farmer seems to be going faster than nature which is late (line 14) to bring in the summer.
- 15 ergo:** As a result of the work completed in lines 1-14.
- 15-17 apibus ... favis:** supply *erat*. *Idem* 'again' reminds us that *primus* (line 16) is repeated from line 10. This farmer is always first!
- 17 illi ... pinus:** supply *erat*, literally *illi erat* 'there was to him...', means 'he had'.
tiliae: the bees are shown to graze on lime-trees at *Georgics* 4.183.
uberrima pinus: *uberrima* is superlative 'the very abundant'. Pines were noted for producing propolis and pollen (useful to the bee).
- 18-19 quotque ... tenebat:** The translation is: And with however many fruits (**quotque pomis**) the fertile tree (**fertilis arboris**) had decked itself (**induerat se**) in early blossom (**in novo flore**), that many (**totidem**) ripe [fruits] (**matura**) it held (**tenebat**) in autumn (**autumno**).
- Fruit trees rarely have all their flowers bloom to full fruit so here Virgil is almost certainly exaggerating how productive they are.
- 15-19:** There are many words in this section which emphasise growth and abundance – *fetis, multo, abundare, uberrima, fertilis, quotque* and *totidem* together. So the hard work of the farmer has paid off and produced a wealth of products. It is notable that Virgil has left out certain elements of the reality of Roman agriculture, such as the use of money and the labour of slaves.

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then reread each line or couplet, asking questions so that the class is led to comprehend the meaning of the Latin text. It may be desirable to produce a written translation once the students have understood the Latin.

namque sub Oebaliae memini me turribus arcis, qua niger umectat flaventia culta Galaesus, Corycium vidisse senem (lines 1-3)

- How does Virgil describe the man he remembers seeing?
- What two features does Virgil use to describe the place?

cui pauca relictis iugera ruris erant, nec fertilis illa iuvenis nec pecori opportuna seges nec commoda Baccho. (lines 3-5)

- What did the farmer have?
- How is the land described (*relictis*)?
- What three agricultural practices could not be done on this land?

**hic rarum tamen in dumis olus albaque circum lilia verbenasque premens
vescumque papaver (lines 6-7)**

- What four things did he plant first?

regum aequabat opes animis (line 8)

- How rich does his produce make him feel?

seraque revertens nocte domum (lines 8-9)

- At what time does he return home?

dapibus mensas onerabat inemptis (line 9)

- What does he load onto his table?

primus vere rosam atque autumnu carpere poma (line 10)

- What was he the first to do in autumn and spring?

**et cum tristis hiems etiamnum frigore saxa rumperet et glacie cursus frenaret
aquarum (lines 11-12)**

- How does Virgil describe winter? Give three points

ille comam mollis iam tondebat hyacinthi (line 13)

- What does the farmer do to the crocus'?

aestatem increpitans seram Zephyrosque morantes (line 14)

- What is the farmer scolding?
- What has been delayed?

**ergo apibus fetis idem atque examine multo primus abundare et spumantia
cogere pressis mella favis (lines 15-17)**

- What animal does the farmer have lots of?
- What does the farmer extract from the pressed combs?

illi tiliae atque uberrima pinus (line 17)

- What two trees does the farmer have on his land?
- What quantity of *pinus* does he have?

**quotque in flore novo pomis se fertilis arbor induerat, totidem autumnu
matura tenebat (lines 18-19)**

- How many fruits grow on the fertile trees?

Questions on Content and Style

1. (lines 1-3) How does Virgil set the scene, bringing the reader into his imagination?
 2. (lines 3-5) How does Virgil suggest the uselessness of the land the farmer has?
 3. (lines 5-19) How effective is Virgil at portraying the abundance produced by the farmer? Use examples from the text to explain your point of view.
 4. (lines 5-19) How hardworking is the farmer in Virgil's vision? Discuss Virgil's content and style to explain your point of view.
 5. (lines 8-19) Is the farmer happy? Use examples from the text to explain your point of view.
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Discussion

Themes: farming / gardening / self-sufficiency / abundance / private vs public

This commentary has referred to the main character of this text as both a gardener and a farmer. Scholarship often refers to him as a gardener and points to Virgil saying he will now discuss gardening (as opposed to farming). Is there a difference? Does the main character appear to be one more than the other?

The main character of the passage is not named, merely situated in Tarentum and described as a Cilician old man. Did Virgil deliberately withhold his name? What effect would it have to make someone anonymous? What effect does it have to situate this poem far away from Rome (about 315 miles away)? Is it important that he is described as an old man? Was gardening/farming an occupation for old men?

The old man appears to be completely cut off from Roman society without the need for trading to obtain food. Does this fit in with the view of Roman farming you have from the other passages and pictures you are studying in this theme? Is farming/gardening a private pursuit for Romans?

Most of the poem concerns the old man working hard to reclaim this abandoned land and make it able to produce a multitude of crops. Is this a positive aspect to Roman farming? Does the farmer appear happy with (a) the abundance of things he is able to grow and harvest (b) the hard work he puts in?

The old man is compared to *regum* 'kings'. Is this a reasonable comparison? Is Virgil suggesting an opinion he has of kings and of the value of farming?

Is Virgil's portrayal of farming realistic? Has he missed anything out? Do parts of it appear to be a fantasy? If it does appear to be a fantasy, is Virgil doing this to praise the life of the farmer or reveal it as a lifestyle that is too good to be true?

Questions on the whole passage

1. How does Virgil show hard work will lead to a rich reward for the farmer?
2. Is Virgil's portrayal of farm life a positive one?
3. Is Virgil describing a fantasy or reality of country living?
4. Does Virgil show a genuine admiration of country life?
5. From reading the other 'Romans in the countryside' texts, do you think Virgil's readers would want to live and promote this kind of lifestyle?

Further Information and Reading

The Cambridge Latin Course Book V Stage 35 on Roman Country Villas contains a detailed discussion in English. A digital version of this section can be found [here](#).

The Cambridge Latin Course Book V Stage 39 provides a short introduction to Roman poets, including the patronage of Maecenas. A digital version of this section can be found [here](#).

Acknowledgement of Resources used:

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