

ARISTAEUS AND MOUNT LYCAEUS

At Virgil, Georgics 4.534ff. Aristaeus is told by Cyrene to sacrifice cattle to the Nymphs to appease their anger at his involvement in the death of Eurydice, and, although at the time he is in Macedonia for his interview with Proteus (4.390f.) and has in Thessaly a farm which appears to contain cattle that could be sacrificed (4.317, 327, 330), he is told to go all the way to mount Lycaeus in Arcadia (539) and slaughter animals which he has grazing there. Why on earth Aristaeus should have to make this long trek south is a small puzzle¹), but one with quite wide ramifica-

1) Most critics ignore the problem. Commentators who do acknowledge it tend merely to note the anomaly (e.g. Conington-Nettleship, Page, Huxley and Thomas on line 539). Mynors on 539 suggests that while *Lycaeus* never loses all its Arcadian colouring, it has started on the road travelled by *Tempe* and could be used of mountain pastures quite generally. The parallels he offers (Georg. 3.2 and 314)

tions. Whether invented by Virgil himself (as so many details in this epyllion seem to have been)²) or taken over from a predecessor³), this journey is variously effective in Virgil's narrative and constitutes a typical instance of Virgilian density, complexity and ingenuity.

At least part of the point could be to intrigue and mystify with yet another odd feature in this generally strange tale; but one can discern some glimmerings. Aristaeus' readiness to go so far without question or hesitation (and to offer a full ten animals, including four choice bulls)⁴) may be meant as an economical indication of his keenness to atone and respect for divine commands. Aristaeus is often found in conjunction with Arcadia⁵) and mountains⁶) in general, and Lycaeus in particular had numerous apt associations. Zeus (who was born and reared on the mountain: see below) and Apollo had sanctuaries on Lycaeus⁷); Aristaeus was identified with both those gods and was also said to be a son of Apollo⁸). Fitting for Aristaeus' offerings is the mountain's aura of death: sacrifices (animal and, notoriously, human too) were made to Zeus Lycaeus, and those who entered his precinct there supposedly died within a year⁹). In keeping with the mysterious, miraculous and strange *bugonia* that took place after Aristaeus' victims were slaughtered (4.554ff.), Lycaeus was a place of mystery (nobody was allowed to go into Zeus' sanctuary, and sacrifices to Lycaean Zeus were secret) and also a place of marvels and

are not convincing, and the explanation seems improbable here, especially since *Lycaei*, which comes with such impact at the end of 539, occurs amidst precise instructions (*Napaeas* in 535, *quattuor eximios praestanti corpore tauros* in 538, *intacta totidem cervice iuvencae* in 540, *quattuor . . . aras* in 541, *nona . . . Aurora* in 544), which are followed exactly by Aristaeus at 548ff.

2) E.g. Aristaeus' descent to his mother's home beneath the water, his involvement in Eurydice's death, his association with *bugonia*, and Eurydice's demise being caused by the bite of a snake.

3) In 4.318 *ut fama* implies some sort of earlier tradition.

4) See 4.538ff.

5) E.g. Georg. 4.283; Hiller v. Gaertringen, *Aristaios* (1), RE II 1 (1885) 853.

6) Ap. Rhod. 2.510 (cf. Pind. P. 3.4), 514ff., 523; Diod. Sic. 4.82.6; Nonn.

Dionys. 5.229; 13.277.

7) Paus. 8.38; Roscher s.v. *Lykaios*; Ernst Meyer, *Lykaion*, RE XIII 2 (1927) 2240ff.; M. Jost, *Sanctuaires et Cultes d'Arcadie* (Paris 1985) 183ff.

8) Pind. P. 9.59ff.; Ap. Rhod. 2.506; Virg. Georg. 4.323; Servius ad Georg. 1.14; Roscher s.v. *Aristaios* p. 547, 549; v. Gaertringen, RE-Art. (see n. 5) 853ff.

9) Plat. *Minos* 315c; Rep. 565d; Plin. N.H. 8.82; Paus. 6.8.2; 8.2.3ff.; 38.6; Meyer, RE-Art. (see n. 7) 2242; W. Burkert, *Homo Necans* (Berlin 1972) 98ff.; Jost (see n. 7) 258ff.

strange phenomena generally (for example, the spring Hagno was said to have always the same amount of water and in a drought to generate a cloud which drew other clouds to it and produced rain, and those who entered Zeus' precinct were supposed to cast no shadow as well as die within a year)¹⁰). It seems suitable too that the generation of bees from cattle's flesh should occur in an area connected with creation (traditionally Zeus was born on Lycaeus, and after his birth Rhea caused a spring to flow there)¹¹ and strongly associated with metamorphosis (humans were believed to turn into wolves during sacrifice to Lycaean Zeus, and to change back to humans nine years later)¹²).

In the case of Virgil's account in particular, reference to Lycaeus also helps link the epyllion with the rest of the *Georgics*, since the mountain had also been mentioned at 1.16, 3.2 and 3.314 (*pascuntur ... summa Lycaei*, which is close to 4.539 *depascunt summa Lycaei*). Homer's *Odyssey* may be relevant too¹³). Scholars have established that the earlier part of Aristaeus' encounter with Cyrene and Proteus at many points echoes and makes variations on the meeting in Od. 4.351ff. with Eidothea and Proteus that Menelaus had when he was stranded on Pharos while returning from Troy¹⁴). There may be reference to Homer in the lines on Aristaeus' trip to Lycaeus as well, if Virgil produced his version of it with an eye to Od. 4.472ff., where Menelaus (like Aristaeus) is told that he must make a long journey south (to Egypt) and at the end of it offer sacrifices (the sacrifices for the success of his voyage which he had overlooked), to stay the wrath of deities, then does as he was told and gets himself out of his predicament. If the

10) Polybius 16.12.7; Plut. Mor. 300c; Paus. 8.38.6; Jost (see n.7) 251f., 255f. With Hagno's cloud cf. perhaps Virgil's *immensasque trahi nubes* (of bees) at Georg. 4.557.

11) Call. Hymn. 1.10ff.; Strabo 348; Paus. 8.36.

12) Plat. Rep. 565d; Plin. N.H. 8.82; Paus. 6.8.2; 8.2.3 ff.; Meyer, RE-Art. (see n.7) 2245; Burkert (see n.9). For the metamorphosis (back to human) after nine years cf. the *bugonia* after nine days (Georg. 4.532ff.).

13) This idea was first suggested to me by a graduate student of mine: see K. Belcher, Virgil's Aristaeus Epyllion: *Georgics* 4.315–558 (Diss. McMaster University 1993) 302f.

14) See esp. F. Klingner, Virgil. *Bucolica*. *Georgica*. *Aeneis* (Zürich and Stuttgart 1967) 211ff.; B. Otis, Virgil. *A Study In Civilized Poetry* (Oxford 1963) 196f.; G. B. Miles, Virgil's *Georgics*. *A New Interpretation* (Berkeley, Los Angeles 1980) 266ff.; Mynors on Georg. 4.390ff.; Thomas on Georg. 4.387ff.; J. Farrell, Virgil's *Georgics* and the Traditions of Ancient Epic (New York and Oxford 1991) 106f.

Homeric allusion does continue, there would be the usual Virgilian twists too: for instance, in Virgil Proteus does not give specific explanation and help, and instead of him it is Cyrene who issues the instructions; Aristaeus faces travel by land, not sea; and he must make offerings to the Nymphs, Orpheus and Eurydice, rather than to Zeus and the other gods of heaven.

Structural considerations are also important in Virgil. For a start Georg. 4.531ff. contain several of the repeated words and motifs that occur in both the inner and outer stories of the epyllion and draw them together – namely *altus*, mountains, Nymphs, trees and liquid¹⁵). In addition Aristaeus' trek south recalls the start of the epyllion, forming a ring¹⁶). For example, at both opening and conclusion there is reference to *bugonia* (315f., 554ff.), Aristaeus' cattle (327, 538ff., 547, 550f., 555) and death (318, 330, 534, 542, 546f.). More significantly, the journey to Lycaeus clearly parallels the initial journey to the source of the Peneus: in both cases Aristaeus travels, to a mountain (the Peneus rose in mount Pindus: Strabo 329 frag. 15), and to a sacred spot (319, 541); each trip is concerned with his bees, which are said to have been killed by a *morbus* (318, 532), and is linked to his mother (made to her, or on her instructions); and connected with each are speeches given in watery surroundings – firstly one by the sad (*tristis*, 319) Aristaeus, opening with *mater* (321), and secondly one to Aristaeus, who has sad (*tristis*, 531) worries, opening with *nate* (531). As well as these ties, there are noticeable contrasts, many of which underline the triumph at the climax by highlighting the reversal of circumstances. For instance, at 319 Aristaeus is *tristis*, but at 531 he is told to give up his *tristis* . . . *curas*; his earlier speech to Cyrene was querulous, uncertain and worried, while her later speech to him is reassuring, certain and serene; initially the shepherd did not know the reason for the bees' death or what to do about it, at the end he does know; also there is movement from dead bees to live bees, and from a punished and defeated Aristaeus to a pardoned and victorious Aristaeus.

15) *Altus* at 333, 359, 368, 459, 462, 467, 528, 533 and 541; mountains at 361, 419, 433, 461, 462, 508, 518 and 539; Nymphs (in addition to Cyrene, who figures *passim*) at 334ff., 376ff., 382f., 391, 453, 460f., 532f., 535f. and 541; trees at 329, 364, 383, 468, 473, 510, 511, 514, 543, 546 and 553; liquid at 317, 319, 321, 333, 352, 355f., 360–373, 375f., 380–384, 387f., 395, 403, 410, 415, 420, 429–431, 442, 457, 461, 463, 474, 479f., 493, 503, 505f., 508f., 517, 524, 527–529, 542 and 555.

16) On the ring-composition here cf. E. de Saint-Denis, *Virgile Géorgiques* (Paris 1968) xxxix and Thomas' note on 315–558.

His visit to Lycaeus is also linked variously to the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, and these links integrate better the inner story and ease progression back to the outer story at 528ff.¹⁷ So, the references to Eurydice (533, 547) and Orpheus (545, 553) obviously look back; death (534, 542, 547) and the allusion to Lethe in 545 call to mind the dead husband and wife and the Underworld; the theme of gifts and the word *munus* in 534 recall 520; and the Nymphs' anger at Aristaeus (*irae*, plural) figures in 536, as in 453.

One set of parallels in this connection is particularly striking. Dexterously Aristaeus' journey to Lycaeus picks up not only his earlier trip to the Peneus' source but also Orpheus' visit to Taenarum (and thence to Hades) at 467ff. In both instances a male protagonist, on a quest prompted by death, travels from the north to a destination in the Peloponnese, which has lethal associations, a *lucus* in the vicinity¹⁸ (entered by both men) and an elevated feature (*alta ostia Ditis* in 467, *summa Lycae* in 539); each has to win over divine powers; and each makes an ascent (from the Underworld, of the mountain), which leads to death. But still more striking (and effective) is the antithesis¹⁹, which retrospectively makes the odds and dangers facing Orpheus seem still worse and his devotion and bravery seem still greater, which heightens the sense of loss and pathos attaching to the inner tale, and which also in an unsettling manner stresses the ease of escape from punishment and the prospering of the would-be rapist who was partly responsible for Eurydice's death. So, *inter alia*, Aristaeus' journey was not as long or terrifying or futile as Orpheus'; the Nymphs were less frightening and difficult powers to approach, and stayed won over (unlike the nether gods at 491ff.); Aristaeus' ascent led to the death of mere animals, and their demise actually led to creation (of the bees); so too, unlike Orpheus, Aristaeus had supernatural backing for his travel and a real prospect of success, and at the end of it he was soon freed from worry and misery; finally, Aristaeus followed the instructions of a divine female (Cyrene: 531ff.) and the outcome was life and

17) For such ties between the two stories cf. A.M. Crabbe, *Ignoscenda quidem* ... Catullus 64 and the *Fourth Georgic*, CQ 71 (1977) 343f., 348f.

18) In 468 and 543. The former grove may be on earth at the entrance to the nether world (see Mynors on 467–470 and cf. also Strabo 363) or in the Underworld itself (see Conington-Nettleship on 468 and cf. also Aen. 6.282ff.).

19) For this kind of contrast between the epyllion's two tales cf. E. Paratore, *Introduzione alle Georgiche di Virgilio* (Palermo 1938) 25 and Thomas on 401.

triumph, whereas Orpheus broke the condition set by a divine female (Proserpine: 487) and the outcome was death and defeat²⁰).

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20) There are also ties (less developed but still present) between Aristaeus' trek to Lycaeus and (a) his visit to Proteus at 415ff., and (b) Orpheus' movement at 507ff. after the second loss of Eurydice. In the case of (a) too it is Aristaeus who travels, to a mountain (419), in connection with the loss of his bees, on his mother's instructions (396ff.), which he follows to the letter (437ff.); but this visit is less helpful immediately and inconclusive in itself. In the case of (b) again a male protagonist, because of death, travels far, to mountainous surroundings (508, 518) and trees (510); but Orpheus' progress is to the icy and unfamiliar north, lasts much longer (507) and culminates in death (520ff.).