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“The Shepherd of the People: Varro On Herding For the Villa Publica in *RR 2*”

Varro's *De Re Rustica* has an overt didactic purpose—how to run a successful villa—and this has been the focus of modern scholarship on the work (e.g. J. Heurgon, *Économie rurale*, vol 1, Paris, 1978; C. Guiraud, *Varron: Économie rurale*, vols, 2,3, Paris, 1985-97; R. Martin *Recherches sur les agronomes latins et leurs conceptions économique et sociales*, Paris, 1971), Yet it is also recognized that Varro himself was in some way aware of an intimate correlation between the nature of the villa and the state of the Republic, for he has given us important evidence of the more extravagant social developments associated with the villa, for instance, the villa as Hellenistic city (*RR 2. Intro.2*), or as Macedonian hunting park (*RR 3.13*).

It is my intention in this paper to discuss not just Varro's awareness of the way in which the Roman villa happened to exemplify Rome's imperial ideology, but rather to go much further (following my earlier study, “Free as a Bird: Varro *De Re Rustica 3*”, *AJP* 118, 1997, 427-48), in order to argue that throughout the *RR* Varro uses the cultivation of the farm as a model for the care of the city of Rome. It was part of his didactic purpose to demonstrate that the ideology of the villa *was* the ideology of Rome.

In fact, Varro's conceit of the condition of the *Res Publica* as the Villa Publica, the People's Estate, reflects a long-standing trope of Rome as a villa under the management of the senatorial class. I will discuss the ways in which Varro's dialogue in *RR 2* concerning sheep and goats, cattle, and then horses and mules is also a dialogue about Rome, a city founded by shepherds (*RR 2. Intro 4*). Characters have fitting names (Vaccius, Scrofa, Faustulus). Varro is greeted as ποιμένα λαῶν, shepherd of the people, for protecting the Roman flock from pirate-predators (2.5.1). He emphasizes the fact that herdsmen must range beyond the villa boundaries (2.10.1), and the dialogue takes place outside Italy (2.Intro.6). But Rome itself is the villa he is protecting, with recognizable physical *topoi* correlated with the *topoi* of the dialogue. Outside the sacred boundary of Rome, the *pomerium*, were the sheep pens (*ovilia*) where Roman citizens voted; the cattle market, which was the foundation of their economy and currency (2.1.9); and the Circus Maximus, where horse and mule races were held during religious festivals. When the topic of bovine and equine herds suggests the vicinity of the Circus Maximus, with its races and theatrical performances, Varro in fact becomes the stage manager (2.5.2; 2.8.1). The underlying message of the dialogue is that villa management and governance of the People's Estate are different aspects of the same *bonae artes*. Varro's lessons for his Roman readers came even as their bankrupt and violent mis-management of the *Res Publica* was about to force them to hand the People's Estate—and themselves—into the control of Julius Caesar's nephew.