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"Bougonia" and Revival of Ritual Sacrifice in the Augustan Age

Vergil's description of honeybees in *Georgics* 4 shows concern for a common social morality. Vergil exemplifies this in the hive's relationship with the beekeeper, firstly against the vicissitudes of nature, and secondly through a comparison of two kings and the virtue of community leadership. He then discusses the more virtuously led society in terms of its proximity to the gods. Lastly, the solution to transforming a 'diseased' bee community into a virtuous one can be found in the "bougonia" process, the details of which underline the significance of ritual behavior and sacrifice for the community's relationship with the divine world. In other words, a community that can unify itself through the universal participation of ritual and sacrifice rather than struggle within itself can thrive, a goal in line with Augustus' religious reforms during the 30s B. C.

Vergil begins Book 4 by addressing the bees in their most primitive state and their necessary dependence on the world around them. In terms of either the onslaught of weather or of a rival hive, the equilibrium of the community's ability to thrive is restored not just through their own efforts, but also through the acceptance of external aid from a beekeeper. This relationship benefits and offers some security to both parties. The bougonia ritual can show that human social participation and sacrifice is one way that society can collectively express its dependency as well as its reverence for the power of external forces (i.e. nature or gods). When the community recognizes its common dependency on these forces, reciprocity between humans and gods, or humans and nature, can then exist as it does for the beekeeper and the hive.

Vergil implies that without reciprocity, civil war is usually the result. Sincerity behind ritual and sacrifice may not be as important here as the acknowledgment of a higher authority that could steady rival factions in the interest of national peace and security, as when Vergil's beekeeper throws dust on the warring hives. As a specific example, the bougonia functions less as a typical Roman ritual or sacrifice than as a symbol for how Roman religion effects political unity. Aristaeus' example shows a dutiful individual who respects the gods while seeking the knowledge needed to carry out this proverbial ritual. Orpheus has greater powers of art, but they are neutralized when he disobeys the gods' commands and fails to carry out the ritual katabasis. Aristaeus, on the other hand, is able to bring back his bees not through his own charismatic talent, but through obedience and attention to ritual detail (541-553), some lines of which Vergil allows to be 'ritually' repeated in lines 550-553. This sacrificial scene is the culmination of a book that began with "in tenui labor; at tenuis non gloria, si quem numina laeva sinunt auditque vocatus Apollo" (6-7). Through ritual sacrifice, the three elements of *labor*, *gloria* and *laeva numina* could be brought together for the benefit of Rome under Augustus.