

Vergil's debt in the *Georgics* to various prose writers – Aristotle, Theophrastus, and Varro in particular – has been well documented. In the paper I show to what extent Vergil also drew on the diverse corpus of writings associated with the name Democritus. I examine the poet's handling of the relevant source texts, and give special attention to four that deal with astrology and thaumaturgy.

As a necessary preliminary the paper offers a quick sketch of the corpus of *Democritea*. In antiquity the name 'Democritus' attached to four different bodies of writing: (1) the authentic treatises of the philosopher from Abdera, which included a *Georgika* or treatise on farming; (2) a set of letters and biographical anecdotes involving the philosopher, of early Hellenistic provenance; (3) several books of varied technical instruction published by a certain Bolus of Mendes under the name Democritus, probably in the early 2nd century B.C.; (4) recipes attributed to the philosopher in the ancient alchemical tradition. Assigning the texts Vergil knew to one of these four categories is at best a matter of informed speculation (even if (4) can be ruled out). Yet few ancient writers took much care to distinguish the authentic from the apocryphal; hence, this paper will follow the convention of Vergil's day in lumping all under the name 'Democritus'.

Democritean sources are attested or demonstrable for at least seven passages from the *Georgics*, including the lunar calendar (1.276-86), the catalog of wines (2.89-108), and the taste test for soils (2.238-40). Four other passages merit special attention. At 1.219-24, Vergil's instruction to plant wheat before the setting of the Crown derives from an astrological text of 'Democritus'. At 1.311-34, Vergil describes the importance of observing the stars so that one can bring the harvest in before bad weather; as the elder Pliny suggests (18.340), this story mirrors a story told about Democritus and his brother Damasus which presents the philosopher as a seer. At the conclusion of the same passage (1.335-7), the poet alludes to a system of meteorological prediction based on planetary astrology; the earliest source for this brand of prognostication is given as 'Democritus' in the *Geoponica* (1.12.5, 29, 40). Finally, the closest parallel to Vergil's detailed account of bugonia at 4.281-314 is a passage which the *Geoponica* (15.2.21-36) attributes to two authors, Mago and 'Democritus'; comparison with Columella 9.14.6 suggests the latter as the relevant source. Hence, it was as a reader of 'Democritus' that Vergil had what may have been his closest encounter with the literature of astrology and thaumaturgy.

To conclude I develop the observation that despite Vergil's engagement with Lucretius and Epicureanism, it is not 'Democritus' the atomist but 'Democritus' the professor of arcana who contributed the most to the *Georgics*.