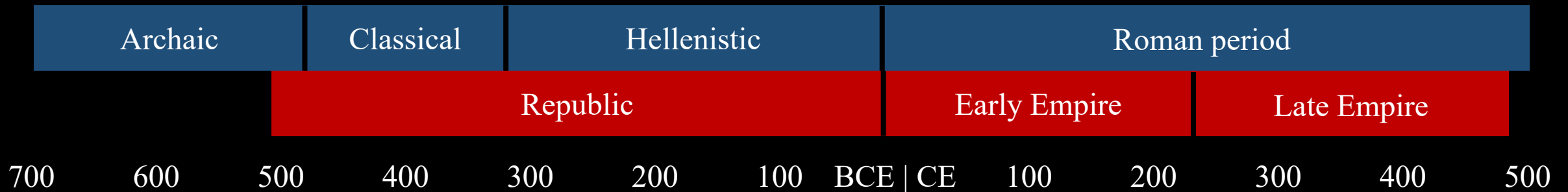


# Later Epic

The Changing Face of a Genre, Pt. II

(Faltonia Betitia) Proba, *Cento Vergilianus de laudibus Christi*



# Discussion

- Proba was writing for a much different audience than Virgil. Roman society had changed dramatically to the point that arguments about returning to the old *mos maiorum* moral virtues no longer had any meaning. Her text had to rework old models to reflect new realities (just like Hellenistic epics vs. Old Greek epics).
  - How does Proba use and modify the old epic style?
  - Do you notice any places where she's using lines from a recognizable convention (type scenes or common general themes), but in a new way to convey a new idea?

# From the Early to the Late Empire

- Domitian ultimately assassinated in 96 CE, succeeded by Antonine Dynasty (96-192), then a Year of 5 Emperors (193), then the Severan Dynasty (193-235), then things fell apart...





# From the Early to the Late Empire

- The Third Century Crisis (235-284)
  - Breakaway kingdoms
  - Uprisings
  - Usurpers
  - Climate shifts
  - Germanic migrations
  - Plague
  - Economic Collapse





# From the Early to the Late Empire

- Ended by emperor Diocletian, who divides the empire and abdicates in 293
- Tetrarchy, power divided among 2 *augusti* and 2 *caesari*
- Not completely stable





# From the Early to the Late Empire

- Continued fighting among tetrarchs and usurpers until Theodosius stabilizes empire (347-395)
- Dies and divides empire between 2 sons
  - Division into eastern and western empires becomes permanent
  - Irreversible change





# From the Early to the Late Empire

- Christianity legalized by Constantine (313) and made the state religion by Theodosius (380)
- Lots of early *Christianities*, no single interpretation or text even within a single sect



# Faltonia Betitia Proba as Author

- Faltonia Betitia Proba's family known in Rome in high political and business positions in mid-late 4<sup>th</sup> c.
  - Possibly converted to Christianity, then wrote this as example of “confessional literature” confessing errors of past and making good by turning to new “proper” subject matter (probably between 352-384 CE)
  - Status of family probably one reason this became so wide spread, emperor Arcadius (383-408) personally requested a copy (w/ new preface)



# Faltonia Betitia Proba as Author

- Cento format relatively new in Latin lit. from 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE
  - We've seen this in Hellenistic lit. though...
  - Matro of Pitane:

δειπνα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροφα καὶ μάλα πολλὰ, *Odyssey* 1.1

ἃ Ξενοκλῆς ῥήτωρ ἐν Ἀθήναις δείπνισεν ἡμᾶς:

ἦλθον γὰρ κάκειῖσε, πολὺς δέ μοι ἔσπετο λιμός. *Odyssey* 6.164

οὗ δὲ καλλίστους ἄρτους ἶδον ἠδὲ μεγίστους,

λευκοτέρους χιόνος, ἔσθειν δ' ἀμύλοισιν ὁμοίους; *Iliad* 10.436-7

τάων καὶ Βορέης ἠράσσατο πεσσομενάων. *Iliad* 20.223

# Faltonia Betitia Proba as Author

- Cento format relatively new in Latin lit. from 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE
  - We've seen this in Hellenistic lit. though...
  - Proba (describing the beginning of the flood):

Then the almighty father || was deeply angered and hurled himself  
from the upper sky. || He poured the earth into the waves  
mixing in a flood, and loosed heaven into Tartarus. (307-9)

*Georgics* 2.325 || *Aeneid* 1.126

*Aeneid* 9.645 || *Aeneid* 12.204

*Aeneid* 12.205



# Faltonia Betitia Proba as Author

- Cento format relatively new in Latin lit. from 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE
  - We've seen this in Hellenistic lit. though...
- Rules:
  - Use only individual lines or combine half lines, no complete sections
  - Can make small changes to grammar but should be true to original
  - Prized not for originality of language but for cleverness in how the original meaning was preserved and slightly altered

# Faltonia Betitia Proba as Author

- Epic about Jesus—ok, but why Virgil?
  - Remember epic as genre and what it does:
    - Importance of Virgil in terms of “good” Latin and foundational knowledge of culturally important things
    - Importance of epic as a genre for transmitting these ideas through generations
  - Recontextualized culturally important lit. for a Christian audience, but without the pagan influence
    - Later used as a school text but probably not its original purpose



# *Cento Vergilianus*: Narrative and Structure

- Confessional and invocation(s) (1-55)
- Stories from the Book of Genesis (56-332)
  - Creation
  - Adam and Eve
  - Fall of Mankind and why life is hard now
  - Flood
  - Later history left to other authors
- The Life of Christ (333-688)
  - Birth
  - Baptism
  - Teachings and Travels
  - Crucifixion
  - Resurrection
- Conclusion (689-94)

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Purpose of Writing

Establishing  
authority

Moral Message

Purpose of Writing



# The Analysis

- The Narrator's Voice
  - Has to establish authority so the reader knows they can trust her
  - Names herself in her confession (12)
  - Two invocations (9, 22)
    - Turns away from pagan Muses (13 ff.)
    - But still a part of the old world—"soaked by the Castalian spring" (20)

# The Analysis

- The Literary Background
  - Christian gospels and Old Testament
  - Virgil's *Aeneid* and *Georgics* mostly, also *Eclogues*
    - Eclogue 4: the birth of a child who will become divine and bring a new Golden Age of peace and abundance
  - Older epic tropes
    - The Fall of Mankind (157 ff.) vs. Hesiod's Ages of Mankind
      - General feel of Virgil recast as wisdom literature (as per Virgil's *Georgics*)
    - Jesus' birth (narrative of a future king born and raised in secret so he can come into full power when grown) vs. every hero ever

# The Analysis

- The Idea of the Hero
  - Jesus labelled as “hero” (518)
    - Old heroic ideals:
      - “they admired the width of his shoulders” (462) from Museus (a poet) in the Isle of the Blessed
      - Revelation of heroic “fate” from “father to son” (402)
  - Qualities often subvert expectations from the cento quotations:
    - “When he saw they were crowded together and were venturing to fight he began and breathed with words a divine love.  
‘Be advised: learn justice. Help the tired,  
each for his own sake, men, whatever wealth you each have... (467 ff.)

From a battle  
scene in the  
*Aeneid*



# The Analysis

- Language and Performance
  - Lines' original meanings often don't match use here in crucial moments:
    - The temptation of Jesus by the serpent, "What is your birth? What home do you come from..." (437) is a hospitality formula
  - Battle scenes:
    - God puts Adam to sleep to make Eve, "his eyes closed in sweet sleep" (125)
    - The serpent tempts Eve like an enemy, "what great cowardice has come upon your courage" (185)
    - "When he saw they were crowded together and were venturing to fight / he began and breathed with words a divine love." (467-8)

# The Analysis

- Language and Performance
  - Sometimes the original setting adds a layer of meaning to the new context:
    - All the *Aeneid* 6 quotes in God's revelation of Jesus' earthly kingdom (403 ff.)
    - Jesus rejects the serpent's temptation and it, "pressed its forehead to the earth and forced bloody froth from its mouth" (454)
    - Jesus walks out of his tomb, "and the earth, encouraged, trembled at the striking of his feet" (659) from the marching of Aeneas' army against Turnus for the final battle

# The Analysis

- The Social Background
  - Good and bad behavior (467 ff.)
    - Presented as moral heart of second half
  - Syncretism = the blending of ideas from different religions
    - Rejecting the Muses (and paganism), but still referencing culturally relevant names and ideas (Castalian spring: 20; Tartarus: 309; Erebus: 632)
  - Some subtle changes from Christian source material
    - God showing Jesus his future kingdom (403 ff.) not in the gospels
      - “Rule your people with authority...” (409) from *Aen.* 6.859
    - Crucifixion narrative lacks all references to the Romans (610 ff.)

# Final Thoughts

- The same reason Apollonius couldn't rely on Homer's epics but had to reinvent them

