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LEVEL 4.2
Petrarch, *Africa* book 9

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Petrarch, *Africa* Book 9.1-215: Scipio Africanus and Ennius Talk about Glory and Poetry

His Carthaginian war over, Scipio sails back to Rome with the epic poet Ennius (Cicero *Pro Archia* 22: carus fuit Africano Superiori noster Ennius). For this association Petrarch was inspired by Claudian 23 (the preface to On the Consulship of Stilicho III): “The elder Scipio, who single-handed turned the Punic wars back from Italy's coasts to their own home, fought not his battles unmindful of the Muse's art; poets were ever the hero's special care. For valour is always fain to seek alliance with the Muses that they may bear witness to her deeds; he loves song whose exploits deserve the meed of song. Therefore, whether to avenge his sire's death the young warrior brought into subjection the Spanish seas or embarked upon the Libyan wave his dreadful standards, resolved to break with sure spear the strength of Carthage, the poet Ennius was ever at his side and in all his campaigns followed the trumpet's call into the midst of the fray. Him after the battle the soldiers loved to hear sing, and the trooper, still dripping with blood, would applaud his verses. When Scipio had triumphed over either Carthage — over the one to avenge his sire, over the other his fatherland — and when at last, after the disasters of a long war, he drove weeping Libya a captive before his chariot wheel, Victory brought back the Muses in her train and Mars' laurel crowned the poet's brow.” Perhaps also by the glimpse of Aeneas and Pallas talking together on shipboard in *Aen.* 10.159-62: hic magnus sedet Aeneas secumque volutat/eventus belli varios, Pallasque sinistro/adfixus lateri iam quaerit sidera, opacae/noctis iter, iam quae passus terraue marique. (In another work, the *Secretum*, where Petrarch imagines St Augustine berating him for embarking on the *Africa*, he uses the image of a journey by sea: (tantis gloriae stimulis urgebaris!) ad Africam poetico quodam navigio transivisti.) Petrarch probably did not know that Silius Italicus had put Ennius into the war in Sardinia 215BCE (*Punica* 12.387-414). Ennius wrote a poem called *Scipio*, which celebrated the African campaigns at the end of the second Punic War and Book 9 of Ennius' *Annales* was devoted to Scipio in Africa. Here the Somnium Scipionis in Cicero's *De republica* is important (see extract at end), as well as Ennius' dream of Homer at the beginning of the *Annales*.

NB If the spelling sometimes looks strange that is because it is medieval.
Recommended reading is listed at the end.

1.

Scipio provectus pelago Romanaque classis
 Iam placidum sulcabat iter. Non rauca procellis
 Aequora fervebant; ventisque silentibus undas
 Victorem sensisse putes. Tranquillior illis
 Vultus erat, caelo facies composta¹ sereno. 5
 Sic hostile fretum, sic cuncta elementa videres
 Obsequio mulcere ducem. Iam litora longe
 Africa linquebant² alacres et bella canentes
 Ibant ac valido frangebant remige fluctus.
 Puppe ducis media tacitus meditansque sedebat 10
 Ennius, assiduus rerum testisque comesque;
 Scipio quem tandem aggreditur verbisque benignis
 Excitat incipiens: "Nunquamne silentia rumpes,
 O michi multorum solamen dulce laborum?
 Fare, precor; nam perpetuis tabentia curis 15
 Pectora nostra vides. Placido sermone levare
 Illa soles; faciesque modo, tantum ora resolve,
 Si tibi nascenti, quo polles, summus Apollo
 Ingenium caeleste dedit, si turba dearum.
 Castalio infantem demersum gurgite lavit 20
 Ex Elicone sacro, collesque eduxit in altos,
 Et calamum et vocem tribuit mentemque poetae."
 Ennius auditis caput extulit atque ita fatur:
 «O flos Italiae, iuvenis, stirpisque deorum
 Certa fides, quid nunc nostro placet³ ore moveri, 25
 Quidve iubes? Evidem tacito modo pectore mecum
 Volvebam quod nulla ferent iam saecula maius
 Eximiae virtutis opus, quam nostra quod aetas
 Laeta videt, nullusque unquam sub mente movebit
 Grande aliquid, cui non, magnas spes inter, honestum 30

¹ Virg. Aen. 1.249 nunc placida compostus pace quiescit² subject is ‘the Romans’³ placet: understand tibi

Nomen in ore sonet, qui non venturus ad actum
Scipiadae meminisse velit, pro munere vultus
Non cupiat vidisse tuos.⁴ Maiorque sepulcri
Post cineres te fama manet.⁵ Mortalia Livor
Carpit enim; at Mors Invidiam consumit et arcet
Ac procul a bustis abigit. Tua gloria pridem
Vicerat hanc pestem, iamque altas tuta per auras
Fugit humum morbosque hominum moresque malignos,
Seque parem tulit alma deis. Tamen ecce supremum
Incrementa diem famae tibi multa daturum
Promisi expertus; quoque ipse a morte recedes
Longius, hoc maior meritum te fama sequetur.

2

Tempore crescat honos perque ultima saecula mundi
Clarus eris. Virtus quoniam non altius ibit:
Descensus vereor. Sed nostra peritia fandi
Nondum propositam valuit contingere metam,
Nuper ab exiguis radicibus orta, nec ante

⁴ See Valerius Maximus 2.10.2: Ad eundem Africanum in Liternina uilla se continentem conplures praedonum duces uidendum eodem tempore forte confluxerunt. quos cum ad uim faciendam uenire existimasset, praesidium domesticorum in tecto conlocauit eratque in his repellendis et animo et apparatu occupatus. quod ut praedones animaduerterunt, dimissis militibus abiectisque armis ianuae adpropinquant et clara uoce nuntiant Scipioni non uitae eius hostes, sed uirtutis admiratores uenissem conspectum et congressum tanti uiri quasi caeleste aliquod beneficium expertentes: proinde securum se nobis spectandum praebere ne grauetur. haec postquam domestici Scipioni retulerunt, fores reserari eosque intromitti iussit. qui postes ianuae tamquam aliquam religiosissimam aram sanctumque templum uenerati cupide Scipionis dexteram adprehenderunt ac diu osculati positis ante uestibulum donis, quae deorum immortalium numini consecrari solent, laeti, quod Scipionem uidisse contigisset, ad lares reueterunt.

⁵ Livy 38.56: there is no agreement as to the time when he [Scipio] was prosecuted nor as to the year when he died nor as to where he died or was buried; some say that both death and burial took place at Rome, others at Liternum. [3] In both places tombs and statues are shown; [4] for at Liternum there is a tomb and a statue placed upon the tomb, which I myself saw recently, shattered by a storm, and at Rome, outside the Porta Capena, in the tomb of the Scipios, there are three statues, two of which are said to represent Publius and Lucius Scipio, the third the poet Quintus Ennius. (The tomb of the Scipios was not rediscovered until 1614.)

Cognita per Latium, Argolicis contenta colonis.	
Hoc igitur mecum indignans sub mente movebam,	
Praecones meritos tua quod notissima virtus	50
Non habitura foret. Macedum rex magnus amici	
Forte videns saxum Aeacidae titulosque sepulcri, ⁶	
'Fortunate' inquit 'iuvenis, cui nominis illum	
Praeconem reperire fuit! ⁷ Non parva profecto	
Est claris fortuna viris habuisse poetam	55
Altisonis qui carminibus cumulare decorem	
Virtutis queat egregiae monimentaque laudum.	
At tibi, summe ducum, claro quo nullus Homero est	
Dignior, in reliquis blanda inque hoc durior uno	
Me solum Fortuna dedit. ⁸ Currentibus annis	60
Nascetur forsan digno qui carmine caelo	
Efferat emeritas laudes et fortia facta	
Et cui mellifluo melius resonantia plectro	
Calliope det fila lirae vocemque sonoram.» ⁹	
«Parce, precor, verbis: tibi non, me iudice, vates	65
Maeonius nec iure tibi praeponitur altus	
Euripides aut quos claro cognomine Grai	
Concelebrant. Alio nolim me carmine dici,	
Si dicendus ero. Quin quod te poscimus» inquit	
Scipio «prosequere; et quae sint permissa poetis,	70
Famosaeque rei certos agnoscere fines	
Te liceat monstrante michi: ¹⁰ quid laurea signet	
Tam ducibus claris quam vatibus addita sacris. ¹¹	

⁶ amici goes with Aeacidae (=Achilles)

⁷ See Cic. Pro Archia 24: Quam multos scriptores rerum suarum magnus ille Alexander secum habuisse dicitur! Atque is tamen, cum in Sigeo ad Achillis tumulum astitisset: "O fortunate" inquit "adulescens, qui tuae virtutis Homerum praeconem inveneris!"

⁸ See Valerius Maximus 8.14.1: uir [Scipio] Homericu quam rudi atque inpolito praeconio dignior. See Ovid, Trist. 2.424: Ennius ingenio maximus, arte rudis, Ennius, greatest in talent, crude in skill'.

⁹ Two ideas here. The fame of heroes depends on the poet's celebration, and the consecration scene of the poet by the Muses (Hesiod etc.). To be developed below.

¹⁰ may I be permitted to know thanks to you...

Neve tibi indignus videar cui talia forte
 Narrentur, nobis animum dulcedine quadam 75
 Pulcra movent, et continuis hoc pectus ab armis
 Dulcia concussum¹² placidae capit otia linguae.»
 Ille autem «Nulla est, fateor, tam dura feroxque
 Mens» ait «alme ducum, cui non sit pulcra voluptas
 Interdum curas inter vitaeque labores 80
 Pyerios audisse modos dulcesque dearum
 Irrepsisse choros. Sed enim haec praecordia nunquam
 A Musis aversa reor. Non talibus astris
 Tam magnum genuisse virum Natura videtur.
 Errasset, si cui dederat cupidissima famae
 Pectora, Musarum non ingessisset amorem. 85
 Quisquis enim se magna videt gessisse, necesse est
 Diligat aeternos vates et carmina sacra.

3

At nunc quod nostro poscis sermone doceri,
 Accipe quam brevibus. Non illa licentia vatum est 90
 Quam multis placuisse palam est.
 Scripturum iecisse prius firmissima veri
 Fundamenta decet, quibus inde innixus amoena
 Et varia sub nube potest abscondere sese,¹³
 Lectori longum cumulans placidumque laborem,
 Quaesitu asperior quo sit sententia, verum 95

¹¹ Petrarch's life-long dream was realised in April 1341 when he was crowned poet laureate on the Capitol. Cf. Prop. 3.1.7ff. *quo me Fama levat terra sublimis, et a me/nata coronatis Musa triumphat equis,/et mecum in curru parvi vectantur Amores,/scriptorumque meas turba secuta rotas.*

¹² *concussum* (agitated) goes with *ab armis*

¹³ See Macrobius' comm. on Somn. Scip. [11] *Et hoc esse uolunt quod Homerus, diuinorum omnium inuentionum fons et origo, sub poetici nube figmenti uerum sapientibus intellegi dedit, Iouem cum dis ceteris, id est cum stellis, profectum in Oceanum, Aethiopibus eum ad epulas inuitantibus. Per quam imaginem fabulosam Homerum significasse uolunt hauriri de humore nutrimenta sideribus, qui ob hoc Aethiopas reges epularum caelestium dixit, quoniam circa Oceani oram non nisi Aethiopes habitant, quos uicinia solis usque ad speciem nigri coloris exurit.*

Dulcior inventu. Quicquid labor historiarum est
 Quicquid virtutum cultus documentaque vitae,
 Naturae studium quicquid, licuisse poetis
 Crede: sub ignoto tamen ut celentur amictu, 100
 Nuda alibi, et tenui frustrentur lumina velo,
 Interdumque palam veniant, fugiantque vicissim.
 Qui fingit quodcumque refert, non ille poetae
 Nomine censendus, nec vatis honore, sed uno
 Nomine mendacis. Potes hinc perpendere quicquid 105
 Scire petis: nostri quae sit mensura laboris,
 Et latos fines, et quanta licentia nobis.
 Laurea restat adhuc: cuius dignare parumper
 Participes nos esse tibi. Si gloria bello,
 Nec minus ingenio constat, patiere virenti 110
 Fronde duces vatesque simul sacra tempora cingant.¹⁴
 Immortale decus viror immortalis utrisque
 Indicat et longe promittit tempora vitae.
 Hinc deus ingenii lauros amat almus Apollo,
 Pyeridum solitus cithara modulari choreas 115
 Incola Cirrhaeo totiens duxisse sub antro.¹⁵
 Praeterea hanc frondem rapido non fulmine vexat
 Iuppiter ex cunctis, talemque meretur honorem
 Laurus: ab aethereo tanta est clementia rege.¹⁶
 Iam famae quod fulmen erit, nisi sola vetustas 120
 Omnia prosternens? Hunc gloria nostra pavorem
 Non habet, atque ideo spernentis fulmina frondis
 Serta gerit sanctoque legit de stipite ramos.»
 Dixerat. At Scipio subridens: «Omnia mulcent;

¹⁴ patiere [ut] cingant

¹⁵ Cirrha was a town near Delphi and alludes to the latter. Apollo is well known as leader of the Muses. The laurel became his tree thanks to the transformation of Daphne.

¹⁶ Isidore Etymologies XVII.7: Laurus a verbo laudis dicta; hac enim cum laudibus victorum capita coronabantur. ... Hanc arborem Graeci DAFNEN vocant, quod numquam deponat viriditatem; inde illa potius victores coronantur. Sola quoque haec arbor vulgo fulminari minime creditur.

Sed laedis brevitate tua; et dum dulcius inter 125
 Ista sonant, medio sitientes calle relinquis.
 Ergo age! nam nullum iam litus cernitur, et sol
 Transivit caeli medium. Tu dulcia prome
 Verba, quibus mens alma scatet, placidoque volentes¹⁷
 Et longo sermone feras, partemque diei 130
 Et partes pelagi minuens.»¹⁸ Tunc ille coactus
 Incipit - hic omnes tenuerunt murmura nautae
 Et comites siluere ducis -: «Vestigia Famae
 Rara sequens, quantum licuit per saecula retro
 Omnia pervigili studio vagus ipse cucurri, 135
 Donec ad extremas anima rapiente tenebras
 Perventum primosque viros, quos Fama perenni
 Fessa via¹⁹ longe ignotos post terga reliquit.

4

Hic quisquis merito fulgens fuit obvius, illum
 Amplexu tenuisse animi michi gloria summa est 140
 Inque locum cari semper coluisse parentis.
 Praecipue illustres calamo florente²⁰ poetas
 Admisi atque ima cordis sub parte locavi.
 Milibus ex tantis unus michi summus Homerus,
 Unus habet quod suspiciam, quod mirer amemque. 145
 Ille michi e caelo veniens tam saepe videtur,²¹
 Ut stupeam potuisse hominem sic alta tenere,
 Astrorum sic nosse vias, sic climata terrae!
 Qui licet ante novos reges et tempora Romae

¹⁷ nos understood

¹⁸ See Aulus Gellius XVII.14: A witty comrade at your side,/To walk's as easy as to ride.

¹⁹ grown weary of the never-ending road

²⁰ calamo florente descriptive with illustres

²¹ Cicero De republica 6.10: in somno tale, quale de Homero scribit Ennius, de quo videlicet saepissime vigilans solebat cogitare et loqui; Cic. Ac. Pr. 2.16.51, Homer the poet appeared at his side, when Ennius dreamed: Cum somniavit [sc. Ennius] narravit visus Homerus adesse poeta.

Floruerit, tamen hoc in tempus mente reduxi Praesentemque animo ficta sub ymagine feci. Hoc sine nulla dies abiit, nox nulla sine illo. Ille breves cenas in longum traxit, et idem Nunc longam breviare viam, nunc tramite plano Edocuit rigidi transire cacumina montis:	150
Denique quicquid agens, nullo discriminе secum Sopitus vigilansque fui, noctemque diemque. ²²	155
Hic michi nunc etiam dubii sub tempore belli Affuit in somnis. Quis somnum dixerit illum?	
Pervigil astabam. Fracta nam pace sub armis Omnia fervebant; seroque in castra reversus	160
Contigeras animum. ²³ Iubeas si vera fateri, Non timui; tamen in dubio spes fessa pependit Usque sub occasum solis. Tum maxima pernox ²⁴	
Cura animum tenuit, quid secum postera ferret Tot motus clausura dies. Hic nocte sub alta	165
Aspicio adventare senem, quem rara tegebant Frusta togae et canis immixta et squalida barba.	
Sedibus exierant oculi. Cava frontis ymago Horrorem ²⁵ inculta cum maiestate ferebat.	170
Dirigi. Tunc ille manu similisque videnti Occupat ancipitem Graioque haec more profatur:	
'Salve, care michi Latiae telluris amice Unice! quodque diu votis animoque petisti,	
Aspice qualis erat quandam dum vixit	175
Homerus. Huc ego vix tandem reserato carcere Ditis	

²² Despite his enthusiasm Petrarch's attempts to read Homer in Greek have been described as a failure: Robin Sowerby, 'Early Humanist Failure with Homer', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, Summer, 1997, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Summer, 1997), 37-63. Colin Burrow (p. 161) says of the following passage 'This is certainly the most ambitious passage in the Africa and it deserves to be regarded as one of the greatest things Petrarch ever wrote.'

²³ contingo = affect (rare meaning)

²⁴ lasting all night

²⁵ dread or veneration?

Emersi, tacite perrumpens viscera terrae'.
 Procubui voluique pedes contingere pronus:
 Umbra fuit nudaequa haeserunt oscula terrae.

5

'Surge' ait 'et mecum ex aequo, nam dignus es, ultiro
 Congredere et, dum tempus habes, tam saepe negato
 Colloquio satiare meo'. Tum protinus ardens
 Exsurgo 'Gentisque ingens o gloria' dixi
 'Argolicae summumque decus, quis talia tanto
 Supplitia inflxit? Sacrae quis lumina frontis
 Naturaequa duces rapuit, tantumque nocere
 Sustinuit mundo?²⁶ Non hic michi creditus²⁷ olim:
 Lincea quin acies animo occursabat amanti
 Visque oculis immensa tuis. Quos Graecia portus
 Dives habet gemino late circumflua ponto; 190
 Quos colles, quae rura colit, quae vallibus imis
 Antra tenet, quaenam frondosa cacumina silvis
 Aut pelago scopulos, quos non michi lumine certo
 Monstraris?²⁸ Cernenda aliis longinqua dedisti,
 Ipse propinqua videns minime? Miracula menti
 Quanta meae! Aegeo diffusas ecce profundo
 Cicladas hinc numero; video quot litore flexus
 Hellespontiaco: tu me nequis ipse tueri,
 Ostendens tam multa michi! Tum suscipit ille:
 'Vera quidem memoras; sed non miranda. 200
 Quid ergo? Qui michi corporeos Deus abstulit, ille nequibat
 Restituisse alios quibus haec archana viderem?

²⁶ Homer's blindness is damaging to the whole world.

²⁷ 2nd person verb understood.

²⁸ Cicero Tusc. Disp. 5.114: Traditum est etiam Homerum caecum fuisse; at eius picturam, non pōlsin videmus: quae regio, quae ora, qui locus Graeciae, quae species formaque pugnae, quae acies, quod remigium qui motus hominum, qui ferarum non ita expictus est, ut, quae ipse non viderit, nos ut videremus, effecerit? Quid ergo? aut Homero delectationem animi ac voluptatem aut cuiquam docto defuisse umquam arbitramur?

Desine iussa Dei solitis onerare querelis,
Mortalis! Namque ista hominum stultissima lis est.
Iusta facit quaecumque facit. Sed noscere cuncta
Vestra nequit gravitas sub opaci carceris umbra.
Quam multis nocuere oculi visusque vagari
Compulit et coepto forsitan semovit honesto!
Hinc ea sponte quidem, gravis ut nocituraque multis,
Sarcina deposita est. Quin hinc modo pergitus ultra? 210
Tu caecum ne sperne ducem. Fortasse videbis
Multam animo placitura tuo. Nec cura futuri
Solicitet casus. Quoniam lux crastina campos
Sanguine Poenorum Latio victore rigabit.'
Prosequor augurio laetus. [...]²⁹

205

210

215

Cicero, *De re publica* 6

(10) Post autem apparatu regio accepti sermonem in multam noctem produximus,
cum senex nihil nisi de Africano loqueretur omniaque eius non facta solum, sed
etiam dicta meminisset. Deinde, ut cubitum discessimus, me et de via fessum, et
qui ad multam noctem vigilassem, artior, quam solebat, somnus complexus est.
Hic mihi—credo equidem ex hoc, quod eramus locuti; fit enim fere, ut
cogitationes sermonesque nostri pariant aliquid in somno tale, quale de Homero
scribit Ennius, de quo videlicet saepissime vigilans solebat cogitare et loqui—
Africanus se ostendit ea forma, quae mihi ex imagine eius quam ex ipso erat
notior; quem ubi agnovi, equidem cohorui, sed ille: 'Ades,' inquit, 'animo et
omitte timorem, Scipio, et, quae dicam, trade memoriae!

²⁹ From here on Homer takes up the role of Anchises as guide to Aeneas in the underworld [and Virgil in Dante?] and shows him the future, including Franciscus who will one day write the Africa.

Recommended Reading

Introductions

Wilfred P. Mustard, 'Petrarch's Africa', *American Journal of Philology* 42 (1921) 97–121

Philip Hardie, 'After Rome: Renaissance Epic', in A. J. Boyle, ed., *Roman Epic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 294–313

https://baylor-ir.tdl.org/bitstream/handle/2104/5144/erik_ellis_masters.pdf?

(the Introduction to this thesis)

https://www.academia.edu/648754/Epic_poetry_of_the_Trecento_Dantes_Comedy_B_occaccios_Teseida_and_Petrarchs_Africa

(chapter 4 in this thesis, esp. 149ff.)

Translation

Thomas G. Bergin and Alice S. Wilson, *Petrarch's Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977

Authoritative Study

Aldo S. Bernardo, *Petrarch, Scipio and the 'Africa': the Birth of Humanism's Dream*, The Johns Hopkins Press, Oxford University Press, 1962.

Other Studies

Michael Paschalis, 'The Chain of Imitations in Petrarch's *Africa*', in *Imitative Series and Clusters from Classical to Early Modern Literature*, ed. by Colin Burrow, Stephen J. Harrison, Martin McLaughlin and Elisabetta Tarantino (2020) 139–152

Gerhard Regn, Bernhard Huss, '[Petrarch's Rome: The History of the Africa and the Renaissance Project](#)', *MLN*, Vol. 124, No. 1, Italian Issue (Jan., 2009), pp. 86–102

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Philip Hardie, *Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 475–84

J. Christopher Warner, *The Augustinian Epic: Petrarch to Milton* (Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 2005), 20–50

Colin Burrow, *Imitating Authors: Plato to Futurity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, Chap. 4

Nora Goldschmidt, 'Absent Presence: Pater Ennius in Renaissance Europe', *Classical Receptions Journal* 4 (2012), 1–19