

## INTRODUCTION

### Life of Vergil

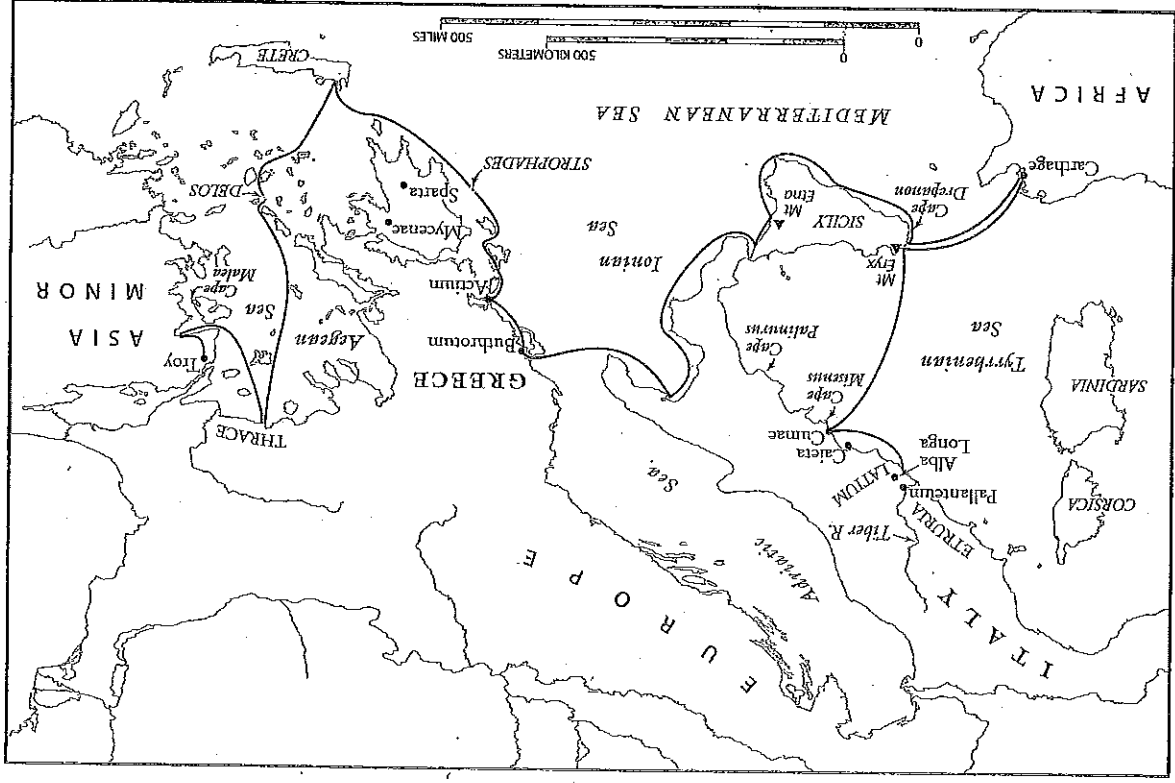
1. Publius Vergilius Maro, one of the most celebrated poets of all time, was born in the little country village of Andes, near Mantua, in northern Italy, October 15, 70 B.C. His father was a small farmer; and, although a man of moderate means, he managed to give his son the equivalent of a college education. The poetically inclined youth studied at Mantua and Cremona, then at the larger city of Milan (Mediolanum), whence he passed to Rome and finally to Naples, where he went to complete his college course. He early developed a taste for literature and especially for philosophy, and all his life he remained a student. Very modest and retiring, even to the point of shyness, he was not fitted to take an active part in the stirring political and military events of his day.

2. After the battle of Philippi in 42 B.C., Octavian confiscated Vergil's farm and assigned it to one of his veterans. Vergil had already begun to write poetry, and his work had attracted the favorable attention of Maecenas, a close personal friend, and political adviser of the emperor. Through Maecenas Vergil met Octavian, who at once took him under his protection, compensated him for the loss of his farm, and made it possible for him to devote the rest of his life to poetry.

3. The most important of his works are known as the *Bucolics* (or *Eclogues*), the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid*. The *Bucolics* are short poems on pastoral themes, formed on Greek models and idealizing the life of the shepherds and herdsmen of northern Italy; the *Georgics*, also formed on Greek models, deal with the pleasures of farm life; while the *Aeneid*, a great literary epic, deals with the wanderings and adventures of Aeneas after the destruction of Troy, from which, according to tradition, he had come with a small band of followers and laid the foundations of the power which later became Rome.

4. For the last ten years of his life Vergil was occupied in writing the *Aeneid*. In the year 19 B.C. he went to Greece with the intention of spending the next three years in the East for the purpose of getting a more intimate acquaintance with the scenes depicted in his poem and of acquiring local color for his work, upon which he was putting the final touches. While in Athens he met the emperor Augustus,

THE WANDERINGS OF AENEAS



who was returning to Rome from a visit in the East and who induced Vergil to accompany him. Vergil was already ill before he set sail and steadily grew worse during the voyage. Shortly after landing at Brundisium in southern Italy he died, September 21, 19 B.C., a little before his fifty-second birthday. Vergil was buried at Naples, which he had especially loved, and his tomb bore the inscription:

5. Mantua mē genuit; Calabri rapuere; tenet nunc  
Parthenopē; cecini pascua, rura, ducēs,

*I was born at Mantua; died in Calabria; my bones lie in Naples;  
pastures, fields, and heroes were the theme of my song.*

His untimely death left his great poem incomplete, and there are many indications of this fact in the *Aeneid*, the most marked being the unfinished verses, of which there are more than fifty.

### The Aeneid

6. The *Aeneid* is a literary epic, modeled upon the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer, from which it has drawn a great deal of its material and inspiration. The poem was undertaken at the request of Augustus. The theme, which is also said to have been suggested by Augustus, is the settlement of Aeneas in Italy, which finally led to the founding of Rome. This legend was already well established in Italy, where many of the great families took especial pride in tracing their ancestry back to Aeneas and his band of Trojan heroes. The Julian gens, of which Julius and Augustus Caesar were members, especially gloried in its tradition of a direct descent from Aeneas himself through Ascanius, or Iulus, as he was sometimes called. Besides this, the Romans were gradually coming to claim a Trojan origin for many of the customs, ceremonies, and institutions of their fathers. Vergil and Augustus were both interested in thus giving divine sanction and the weight of hoary antiquity to the measures which Augustus had undertaken for establishing the empire. Thus Augustus appears as the restorer of the good old days and the good old ways of the fathers. He is the promised ruler of divine descent who is to bring peace and a return of the Golden Age to the whole world. Throughout the entire poem the person and the work of Augustus are magnified, but these are made to appear as secondary and as but instruments in the hands of the gods for working out the high destiny of the Roman people. By thus stirring the feeling of Roman patriotism and pride of race as well as by constantly appealing to the sanctity and the authority of the good old days, the *Aeneid* met with an instant and a direct response from the Roman people, who were taking an ever-growing pride in the great achieve-

ments of their fathers. The success of the poem was thus assured from the first, and it has continued to exert an enormous influence upon later Roman and European literature.

7. As a piece of literature, the *Aeneid* has both the strength and weaknesses of its author and subject matter. Vergil was a weakling, usually in poor health, shy to the point of painfulness, a sentimental idealist, and little acquainted with the hard and practical ways of the stern old Roman world. He was never married and seems to have cared little or nothing for feminine society. His one great ideal of life can be summed up in the word *pietās*, *devotion*, *loyalty*, and he equips his hero Aeneas (*pius Aeneās*) with a full and overflowing measure of this quality, which finds its best expression in an unquestioned obedience to the will of the gods and to their more or less contradictory commands, no matter how much human suffering may be entailed nor how much apparent wrong may result. Vergil was born in Cisalpine Gaul, probably ineligible for Roman citizenship in his early years and possibly a member of a conquered tribe which had felt the pitiless heel of the conqueror. In any case he seems to have early developed a deep sympathy for the oppressed and for the losers in life's battle, and also a profound conviction of the sadness and sorrow of human existence and the futility of human effort in its attempts to adjust its feeble struggles to a world that is too much for it. The craving for satisfaction of a thwarted nature found its chief expression in its reliance upon the gods and their inscrutable ways as they worked out their plans for the world. In addition, he found refuge in a deep reverence for the past with its great heroes who had been so submissive to the will of the gods that they had become but puppets in carrying out the divine commands.

8. Vergil's chief claim to fame as a poet rests upon his incomparable literary style. Nettleship<sup>1</sup> says: "Unquestionably it was Vergil's style which more than anything else gave him his pre-eminence among Roman poets. The great power of his style lies in the haunting music of his verse, in the rhythm and fall of his language." As a close student of Greek, he had absorbed much of the best in that literature. "Not only is he fond of filling his verses with Greek forms and Greek cadences, but his lines are rich and harmonious with a new music manifold in its capacity; it is as if the sound of the Greek language had awakened a sympathetic strain in Italian. . . . Vergil not only translates but works his Greek materials into new forms." As a great artist he thoroughly loses himself in his work, but his impersonality "is not the impersonality of Homer or of Shakespeare, who simply show us the world as it stands; Vergil yearns over the spectacle which he spreads before us."

<sup>1</sup> Vergil, pp. 90-92.

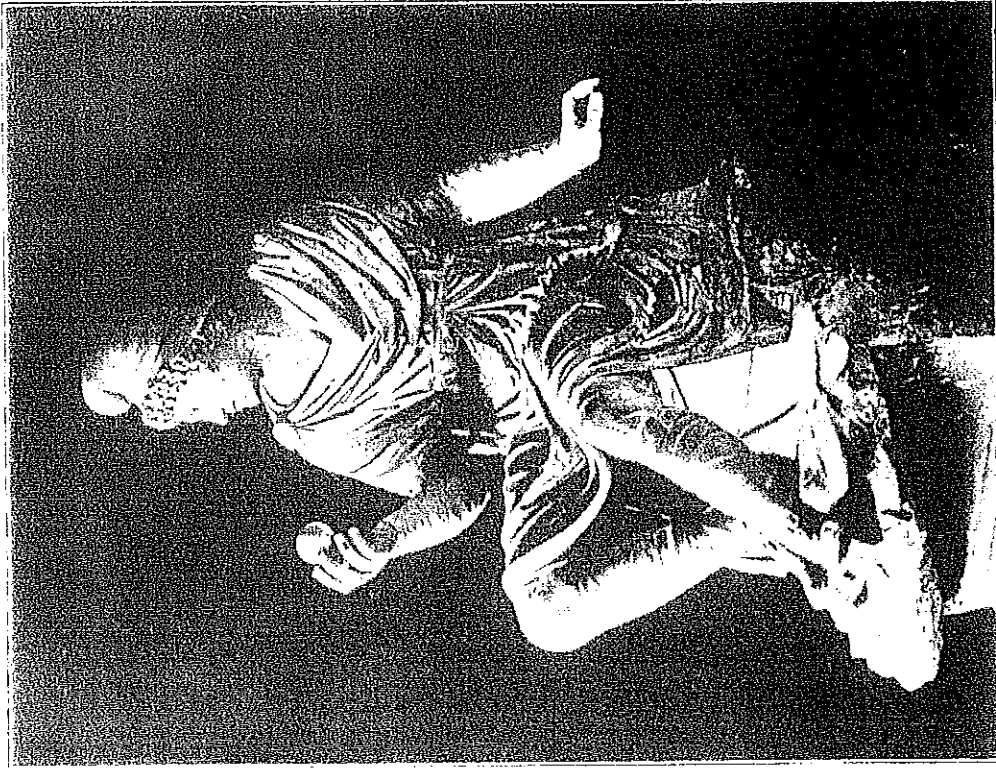
### Vergil's Later Fame

9. Vergil was ardently admired even in his own day, and his fame continued to increase with the passing centuries. Under the later Roman Empire the reverence for his works reached the point where the *Sortes Vergilianae* came into vogue; that is, the *Aeneid* was opened at random, and the first line on which the eyes fell was taken as an omen of good or evil. In the mediæval period a great circle of legends and stories of miracles gathered around his name, and the Vergil of history was transformed into the Vergil of magic. He was looked upon not only as a great magician but as an inspired pagan prophet who had foretold the birth of Christ. It was at this period that the spelling *Virgil* came into vogue, thus associating the great poet with the magic or prophetic wand, *virga*. "The mediæval world looked upon him as a poet of prophetic insight, who contained within himself all the potentialities of wisdom. He was called the *Poet*, as if no other existed; the *Roman*, as if the ideal of the commonwealth were embodied in him; the *Perfect in Style*, with whom no other writer could be compared; the *Philosopher*, who grasped the ideas of all things; the *Wise One*, whose comprehension seemed to other mortals unlimited. His writings became the Bible of the race. The mysteries of Roman priestcraft, the processes of divination, the science of the stars, were all found in his works."<sup>1</sup> The great mediæval poets, such as Dante and Chaucer, learned much from the immortal Roman; since that time few great poets have escaped his influence, and one cannot properly estimate the course of European thought and poetic art without some knowledge of Vergil and his dominating power.

### The Trojan War

10. To understand the *Aeneid*, it is necessary to be familiar with the story of the Trojan War and of the events leading up to it. According to the story, Jupiter, father and king of gods and men, once fell in love with Thetis, a beautiful sea goddess, and wished to marry her, but an oracle had foretold that the son of Thetis was to be mightier than his father. Hence Jupiter decreed that Thetis was to marry a mortal, and Peleus, a Greek king, was chosen as her husband. The wedding was a magnificent occasion, and all the gods and goddesses were invited except Eris, goddess of strife. Incensed at being thus slighted, she appeared in the midst of the festivities and spitefully threw among the assembled guests a golden apple (the famous Apple of Discord) with the inscription "To the fairest." Each of the ladies present wished to claim this prize for herself; but

<sup>1</sup> Tunisia, *Master Vergil*, p. 156.



Alinari, Rome

Vatican Museum

### PARIS BEGUILLED

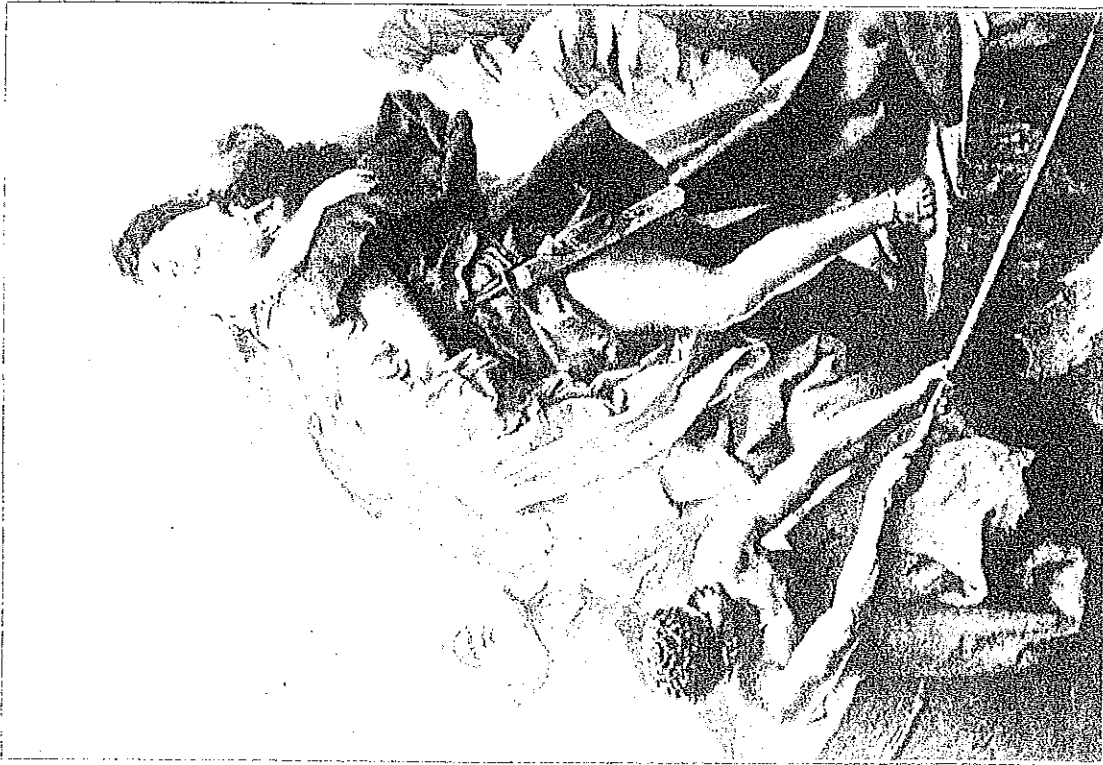
In his right hand he holds the Apple of Discord,  
for which the three goddesses quarreled.

the contest finally narrowed down to Juno, queen of the gods; Minerva, goddess of wisdom; and Venus, goddess of love and beauty. The rivalry became very bitter, and the angry goddesses called upon Jupiter to decide; but he discreetly refused to act as judge.

So the case was finally referred to Paris, son of Priam, king of Troy or Ilium. Each of the goddesses then tried to bribe Paris. Juno offered him great wealth and unlimited power, Minerva the gift of great wisdom, while Venus promised him the most beautiful woman in the world for his wife. Paris thereupon awarded the prize to Venus and thus incurred the vindictive and unforgiving hatred of Juno and Minerva. His decision, henceforth known as the "Judgment of Paris," was the beginning of unending trouble for Paris and the Trojan people.

11. The most beautiful woman in the world at that time was Helen, daughter of Leda, and wife of Menelaüs, king of Sparta. With the help of Venus, Paris succeeded in winning Helen and eloping with her to Troy. All Greece at once arose in arms to avenge the insult of having one of their women carried off by a foreigner, and a great expedition was fitted out under Agamemnon, brother of Menelaüs, as commander-in-chief. The forces assembled at the port of Aulis in eastern Greece, but day after day the winds were unfavorable, and it was not possible for them to set sail. The Greeks consulted Calchas, the soothsayer of the expedition; and he replied that no favorable wind could be expected until they had sacrificed Iphigeneia, daughter of Agamemnon, to appease the gods. The princess was duly sacrificed, thus appeasing the gods and securing a favorable voyage for the expedition.

12. Many great Greek heroes embarked on this undertaking with Agamemnon and Menelaüs. Among the most famous were the sententious Nestor, who was older, knew more, and could talk more than any other man of his time; the wily Ulysses, whose cunning was invincible; the swift-footed Achilles, the dashing young hero ever eager to do and to dare for the pure thrill of the excitement and the love of adventure; the mighty Ajax, whose enormous strength was accompanied by a correspondingly dull wit; another Ajax, son of Oileus, who was ever eager to grab his part of the spoils; the mighty Diomedes, who dared to fight against the very gods on the field of battle. There were also many other Greek heroes who were eager to distinguish themselves in such a noble undertaking and to get their share of the booty, when they should succeed in capturing the rich city of Troy. Among the Trojan warriors who opposed the Greeks were the dauntless Hector, eldest son of Priam and the noblest of all the warriors before Troy; the jaunty Paris who was fighting mightily to keep Helen; and the faithful Aeneas, the son of Venus and Anchises.



Gramstorff Bros.

THE ABDUCTION OF HELEN

Eudolf von Deutschi

### The Fall of Troy and Aeneas's Wanderings

13. For ten long years the siege lasted with varying fortunes, although the Greeks had a slight advantage, owing to the fact that more of the gods were fighting on their side than on that of the Trojans. Juno and Minerva were especially helpful to the Greeks, since they had both developed an undying hatred against all the Trojans, because of the evident unfairness of Trojan Paris in awarding the beauty prize to their hated rival, Venus.

14. Through the stratagem of the wooden horse, fully described in the second book of the *Aeneid*, Troy was finally captured and destroyed. Most of the inhabitants were either killed or dragged away into slavery; but a remnant, under the leadership of Aeneas, succeeded in escaping. After long wanderings and much hardship they finally reached Italy, where they settled and established their rule over the uncivilized natives. This settlement finally resulted in the founding of Rome, which gradually extended its sway and established the Roman Empire, with Augustus at its head in the days of Vergil.

### The Purpose of the *Aeneid*

15. One of the results which both Augustus and Vergil hoped to see effected with the help of the *Aeneid* was a revival of faith in the old-time religion. The educated Romans of the day were becoming quite blasé and sophisticated and were gradually losing the faith of their fathers with its simple, unquestioning reliance on the infallible wisdom of the gods and their helpful interference in human affairs.

### The Roman Religion

16. The machinery of this religion was quite elaborate. Before their acquaintance with Greek culture the Romans had developed a religion of their own, with a number of departmental divinities, each having charge of some general field in human experience, the boundaries of which were never very clearly defined. Hence there was a considerable overlapping of authority, with a consequent confusion in the divine government. With the coming of Greek culture, no radical change was effected in the general conceptions, but the Romans took over a vast mass of Greek stories about the gods and the deeds of divine and semidivine characters. In most cases the Roman names of the various divinities were retained, and they were simply identified with the corresponding Greek deities with their elaborate system of mythology. Thus the Greek father of gods and men, Zeus, was identified with the Roman Jupiter, Hera with Juno,

Athena with Minerva, Aphrodite with Venus, Hermes with Mercury, Poseidon with Neptune, Hephaestus with Vulcan, etc. In addition to these common features, the Roman religion had certain characteristic divinities and conceptions of its own before the coming of Greek culture, and these were retained.

17. In speaking then of the religious ideas embodied in the *Aeneid*, we are dealing primarily with the Greco-Roman religion, to which are added certain Roman features not belonging to the Greek system.

18. At the head of the Roman system of religion stood Jupiter, father and king of gods and men. He was the god of heaven who gathered the storm clouds and hurled the lightning. His sign was the thunderbolt, and the eagle was his messenger. Apollo was the great god of light and the foe of all darkness and evil. He was the ideal of manly beauty and the patron of music, prophecy, poetry, and medicine. Mars was the brutal and bloody god of war and of battles. Vulcan, god of fire, supervised the working of metals and all useful and mechanical arts. Mercury with his winged sandals and his magic wand was the messenger and the herald of the gods. He was also god of inventions, trade, and commerce. Bacchus was the god of wine and master of revelry. Neptune, brother of Jupiter, was god of all the seas and waters of the earth. Juno, wife of Jupiter and queen of the gods, presided over the life of women and especially over the rites of marriage. Minerva was goddess of wisdom and of the arts and handicrafts, especially of female handicrafts. Diana, sister of Apollo, was the divinity of the moonlight, goddess of the woods, and mistress of the chase. Venus, born of the sea foam near Cythera, was goddess of love and beauty. Ceres, goddess of grain, presided over seedtime and harvest. Vesta, the goddess of the household fire, presided over hearth and home and the sanctities of family life. Pluto or Dis, with his queen Proserpina, ruled over the lower world and the souls of the dead.

19. In addition to these greater divinities, there were many minor deities, such as the beautiful feminine nymphs who haunted every fountain, stream, mountain, or sea, and their masculine counterparts, the homely satyrs, who frequented the forests, fields, and mountains. The Fates presided over human destinies, while the Furies avenged such crimes as murder and sacrifice. Among the great number of lesser deities and spirits were such personified qualities as Fortune, Concord, and Peace.

20. In addition to these gods and goddesses may be mentioned Janus, the two-faced god of beginnings and of gateways, and the household deities, the lares and penates, who along with Vesta, goddess of the hearth, formed the center of the family worship. These household deities were worshipped each day at the family

meal. When the household sat down to dinner, a little of the food was thrown into the flames of the fire on the hearth, and a little wine was poured out as an offering to the household gods. The images of the lares and penates would also be brought from their shrine and placed on the table to insure their presence at the meal.

21. Special veneration was also shown to the spirits of the dead. These were called *manes*, meaning "the pure ones," and they were always looked upon as guardian deities of the family. These manes, or souls of the departed, were supposed to live a shadowy sort of existence in the lower world, sometimes returning to haunt the grave where they had been buried; for, unless the body were properly interred, the soul could not at once enter the realm of the lower world and find a permanent resting place, but must wander unhappily around for a hundred years, as a source of torment and of terror to the living. Hence the great importance of the proper burial rites and the great care bestowed upon these ceremonies by the Romans.

22. It was believed that the gods indicated their purposes to men by means of signs and omens, such as dreams, thunder and lightning, an eclipse of the sun, a blazing comet, the flight of birds, or the peculiar appearance of the entrails of animals offered for sacrifice. The gods were also thought to deliver special communications at sacred places known as "oracles." The most famous of these was that of Apollo at Delphi. Here stood a temple of Apollo over a cleft in the rock, and over this cleft, in the dark inner recesses of the temple, was placed a tripod containing a seat for the priestess or Pythia, who delivered the oracles. Other famous oracles were those at Delos, at Cumae, and in the Libyan desert.

23. The old Roman religion was of an intensely practical nature and busied itself with the everyday life of the people. As each household was bound together by the tie of a common worship, so all the citizens were held together by a common reverence for the divinities and powers who protected and guided the state. The Roman religion thus formed an indispensable bond of union for the family as well as the nation.

#### 24. Chronological Table of Vergil's Life

- B.C.
- 70 Birth of Vergil. First consulship of Pompey and Crassus.
  - Trial of Verres.
  - Birth of Gallus.
  - 65 Birth of Horace.
  - 63 Birth of Octavian (afterward called Octavian, and still later called Augustus Caesar). Consulship of Cicero. Catiline's conspiracy. Annexation of Syria.
  - 60 First Triumvirate of Pompey, Caesar, and Crassus.
  - 59 Consulship of Caesar.

- 58 Cicero exiled. Caesar begins conquest of Gaul. Vergil is sent to school at Crenona.
- 57 Cicero recalled.
- 56 Conference of Caesar, Crassus, and Pompey at Luca, and renewal of the First Triumvirate.
- 55 Vergil assumes the toga virilis. Death of Lucretius.
- Second consulship of Pompey and Crassus. Caesar invades Britain.
- 54 Vergil attends college at Milan. Death of Catullus.
- 53 Vergil attends the university at Rome, taking special courses in philosophy and literature. The Parthians defeat and kill Crassus at Carrhae, capturing the Roman standards.
- 52 Revolt of Vercingetorix.
- Pompey sole consul. Cicero's speech *Pro Milone*.
- 51 Cicero proconsul of Cilicia.
- 49 Caesar confers Roman citizenship on the inhabitants of Gallia Transpadana.
- 49-46 Civil war between Caesar and the senatorial faction led by Pompey.
- 48 Battle of Pharsalia: Caesar defeats Pompey and the senatorial faction.
- 48-47 The Alexandrine war.
- 47 War with Pharnaces.
- 46 Battle of Thapsus.
- 45 Battle of Munda, marking the final overthrow of the senatorial faction.
- 44 Assassination of Julius Caesar.
- 44-43 War at Mutina. Cicero's *Philippics*.
- 43 Octavian consul. Second Triumvirate composed of Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus. Assassination of Cicero. Birth of Ovid. Vergil begins the composition of the *Eclogues*.
- 42 Battle of Philippi. Overthrow of Brutus and Cassius.
- 41 War at Perugia. Confiscations of the Triumvirs. Vergil's farm lost; his friendship with Maecenas.
- 40 Consulship of Asinius Pollio. Treaty of Brundisium. Octavian compensates Vergil for the loss of his farm.
- 39 Treaty of Misenum. Vergil introduces Horace to Maecenas.
- 38 Vergil and Horace accompany Maecenas to Brundisium.
- 37 Vergil publishes his *Eclogues (Bucolics)*, and begins work on his *Georgics*. Treaty of Tarentum. Second Triumvirate renewed. Phraates becomes king of Parthia.
- 36 Defeat of Sextus Pompey. Lepidus deposed as Triumvir. Parthian War.
- 33 Phraates attacks Media and Armenia.
- 31 Battle of Actium: Octavian completely overthrows Antony and Cleopatra. Octavian visits the East.
- 30 Death of Antony and Cleopatra. Annexation of Egypt. Settlement of the East by Octavian.
- 29 The *Georgics* published. The *Aeneid* begun. Octavian returns from the East and celebrates a triple triumph. The temple of Janus closed.
- 27 The titles of *Princeps* and *Augustus* conferred by the senate upon Octavian, who is henceforth known as Augustus Caesar. Death of Gallus.
- 26 Augustus in Spain. He corresponds with Vergil.
- 25 Annexation of Galatia. Propertius' *Cynthia*.
- 23 Death of Marcellus. Vergil recites portions of the *Aeneid* before Augustus and Octavia. Horace publishes the first three books of his *Odes*.
- 20 Expedition of Augustus to the East. The Parthians restore to the Romans the standards captured from Crassus at Carrhae in 58.
- 19 Vergil goes to Greece, returns with Augustus, and dies at Brundisium. Death of Tibullus. Horace publishes the first book of his *Epistles*.