ON DATING THE COPA

BY

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What has become of the former interest in this charming part of the Appendix Vergiliana with its many fascinating problems? I doubt whether it is still read by the average student of classical literature, let alone seriously studied. Von Wilamowitz tells us that he used to read the poem in his "Seminar" with a remarkable purpose: "damit die Studenten den rechten Abscheu vor der Sorte Philologie bekämen, die sich an der Appendix Vergiliana versündigt hat" (Hellenistische Dichtung, II, 1924, p. 311). It would not be elegant to suppose that this is the reason of the subsequent silence. In those years when scholars took at least a keen interest in the poem (Frank, de Witt, Drew, Rand, Vollmer, Hubaux, and many others), the debate was mostly concerned with the question of Vergilian authorship; not much attention was paid to the text and its interpretation, until the appearance of I. E. Drabkin's dissertation: The Copa, An Investigation of the Problem of Date and Authorship with Notes on Some Passages of the Poem (New York 1930), a book which contains much useful information, but is disfigured by the author's stubborn efforts to assign the poem to Vergil, and which certainly should not be the last word on the Copa. Many critical and exegetical problems are still unsolved; some editions of the App. Verg. have since been published, but they contain very little which is new or they are a mere reprint of earlier, wholly antiquated editions (like Ellis's in the Bibliotheca Oxoniensis).

In this paper I propose only to resuscitate the problem of the dating of the Copa, the direct reason for which is Büchner's recent article in Pauly-Wissowa's Realencyclopädie, s.v. Vergilius, which

1) The Graz-fragment does not clear the textual difficulties, for only the beginnings of the first 14 lines of the Copa and the final letters of the last lines have been preserved. The only gain perhaps is that the readings jumosa (l. 2), topia (7) and triclia (8) are now definitely established. Cp. J. Kraszler and E. Gaar, Anz. d. österr. Akad. d. W., phil.-hist. Klasse, 1953, p. 186-231, esp. p. 208-9.
has also appeared as a separate book: P. Vergilius Maro, Der Dichter der Römer (Stuttgart 1956), in which pp. 135-143 are devoted to the Copa ¹). That a scholar in writing articles in an encyclopedia should not be content with summing up pure facts and the various former theories, but also wants to give his own point of view, is quite natural and even commendable; that, however, he should turn out an entirely new theory with radical alterations in the text, might cause objections to be raised, especially in an encyclopedia like R.E. which enjoys a wide authority and is not likely to be revised in the next half century.

I agree with Professor Büchner that the Copa cannot be Vergil's ²); the title is not included in Donatus' list and it is therefore reasonable to suppose that the poem was inserted into the App. Verg. between Suetonius and Servius, who does mention it. Even Rostagni was convinced of this (Virgilio Minore, 1933, p. 26-7). But especially the joyous strain of the poem, the frivolous character, the jovial way of looking at life, culminating in the last lines: "Enjoy to-day, to-morrow might be too late", is quite unlike Vergil. Besides, this poem is not the work of a young poet, it shows a remarkable metrical and technical skill. And if it had been written by Vergil in his student-years, we should certainly have expected a strong influence of Catullus in language, in metrical peculiarities, in spirit, but nothing of the kind is present here. No, I think every one must feel certain now that the Copa is neither the work of the younger nor that of the later Vergil.

So we have to look for internal arguments to date the poem; it was observed long ago that many lines bear a striking resemblance to Vergil's Eclogues, others to Propertius, and that the atmosphere reminds the reader of Horace (pallida mors; carpe diem). These facts put us to the choice between these two conclusions: either the Copa is pre-Vergilian and both Vergil and Propertius knew the poem and used its expressions, or it is post-Propertian and the

¹) The work will be cited according to the pages of this separate edition.
²) He might have added to his list of Vergilian champions on p. 142 the names of Tenney Frank (Vergil, A Biography, 1922) and E. K. Rand (Young Vergil's Poetry, Harv. Stud. 1919, p. 174-8), for their influence was strong in transatlantic publications.