

READING 19-3

Source: Varro, (M.I.) *On Agriculture*. 1934. Harvard University Press, Cambridge. (W.D. Hooper, translator).

Varro

Introduction

I. Had I Possessed the leisure, Fundania, I should write in a more serviceable form what now I must set forth as I can, reflecting that I must hasten; for if man is a bubble, as the proverb has it, all the more so is an old man. For my 80th year admonishes me to gather up my pack before I set forth from life. Wherefore, since you have bought an estate and wish to make it profitable by good cultivation, and ask that I concern myself with the matter, I will make the attempt; and in such wise as to advise you with regard to the proper practice not only while I live but even after my death. And I cannot allow the Sibyl to have uttered prophecies which benefited mankind not only while she lived, but even after she had passed away, and that too people whom she never knew—for so many years later we are wont officially to consult her books when we desire to know what we should do after some portent—and not do something, even while I am alive, to help my friends and kinsfolk. Therefore I shall write for you three handbooks to which you may turn whenever you wish to know, in a given case, how, you ought to proceed in farming. And since, as we are told, the gods help those who call upon them, I will first invoke them—not the Muses, as Homer and Ennius do, but the 12 councillor-gods; and I do not mean those urban gods, whose images stand around the forum, bedecked with gold, 6 male and a like number female, but those 12 gods who are the special patrons of husbandmen. First, then, I invoke Jupiter and Tellus, who, by means of the sky and the earth, embrace all the fruits of agriculture; and hence, as we are told that they are the universal parents, Jupiter is called “the Father,” and Tellus is called “Mother Earth.” And second, Sol and Luna, whose courses are watched in all matters of planting and harvesting. Third, Ceres and Liber, because their fruits are most necessary for life; for it is by their favour that food and drink come from the farm. Fourth, Robigus and Flora; for when they are propitious the rust will not harm the grain and the trees, and they will not fail to bloom in their season; wherefore, in honour of Robigus has been established the solemn feast of the Robigalia, and in honour of Flora the games called Floralia. Like-wise I beseech Minerva and Venus, of whom the one protects the oliveyard and the other the garden; and in her honour the rustic Vinalia has been established. And I shall not fail to pray also to Lympha and Bonus Eventus, since without moisture all tilling of the ground is parched and barren, and without success and “good issue” it is not tillage but vexation. Having now duly invoked these divinities, I shall relate the conversations which we had recently about agriculture, from which you may learn what you ought to do; and if matters in which you are interested are not treated, I shall indicate the writers, both Greek and Roman, from whom you may learn them.

Those who have written various separate treatises in Greek, one on one subject, another on another, are more than 50 in number. The following are those whom you can call to your aid when you wish to consider any point: Hiero of Sicily and Attalus Philometor; of the philosophers, Democritus the naturalist, Xenophon the Socratic, Aristotle and Theophrastus the Peripatetics, Archytas the Pythagorean, and likewise Amphilocheus of Athens, Anaxipolis of Thasos, Apollodorus of Lemnos, Aristophanes of Mallos, Antigonus of Cyme, Agathocles of Chios, Apollonius of Pergamum, Aristandrus of Athens, Bacchius of Miletus, Bion of Soli, Chaerestus and Chaereas of Athens, Diodorus of Priene, Dion of Colophon, Diophanes of Nicaea, Epigenes of Rhodes, Euagon of Thasos, the two Euphronii, one of Athens and the other of Amphipolis, Hegesias of Maronea, the two Menanders, one of Priene and the other of Heraclea, Nicesius of Maronea, and Pythion of Rhodes. Among other writers, whose birthplace I have not learned, are: Androtion, Aeschryon, Aristomenes, Athenagoras, Crates, Dadis, Dionysius, Euphiton, Euphorion, Eubulus, Lysimachus, Mnaseas, Menestratus, Plentiphanes, Persis, Theophilus. All these whom I have named are prose writers; others have treated the same subjects in verse, as Hesiod of Ascra and Menecrates of Ephesus. All these are surpassed

in reputation by Mago of Carthage, who gathered into twenty-eight books, written in the Punic tongue, the subjects they had dealt with separately. These Cassius Dionysius of Utica translated into Greek and published in twenty books, dedicated to the praetor Sextilius. In these volumes he added not a little from the Greek writers whom I have named, taking from Mago's writings an amount equivalent to eight books. Diophanes, in Bithynia, further abridged these in convenient form into six books, dedicated to king Deiotarus. I shall attempt to be even briefer and treat the subject in three books, one on agriculture proper, the second on animal husbandry, the third on the husbandry of the steading, omitting in this book all subjects which I do not think have a bearing on agriculture. And so, after first showing what matter should be omitted, I shall treat of the subject, following the natural divisions. My remarks will be derived from 3 sources: what I have myself observed by practice on my own land, what I have read, and what I have heard from experts.

On Grafting

You cannot, for instance, graft a pear on an oak, even though you can on an apple. This is a matter of importance to many people who pay considerable attention to soothsayers; for these have a saying that when a tree has been grafted with several varieties, the one that attracts the lightning turns into as many bolts as there are varieties, though the stroke is a single one. No matter how good the pear shoot which you graft on a wild pear, the fruit will not be as well flavoured as if you graft it on a cultivated pear. It is a general rule in grafting, if the shoot and the tree are of the same species, as, for instance, if both are of the apple family, that for the effect on the fruit the grafting should be of such a nature that the shoot is of a better type than the tree on which it is grafted. There is a second method of grafting from tree to tree which has recently been developed, under conditions where the trees stand close to each other, From the tree from which you wish to take the shoot a small branch is run to the tree on which you wish to graft and is inserted in a branch of the latter which has been cut off and split; the part which fits into the branch having first been sharpened on both sides with the knife so that on one side the part which will be exposed to the weather will have bark fitted accurately to bark. Care is taken to have the tip of the grafted shoot point straight up. The next year, after it has taken firm hold, it is cut off the parent stem.

Information of fruit storage

LXI. "Experienced farmers store their amurca in jars, just as they do oil and wine. The method of preserving is: as soon as it flows out from the press, two-thirds of it is boiled away, and when it is cool it is stored in vessels. There are also other methods, such as that in which must is added.