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Virgilian Imagery and Meaning on a Carolingian Flabellum: Contradiction or Continuity?

CAROL LONG
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The fan, according to Virgil and Apuleius, was sacred to Bacchus and the “mystica Vannus Iacchi” was carried in procession in the feast of that deity, as well as in the Eleusinian Mysteries...In the works of the middle ages references are made to the two forms of the fan, to that employed for winnowing grain, and that used in the service of the Church.²

A singular treasure, the Flabellum of Tournus (Fig. 1), is housed in the National Museum of the Bargello in Florence; a liturgical fan, it is one of the most extraordinary artifacts that exists from the Carolingian renaissance. It was used to fan flies and insects away from the altar during the Holy Sacrifice so that the Eucharistic species would remain undefiled. The fan exhibits delicate craftsmanship and intricate reliefs which include ivory vignettes of Virgil’s bucolic poetry, the Eclogues. The work, indeed its very

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¹ I wish to thank Joseph Alchermes, for introducing me to the Flabellum of Tournus many years ago, which caused me to never stop wondering about its mysteries and to thank Sarah Blick for her generous encouragement and assistance.

² Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, 1851, Reports by Juries (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1851), 666.
existence, is exceptional considering the disappointing
dearth of Virgilian imagery extant from the 9th
century. What justifies the pagan scenes present on
this instrument employed at the altar of God? After
more than a millennium, the flabellum remains an
enigma. This study seeks to explain the message of the
Eclogue illustrations through their relationship to the
fan’s purpose.

An eloquent exegeses on the flabellum is

Herbert Kessler’s analysis of the fan’s function of creating breezes, in light of scripture,

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late-antique and medieval texts, and the object’s vellum membrane with its detailed illumination and inscriptions. Persuaded of the link between purpose and iconography, I propose that the artistic program of the ivory miniatures was engendered by the flabellum’s exceptional charge of shielding the Eucharist. The Eclogue scenes extol Virgil’s illusory pre-Christian consciousness of salvation history, perpetuated through the Mass, in which the fan participates. The poems that are depicted evince a sense of longing for the ‘Good’ that is a lost or awaited ideal. In a liturgical context, the scenes represent an allegory of humanity’s awaiting the coming of the Savior and portend the Christian story of redemption. The images culminate with the Fourth Eclogue, which prophesies a new Golden Age. It is an awaited era of peace which the Carolingians would read as an allegory of the reign of Augustus, the Pax Augusta, during which “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14).

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5 David Thompson, “Allegory and Typology in the ‘Aeneid.’” Arethusa 3, no. 2 (1970), 152. “Although there is no way to prove that Virgil had any knowledge of, or was influenced by, Jewish typology, he clearly had a similar teleological view of history as meaningful pattern.”


7 Syrithe Pugh, Spenser and Virgil: The Pastoral Poems (Manchester, 2016), 72-73. “…Eclogue 4 can still, in almost Servian terms, redound to the credit of Augustus, since the coming of Christ occurred under his reign…”
Because Golden Age allegory involves parallels in Virgil’s wider oeuvre, a Golden Age “value” emerges and further reveals the prophetic significance of the carvings. It is the mystica uannus Iacchi, a winnowing fan that cleanses grain, carried in rites of Bacchus. The mystica uannus Iacchi is lauded in Virgil’s First Georgic (1.166) and is implicit in Eclogue 5, portrayed on the flabellum. While the uannus was a winnower, it was also a fan that creates breezes. This cleansing implement belonged to the worship of the pagan deities of wheat and wine, prefiguring the flabellum’s role of preserving the purity of the bread and wine offered for consecration during the Mass. The fan’s highest purpose is unveiled in scripture. The Gospels of Matthew (3:12) and Luke (3:17) proclaim that the fan will separate the wheat from the chaff, but in the prophecy of Isaiah (30:23-26), the fan will perform its purifying function in the renewed heaven and earth to come. Scholarship maintains Virgil’s probable familiarity with

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9 Eclogue 5.30: the sacred “dances of Bacchus” in which the mystica uannus Iacchi was carried; Jane Harrison, “Mystica Vannus Iacchi,” Journal of Hellenic Studies 23 (1903), 293. https://www.samorini.it/doc1/alt_aut/ek/harrison.pdf

10 Ibid.

Jewish scripture, particularly the Book of Isaiah. The Carolingians would duly apprehend that Isaiah’s winnowing fan presages the ‘mystic fan’ sacred to Bacchus, and moreover, that Isaiah’s prophecy of a new heaven and earth may have nourished Virgil’s Golden Age allegory of the Fourth Eclogue. Through the allegorical and prophetic tenor in Virgil’s poetry that concerns the values of the Golden Age and describes scripture, the mystica uannus lacchi emerges as the fulcrum which reconciles the medieval conundrum of Virgil’s spirited bucolic mythos gracing a rare liturgical fan.

Provenance, Iconography and the Carolingian Scriptorium

The captivating story of the flabellum involves the riddle of its provenance and its possible influence on the work’s iconographic scheme. The fan came into possession of the Benedictine monks of St. Philibert during the community’s long period of migration across the Frankish realms to escape the Viking raids. In 834, the monks vacated the monastery founded by St. Philibert in 654 on the island of Noirmoutier, off the coast of Aquitaine, and relocated to Grandlieu on the mainland. As Norman pirates continued to encroach further inland the monks fled thrice more, to Cunault (846),

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Messay (862), and Saint-Pourcain (871), until they arrived at their final foundation at Tournus in Burgundy, around 875. The Philibertines were guardians of the fan until 1793, when during the French Revolution, the abbey church was secularized.¹³ Lorenz Eitner, in his definitive monograph *The Flabellum of Tournus*, proposes that the fan originated at the great monastic center of Corbie (or Saint-Denis) and reached the monks at Grandlieu around 836-40.¹⁴ By about 820, the Philibertines developed close ties to Corbie through the friendship of its abbot, Adalhard, who was responsible for establishing their earliest scriptorium at Noirmoutier, thus bringing the cultural influence of Corbie to the provincial monastery. The subsequent years of instability would not have allowed circumstances for the fan’s manufacture within the community. By 840, the monks completed enlargement of the apse of the pre-existing church at Grandlieu with the innovative design employed at Saint-Denis in 832 by Abbot Hilduin, although by 838 the Philibertines were already hoping to obtain a safer

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¹³ After the French Revolution the fan was purchased by Jean-Baptiste Carrand, whose son Louis brought it to Florence, and in 1888 bequeathed it to the Bargello.

¹⁴ See Lorenz E.A. Eitner, *The Flabellum of Tournus* (New York: College Art Association, 1944), 10; 8-13; 26-27. The wealth of the Philbertine community after transferring to Grandlieu, c. 834 would have enabled it to obtain the flabellum some time before 840. The temporary of exile of Adalhard at Noirmoutier and the community’s close friendship with the Abbot may indicate the flabellum’s origin from Corbie; the school of Corbie was associated with the abbey of Saint-Denis; Massimo Bernabo, “Virgil Illustrated in Gaul.” *Bizantinistica Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi*, ser. 2 no.16 (2014-15), 249, Centro Italiano di Studi sull’alto Medioevo. Spoleto. [https://www.academia.edu/26634608/M](https://www.academia.edu/26634608/M) It is possible that the flabellum originated at Saint-Denis.
haven through Hilduin’s intercession to Emperor Louis the Pious.\textsuperscript{15} The community’s link to both Hilduin of Saint-Denis and the royal court may indicate that the flabellum was a gift from either, befitting the renewed church.

This possibility, though, fails to resolve a puzzling question raised by the inscription on the handle, of IOHEL, a name which may or may not be a pseudonym for Geilo, perhaps the fan’s donor (or maker).\textsuperscript{16} Danielle Gaborit-Chopin argues that the flabellum was presented by a nobleman Geilo, who in 868, left the court of Louis II, King of Aquitaine and joined the community at Messay.\textsuperscript{17} Isabelle Cartron theorizes that the Eclogue images refer to the community’s exile and search for an âge d’or retrouvé (the community’s final settlement at Tournus in 875)\textsuperscript{18} and indicate the flabellum’s manufacture at around that time.

The possible scenarios relating to the fan’s origin unfold during the conflicts which arose among Charlemagne’s heirs following his death in 814 and lasting until the

\textsuperscript{15} Colum Hourihane, ed. Grove Encyclopedia of Art and Architecture, Vol. 2, (Oxford University Press, 2012), 232; See Eitner, Flabellum, 11, on the monk Ermentarius’ Miracula sancti Filiberti (c. 837-38) dedicated to Hilduin of Saint-Denis. It recounts the miracles worked through the relics of St. Philibert during the monks’ migration.

\textsuperscript{16} Eitner, Flabellum, 2. The inscription reads IOHEL ME SCAE FECIT IN HONORE MARIAE

\textsuperscript{17} Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, Flabellum (Firenze: Museo Nazionale del Bargello, 1988), 55.

\textsuperscript{18} Isabelle Cartron, “Le flabellum liturgique carolingien de Saint-Philibert: du don d’unsouffle à la geste des moines” Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire, Histoire médiévale moderne et contemporaine 88, 2 (2010), 166. \url{http://www.persee.fr/doc/rbph_0035-0818_2010_num_88_2_7921}. “Indeed, Virgil’s poem evokes exile, the pain that it arouses…and ends with the announcement of a Golden Age found. We find themes dear to the monastic milieu, such as pilgrimage.” This, and further translations are my own.
death of Charles the Bald in 877, which wearied the cultural renewal. The flabellum’s artistic testimony to the vestiges of the Carolingian will to “reclaim the heritage of Rome, ‘Rome’ meaning Julius Caesar and Augustus as well as Constantine the Great”\(^{19}\) could support royal provenance from the schools at Aachen or Saint-Denis around 840 (for Grandlieu), or the palace school of Charles the Bald at Saint-Denis in the 860s (for Messay). Its iconography, informed by a sense of longing for the Augustan Golden Age, may evidence a zeitgeist of the ebbing renascence, as the elite watched the demise of Charlemagne’s cultural reawakening.\(^{20}\) If the flabellum was manufactured in the 860s, or 875 for the community’s arrival at Tournus, its unity of liturgical function (preserving Christ’s body and blood in the Eucharist) and iconography (pagan prefiguration in salvation history) might allude to the mid-9th century theological debates on transubstantiation of the Eucharist and predestination that were both resolved by 860.\(^{21}\)

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\(^{19}\) Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 44.

\(^{20}\) Johannes Fried, *Charlemagne* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 339. Charlemagne’s imperial seal had “proclaimed *Renovatio imperii Romanorum*;” Florus of Lyon, c. 845: “Lament on the Division of the Empire” in Peter Godman, ed. *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 51. “But now that pinnacle of power, fallen from its great heights, like a garland of flowers cast down from the head, once splendid with the different scents of sweet smelling herbs, is trodden underfoot by all, stripped of its crown. It has lost both the name and the distinction of empire…” See also Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, 52-53. The waning of the *renovatio* led to a general cultural decline until “the Carolingian revival, virtually ended” following the death of Charles the Bald in 877.

The transition from Virgil’s bucolic verses scripted in an antique manuscript to their carved representation on a Christian flabellum must be considered from the vantage point of the Carolingian monastery school and scriptorium. The flabellum was created in an ivory-carving workshop, but these workshops were associated with scriptoria and libraries\(^2^2\) and were beneficiaries of the requisite familiarity with Virgil’s work that existed in the scriptoria. In the learned milieu that preserved the intellectual deposit of Graeco-Roman culture, Virgil’s oeuvre was carefully studied. It was imperative for masters and students of Virgil to understand the entire substance of the works they studied, including “Roman grammar, vocabulary… Roman institutions, places, ideas.”\(^2^3\) Indeed, Alcuin (735-804), whose genius animated Charlemagne’s educational project, wrote pastoral poetry illuminated by Virgil’s verse.\(^2^4\) Carolingian scholars’ affinity for Virgil was achieved largely through the study of commentaries, the *Vitae Vergilianae*, which were readily accessible.\(^2^5\) Monastic education required


\(^2^5\) Jan M. Ziolkowski, Michael C. Putnam, eds. *The Virgilian Tradition: The First Fifteen Hundred Years* (New Haven, 2008), 179-403. This includes a complete presentation of the Virgilian *Vitae*. 
cognizance of the allegorical meanings that underlie Virgil’s writing, for which the Vitae of Donatus and Servius were compulsory. This is the tutelage that guided the flabellum’s Virgilian program.

The flabellum’s elaborate workmanship far exceeds that of any extant medieval fan. It is made of a slender bone handle about two feet in length, from which extends a narrow rectangular wooden casing box (etui), to which is attached a pleated fan made of vellum (Fig. 2). When opened, the vellum is round and richly illuminated. Its colorful design is ordered of concentric registers of varying widths. A variegated inhabited acanthus rinceaux occupies the wide outer register. In Christian iconography, the acanthus vine often represents life and rebirth, but also the biblical tree of life, a prefiguring type for the Holy Eucharist: “To him that overcometh, I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of my God” (Apoc. 2:7). Whimsical trees, animals and small figures coexist with the predominant saints of the vellum’s middle range; in the narrow band above, dedicatory lettering identifies the various saints,

26 Contreni, “Getting to know Virgil in the Carolingian Age,” 26-29. Donatus, fl. mid-4th century, was a teacher of rhetoric and tutor of St. Jerome; Servius, fl. late 4th century, was a learned grammarian.

27 See Joyner, The Virgilian Tradition, 436.

Figure 2  Flabellum of Tournus, vellum membrane, detail. Photo: Permission via email to use image: https://schola-saint-cecile.com
whereas underneath, the fan’s breezes are praised. On the recto side, the largest and most prominent figure is the Hodegetria, the Virgin Mary holding the Christ child, to whom she points, showing that he is the way of salvation. Mary is flanked on either side by early martyrs whose names are identified and belong to the Roman canon in use since the eighth century.\(^{29}\) The verso side identifies saints who are venerated locally. The relics of St. Valerian were venerated at Tournus, but Valerian does not appear on the vellum, meaning that the fan probably predates 875.\(^{30}\)

The handle displays delicately modeled relief of a meandering vine whose fruit is being enjoyed by birds and other creatures. It is divided into three sections by four green bosses; attached to the upper boss is a fanciful ‘capital,’ embellished with carved vegetation and figures of Saints Mary, Peter, Paul, and Philibert. The capital supports the etui that is covered with diminutive and splendidly carved ivory plaques. The etui’s oblong lateral panels display sumptuous acanthus and vine scrolls populated with charming divinities and comely animals, to exemplify \textit{horror vacui} par excellence.\(^{31}\) The ornamentation complements the images derived from Virgil’s \textit{Eclogues} that cover the top and bottom panels of the etui in a virtuoso display of expressive figures, whimsical

\(^{29}\) Eitner, \textit{Flabellum}, 7. See pages 2 - 8 for a detailed discussion of the illuminated vellum.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{31}\) Kessler, “Borne on a Breeze,” 5-6. The inhabited scrolls symbolize “the idea of pagan rites yielding to Christ’s eternal offering in the Eucharist...”
animals and enlivening vegetation (Fig. 3). Each panel is made up of three arresting scenes from the Eclogues, evoking moods from frolicsome to plaintive. Of the six plaques, five are winsome carvings of animated shepherds and companion beasts set among lush foliage. The sixth plaque is puzzling because it portrays a bearded *togatus* seated on an architectural throne.

**Figure 3** Flabellum of Tournus, etui lid and bottom panels, detail. Photo: Permission via email to use image: [https://schola-saint-cecile.com](https://schola-saint-cecile.com)
surrounded by five figures. It appears to be ceremonial and is similar to the honorary plaques made for consuls and other Roman officials in the 5th century.  

It is untenable to attribute the flabellum’s provenance to a specific Carolingian workshop. Lorenz Eitner acknowledges “it is very difficult to find any convincing Carolingian parallels to the decorative style of these carvings.”

Gaborit-Chopin states that the ivories possess the fullness of “carattere anticheggiante.” The antecedent to the Virgilian images is one of the most prized late Roman manuscripts copied by the Carolingians, the 5th century illustrated codex *Vergilius Romanus*, that contained Virgil’s *Eclogues, Georgics*, and the *Aeneid*. The *Vergilius Romanus* was housed at Saint-Denis, with which the school of Corbie was closely associated. The *Eclogue* plaques were inspired by the carefully studied poetry of the codex rather than its illustrations that are characterized by simplified, flat, linear forms (*Fig. 4*). The ivory carvings of human

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32 Eitner, *Flabellum*, 22. In addition to the official himself, consular diptychs often included secretaries, notaries, allegorical figures, petitioners.


34 Gaborit-Chopin, *Flabellum*, 34. “ancient character”


36 Bernabo, Ibid. The *Vergilius Romanus* was housed at Saint-Denis during the Carolingian period.
figures amidst flora and fauna capture a sense of three-dimensionality and movement reminiscent of some late Imperial and Early Christian reliefs, while the facile workmanship recalls the impressionistic quality of Augustan Age frescoes.

**Prophecy and the Eclogue Plaques**

The Roman residuum of the flabellum fascinates the imagination, although Erwin Panofsky appears not to consider the work’s pagan imagery an anomaly as he reasons:
And it is characteristic of the Carolingian *renovatio* that these classical “images,” including the dramatis personae of the pastoral and the divinities of the pagan pantheon, were given liberty to escape from their original context without abandoning their original nature. In at least one case - and there may have been many more – a Carolingian *ivoirier* decorated the case and the handle of a flabellum...with scenes from Virgil’s *Eclogues* hardly susceptible to an *interpretatio christiana*.37

Panofsky’s observations raise questions; indeed, the pretext for the *Eclogue* scenes which adorn the piece continues to be debated. According to Danielle Joyner, the flabellum’s pastoral imagery was motivated by “prophecy and inspiration;” she posits that the “inspiration of divine prophecy becomes the heavenly winds that indicate a divine presence over the altar during Mass.”38

I submit that the prophesying interpretations arrived at by the Carolingian elite who studied Virgil’s life and works were inspired by allegories attested to in the *Vitae Vergilianae* which exalt Octavian. The *Eclogues* (c. 42-39 BC) were written against the backdrop of civil wars and political uncertainty that befell Rome during the years leading up to and following the assassination of Julius Caesar. Roman listeners would glean a sense of yearning from their shepherd protagonists who were unhappy in love or dispossessed of land, due to “the harsh realities of contemporary politics; in

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37 Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, 50-51. Examples of classical images are found in Carolingian book illuminations, for example, Virtues and Vices in the guise of Venus, Jest and Cupid in Prudentius’ *Psychomachia* and Saturn and Mars in a Carolingian copy of *Chronograph* of 354.

38 Joyner, in *The Virgilian Tradition*, 438.
particular...the policy of land confiscations... operating intermittently ever since Philippi and continued after Actium.”³⁹ Virgil suffered the loss of his own estate, though eventually granted back to him by Octavian through the intercession of influential friends, Pollio, Varus, and Gallus.⁴⁰ According to Raymond Starr, “Servius explicitly identifies the loss and recovery of the farm as the causa of the Eclogues.”⁴¹ Throughout the poems, allegorical praise of Augustus “and other nobles through whose favor [Virgil] recovered the farm he had lost”⁴² coalesces with the values associated with the paradisaical Golden Age. This notion of a long-awaited Good restored is echoed in the Fourth Eclogue which envisions “a universal regeneration and proposition that the Golden Age, traditionally located in a lost and irrecoverable order of time past, will return.”⁴³ It is customarily accepted that Virgil’s Golden Age of Eclogue 4 was


⁴⁰ Vita Seutonii vulgo Donatiana in The Virgilian Tradition, 197.


⁴² Ibid.

personified by Octavian/Augustus and was a keenly anticipated political Good.\textsuperscript{44} Carolingian scholars knew the Golden Age connotations of the imperial reign of Augustus beginning in 27 BC; at Charlemagne’s court “the name for Charlemagne [Augustus] was not only a title, but a name, remembering the first emperor.”\textsuperscript{45} In the Golden Age allegory of the Fourth Eclogue, the Carolingians would read praise of Octavian/Augustus, through whom was revealed the destiny of Rome at an established moment in time. The Pax Augusta throughout the Roman world allowed for the awaited messiah to be born in Bethlehem, city of David, according to the prophet Micah.\textsuperscript{46}


\textsuperscript{45} Jurgen Strothman, “Augustus and the Carolingians” in Penelope J. Goodman ed, \textit{Afterlives of Augustus, AD 14-2014} (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 145. A citation in a Carolingian poem on the Fourth Eclogue associates Charlemagne himself with “golden kingdoms’… [and] may be a remembrance of the secular games of 17 BC...perhaps even in the knowledge of Virgil’s description of Augustus [\textit{Aen.} 6.792] as…Augustus Caesar…who will found a Golden Age.”

\textsuperscript{46} Micheas 5:2-3 (DV): And Thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda: out of Thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel: and his going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity. Therefore will he give them up even till the time wherein she that travaileth shall bring forth: and the remnant of his brethren shall be converted to the children of Israel.
Herbert Kessler regards the flabellum’s function and bucolic spirit in terms of prophecy. Kessler describes a lyrical inscription on the vellum fan which begins “Receive kindly pure heavenly sovereign the gift of a breeze from a pure heart”\textsuperscript{47} where he notes the heavenly reality of wind found in the writings of Old Testament prophets Hosea and Jeremiah.\textsuperscript{48} It is prescient that while the fan was opened and creating breeze during the Mass, the Eclogue scenes on the etui were invisible, being superseded by the communion of saints illuminated on the vellum.\textsuperscript{49} This conceit interests Kessler, though he finds no “particularly persuasive” arguments for the presence of the Virgilian subjects on the flabellum, proposing that these “seem to have been chosen to assert a fundamental bucolic aura.”\textsuperscript{50} Still, an intentional motive for the flabellum’s pastoral subject matter is affirmed by Jean Leclercq. It is the medieval Christian’s optimism

\textsuperscript{47} Kessler, “Borne on a Breeze,” 3.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 10. “The rustic pagan world cedes to that of the true Pastor, Christ and, in turn, his shepherds, the priests, in a move inspired perhaps by biblical passages that invest sacrificial animals and their protectors with references to winds notably Hosea 4.19…and Jeremiah 22.22…”

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.,” 10. “Whatever motivation determined the choice of the Virgilian episodes, when the fan was deployed, the plaques were swung around and clapped against one another causing the bucolica to vanish from view. Only when the vellum was folded and stored inside the etui, were the pagan images fully visible.”

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 9-10.
towards the true, good and beautiful found in pagan literature - which resulted in the prevailing allegorical method of interpreting the classics.\textsuperscript{51}

Joyner theorizes “the flabellum emphasizes the traditional interpretation of \textit{Eclogues} 4 as a prophecy of Christ.”\textsuperscript{52} This is problematic because, evidently, the Carolingians were not committed to a messianic interpretation of the allegorical Fourth \textit{Eclogue}.\textsuperscript{53} Instead, they would recognize that the prophesied new millennium of \textit{Eclogue} 4 refers to the “longed for \textit{era of peace} [emphasis added] to be ushered in with the birth of a boy.”\textsuperscript{54} The boy may be a future ruler, Octavian’s heir, though not necessarily his son.\textsuperscript{55} The Scholia Bernensia (c. 850) deemed Augustus himself as the child of prophecy.”\textsuperscript{56} The identity of the boy whose birth is foretold in the Fourth \textit{Eclogue}


\textsuperscript{53} Anabel Patterson, \textit{Pastoral and Ideology, Virgil to Valery} (Berkeley, 1987), 24-25. On the Carolingian understanding of the Fourth \textit{Eclogue} based on Servius: “The commentary of Servius is utterly distinct in content and method from any subsequent allegorizing connected with Christianity, whether it be, to speak only of Virgilian interpretation, the prophetic readings of the ‘messianic’ eclogue by the Church Fathers.”


\textsuperscript{55} Pulbrook, “Virgil’s Fourth ‘Eclogue’ and the Rebirth of Rome,” 36.

remains unknown but the Carolingians would identify the era of peace as the Pax Augusta. It is a verdict that arises from the allegorical veneration of Octavian explained in the *Vitae Vergiliane* and voiced in the *Eclogues* appraised below.  

Christine Perkell has observed that the speakers in *Eclogues* 1, 2 and 10, the same *Eclogues* that appear on the etui lid (Fig. 5), express despondency over the unattainable.  

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57 Eitner, *Flabellum*, 17-21. The scenes are identified by Eitner after Goldschmidt.  

Carolingian student of Virgil, the mood is tempered by allegory that alludes to hope through Octavian. Reading the images from top to bottom, the uppermost plaque depicts the shepherds Tityrus and Meliboeus of the First Eclogue. From Seutonius, the Carolingians learned that Tityrus appears within the opening verse because he represents Virgil himself. Immediately, the poem’s sense of longing beckons our attention as Meliboeus laments that he is expelled from his farm.

You, Tityrus, lie under the canopy of a spreading beech, wooing the woodland Muse on slender reed, but we are leaving our country’s bounds and sweet fields. We are outcasts from our country...

_Ecl. 1.1-4_

As the Eclogue unfolds, Tityrus proclaims that he has been to Rome and was granted freedom by a god: O Melibeous, it is a god who gave us this peace (Ecl. 1.6). Octavian is the “god” - so named by Virgil as an honorific gesture for the return of the property his family had lost. It is an example of the poet’s piety, a virtue that nourishes the ‘optimism’ towards the classical literature described by Leclercq, seized

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59 _Vita Suetonii vulgo Donatiana_ in _The Virgilian Tradition_, 195.


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on by Radbertus of Corbie in his commentary on Psalm 44 (c. 850). The saintly abbot reminds the nuns at Soissons that “God has made this leisure for us,” speaking through Virgil’s words of gratitude: *Deus nobis haec otia fecit* (Ecl. 1.6). The carving illustrates Meliboeus holding his goat by the horns as he tells Tityrus of his latest misfortune forewarned to him by means of an old oak tree struck by lightning. Two crows appear on the plaque; to the shepherds’ left, one rests on a stricken oak, with wings slightly raised, as if cawing. Summoning Servius, Isabelle Cartron observes that the poem refers to Virgil’s banishment from his own land and compares the theme of banishment to the Philibertines’ years of wandering before 875. Yet, because the monks arguably possessed the fan before arriving at Tournus, it is unlikely that the community’s exile is the stimulus for the flabellum’s bucolic imagery. We look to other possibilities - and all roads lead to Rome, and Octavian. Chester Starr elucidates “of the ten *Eclogues* only the first refers to Octavian, and that indirectly; but Octavian is unmistakably the ‘praesens


63 Horace Andrews, *Virgil’s Eclogues and Georgics with Notes.* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1866), 109. [https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=loc.ark:/13960/t45q67f15&view=1up;seq=14](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=loc.ark:/13960/t45q67f15&view=1up;seq=14) According to Pomponius, the striking of [the oak] trees by lightning was an omen of banishment; See Geymonat, *Bucoliche*, 120. The Latins considered crows to be a bad omen.

64 Cartron, “Le Flabellum Liturgique carolingien de Saint-Philibert,” 166. “Virgil’s biographers have drawn parallels between the ev ocation of exile in the First Eclogue and the confiscation of the author’s fields around 40 BC; “Vita Servi in The Virgilian Tradition, 205; *Vita Philargyrii II* in The Virgilian Tradition, 224-225.
deus’ who deserves sacrifice for his benefactions.” Nonetheless, for the Carolingians who studied closely the Virgilian Vitae of Servius et al, the commentaries reveal allegorical preeminence of Octavian/Augustus in other Eclogues.

The next scene represents Eclogue 10 and alludes to Octavian’s beneficence. Virgil pays homage to the poet Cornelius Gallus, his friend and intercessor before Octavian in the quest to regain his land. The illustration depicts the satyr Pan and shepherd-poet Gallus, who in angst, laments the loss of his beloved Lycoris. The themes of unrequited love in Eclogue 10, and banishment in Eclogue 1 converge as Meliboeus and Gallus both mourn the loss of a ‘Good.’ As Virgil honors Gallus by immortalizing his name in the poem, Eclogue 10 obliquely echoes the approbation of the “god” Octavian in Eclogue 1.

A longing for the unattainable reverberates through the Second Eclogue, depicted on the third ivory plaque. The solitary and lovesick shepherd Corydon sits under a tree with his cows and pines for Alexis.

The grim lioness follows the wolf,
the wolf himself the goat,
the wanton goat the flowering clover,
and Corydon follows you, Alexis. Each is led by his liking.
See, the bullocks drag home by the yoke the hanging plough,

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24
and the retiring sun doubles the lengthening shadows.

_Ecl. 2.63-67_

On the authority of Servius, the Carolingians interpreted Corydon’s desperate entreaties to Alexis as a reflection of Virgil’s disappointed first appeal to Octavian for the return of his land.⁶⁷ As melancholy permeates the pastoral mood of _Eclogue 2_, the imagery of the plough dragged home by the yoke implies that man must labor for his existence and presupposes a longed-for Golden Age when men lived in harmony with nature and did not have to toil for their daily bread. The notion of redemption in conjunction with Octavian continues in the three illustrations of the etui bottom panel (Fig. 6). Continuing to the lower plaque,

**Figure 6** _Flabellum of Tournus_, etui bottom panel, detail. Photo: Permission via email to use image: https://schola-saint-cecile.com

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the subject is an amiable musical rivalry between shepherds, punctuated by poetic reminiscence of pastoral life, arguably Eclogue 7. Eitner suggests that the presence of sheep and youthful appearance of the figures favor Eclogue 3, but notes the similar compositional arrangement to the Vergilius Romanus illustration of Eclogue 7 (Fig. 4).68 I propose a determinate: in the poem, the musical contest is sung, but the carved figures play pipes and wear Phrygian hats! The Phrygian hats and pipes may underline the notion of musical prowess if we consider that “the earliest Greek music, especially that of the flute, was borrowed in part...from Phrygia.69 The poem hails Corydon and Thrysis as “Arcades” (Ecl. 7.4), a term which celebrates their musical abilities.70 We resume in favor of Eclogue 7. Daphnis has called after Meliboeus (the central figure) to judge a singing contest between the two Arcadians. The adroit shepherds recite reciprocally, bound by delight in sparring around the countryside in bloom and the country laid to waste. Thyrsis mourns the desolate hills that Bacchus’ vines no longer shelter:

The field is parched; the grass is athirst, dying in the tainted air;


Bacchus has grudged the hills the shade of his vines:
but at the coming of my Phyllis all the woodland will be green,
and Jupiter, in his fullness, shall descend in gladsome showers.

_Ecl. 7.57-60_

The Carolingians would read in the commentary of Philargyrius that the stanza is an allegory of the state of abandon of the Mantuan fields after the old landowners had been sent away; Phyllis alludes to Octavian, who rejuvenated the lands. The four Eclogue plaques examined thus far contain allegories of redeeming the land identified with Octavian. The penultimate plaque depicts _Eclogue 5_. The shepherds Menalcus and Mopsus mourn their dead friend, the shepherd poet Daphnis, who appeared in _Eclogue 7_. Servius claims that the death of Daphnis (_Ecl. 5.20_), symbolizes the death of Caesar. The death of Daphnis carries salvific allegorical meaning: because the death of Caesar ushered the rise of Octavian “Daphnis dies as Julius Caesar but is reborn as Octavian to become Caesar Augustus.”

...kindly Daphnis loves peace.

71 “Vita Philargyrii I” in _The Virgilian Tradition_, 217; “Vita Philargyrii II” in _The Virgilian Tradition_, 224; Starr, “Virgil’s Seventh Eclogue and its Readers” 131. “…the Bern Scholia see an allusion to bleakness caused by the land confiscations, a bleakness that would be reversed by Octavian (SB ad. 7:57).”

72 Owen Lee, _Death and Rebirth in Virgil’s Arcadia_ (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 56. Lee points out that the shepherd Daphnis in _Eclogue 7_ “presiding under the ilex tree…[is] the Daphnis whose death was sung” in _Eclogue 5_.

73 Servius, “Ecloga Quinta” in _Vergilii carmina comentarii_. (Ecl. 5.20-23). According to Servius, the eclogue refers to the slaying of Caesar by members of the Senate.

74 Lee, _Death and Rebirth in Virgil’s Arcadia_, 110.
The very mountains, with woods unshorn,
joyously fling their voices starward; the very rocks,
the very groves ring out the song: ‘A god is he, a god, Menalcas!’

_Ecl._ 5.61-64

Menalcus cries out that Daphnis (the god Caesar/Octavian) will be honored each year, just as Bacchus and Ceres are: “As to Bacchus and Ceres, so to you, year after year, shall the husbandman pay their vows; you too, shall hold them to their vows” (_Ecl._ 5.79-80). In Italy, Bacchus, or Iacchi, the god of fertility and wine was also known as Liber.

In a panegyric to Daphnis/Caesar, Mopsus extolls the festival of Liberalia.

_Daphnis it was that taught men to yoke Armenian tigers beneath the car,
to lead on the dances of Bacchus
and entwine in soft leaves the tough spears._

_Ecl._ 5.29-31

The Carolingians believed that Julius Caesar had introduced the Liberalia to Rome. The Bacchic celebration included carrying the purifying _mystica uannus Iacchi_ laden with fruit offerings to be consecrated to Liber, as seen in ‘dances of Bacchus’ (_Ecl._ 5.30), frequently depicted on Imperial period sarcophagi (Fig. 7). The _mystica uannus_

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75 Servius, “Ecloga Quinta” in _Vergilii carmina comentarii._ (Ecl. 5.29-31). According to Servius, Julius Caesar first transferred the rites of Father Liber to Rome.

76 A child’s sarcophagus includes a scene of a Bacchic procession celebrating the birth of Dionysos/Bacchus and the carrying of fruit offerings in a _mystica uannus._ (c. 150-160), Walters Museum, Baltimore. See Harrison, “Mystica Vannus Iacchi,” 296-302. An explanation of the prefiguring Greek _liknon_ and the Latin _uannus_ used as a basket for fruit in Dionysian rituals.
Figure 7 Child’s Sarcophagus with the Birth of Dionysos and Dionysian Scenes, c. 150-160, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Photo: https://art.thewalters.org/detail/16574/sarcophagus-depicting-the-birth-of-dionysus/

foreshadows the flabellum’s role to preserve the purity of the gifts offered for consecration during the Christian mysteries and affirms the Christian appropriation of bucolic images on the flabellum, as will be demonstrated. This begs the question: what is the Christian apologia for the pagan miniatures represented on the liturgical fan? In Virgil’s Aeneid Anchises utters famous sibylline
words which liken the epic to an oracle that pronounced Rome’s divine destiny through the Julii.\textsuperscript{77}

\[\text{...you, Roman, be sure to rule the world (be these your arts), to crown peace with justice, To spare the vanquished and to crush the proud.}\]

\textit{Aen. 6.850-53}

Through the arts of conquest Rome fulfilled her political destiny, but in medieval thought, Rome’s destiny to rule the world (\textit{Aen. 6.852}) begins with the rule of Octavian/Augustus.\textsuperscript{78} The infancy narrative of Luke (2:1-5) records the juncture of events through which the will of the one true God was fulfilled in Bethlehem in Judea around the Roman year 748 during the reign of Augustus.\textsuperscript{79}

In the 9\textsuperscript{th} century, the abbess Cassia is a witness to the enduring belief that the miracle of redemption began to unfold in the divinely willed epoch: “When Augustus reigned alone upon the earth, the many kingdoms of humankind came to an end; and

\textsuperscript{77} Meyer, \textit{Medieval Allegory}, 12. “[Aeneas] learns of the divinely ordained destiny of Rome to rule the world. In Virgil’s poetry, the golden age of Augustus is one of the most formidable glories of that destiny.”

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 13. “Coinciding with the \textit{Pax Augusta} in Rome is another revealed prophecy: the birth of Christ in Judea...Medieval Christians in the West viewed this historical correlation... as a sign of divine providence. Their allegiance to papal Rome found justification in the view that the \textit{princeps} of the Christian church was the rightful successor to the ancient Roman emperors.”

\textsuperscript{79} Lk 2:1-5: \textit{And it came to pass, that in those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled...}every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem: because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child.
you were made man of the pure Virgin, the many gods of idolatry were destroyed...”

The Carolingians would read prophecy of Augustan rule in the Fourth Eclogue’s oration to the boy who will usher an era of peace and redemption from travail. The poem tells of the boy’s infancy lived among the gifts of the earth freely given in a land of no death or suffering, a Hesiodic golden race: “Only do you, pure Lucina, smile on the birth of the child, the iron brood shall at last cease and a golden race spring up throughout the world (Ecl. 4.8-10).”

He shall have the gift of divine life,
shall see heroes mingled with gods, and shall himself be seen by them,

And shall rule the world to which his father’s prowess brought peace.

Ecl. 4.15-17

Inevitably, Eclogue 4 appears on the etui as a declamation plaque, originally identified by Adolph Goldschmidt as Virgil “reciting his prophecy of the New Millennium.” Gaborit-Chopin reiterates: “…un’oratore al cospetto di un personaggio troneggiante, potrebbe raffigurare Virgilio che sta profetizzando il nuovo Millenium.”

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81 Perkell, “The Golden Age and its Contradictions in the Poetry of Virgil,” 3-4. At times Eclogue 4 prophesies “an almost Hesiodic Golden Age, in which such defining Iron Age pursuits as agriculture and trade have vanished, and the uncultivated earth offers everything in abundance.”

82 Eitner, Flabellum cit. (note 33), 20.

83 Gaborit-Chopin, Flabellum, 22. Trans: “…an orator in the presence of an enthroned personage, could represent Virgil who is prophesying the new millennium.”
The scene is puzzling. The enthroned figure wears a beard and long hair. He appears to be Christ between Peter and Paul, yet, if he is Christ, why is there no halo, and why does his right hand not gesture a benediction? At the same time, the plaque recalls late antique portraits of emperors flanked by co-emperors (Fig. 8). Its composition and figural relationships are distinctly similar to those of the ivory consular Probianus Diptych (Fig. 9). Eitner states that the plaque depicts Virgil addressing his patron, Gaius Asinius Pollio (one of the intercessors to Octavian regarding Virgil’s proprietary rights), to whom the Fourth Eclogue is dedicated in the year of his consulship. Indeed, Servius “...recorded the hypothesis that the wondrous child of the fourth eclogue was the otherwise unknown infant son of Pollio...” Although the plaque’s similarity to consular diptychs affirms Servius, the identity of the enthroned figure matters little. What is essential is that the plaque represents Eclogue 4 and the promise of peace during the reign of Augustus, as Orosius informed the Carolingians.

84 For example, the Missorium of Theodosius, c. 388 (Museum of Merida, Spain). Theodosius is enthroned under a “triumphal arch,” and flanked by co-emperors.

85 Eitner, Flabellum, 20.

86 Patterson, Pastoral and Ideology, Virgil to Valery, 24-25.

87 Rosamond McKitterick, History and Memory in the Carolingian World (Cambridge: University Press, 2004), 45-47. Orosius (fl. 4th -5th century.), Seven books of history against the pagans was well known to the Carolingian Franks; Johannes van Oort, Jerusalem and Babylon: a study into Augustine’s City of God and the sources of his doctrine of the two cities (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 158.”...Orosius pointed out that during the peace of Augustus, Christ was born; His advent concurred with this peace...precisely at that time God appeared in human form: it was not coincidental that Christ came into the world a Roman citizen;” Pulbrook, “Virgil’s Fourth ‘Eclogue’ and the Rebirth of Rome,” 26. Octavian is the unifying figure of Eclogues 1, 4
Golden Age Values in Virgil’s First 

Georgic

and 5: “Octavian is the ‘god’ in Ecl. 1.6; Octavian is the progenitor of the boy who ushers in the longed-for Golden Age in Ecl. 4.8-10 and Daphnis/Caesar is reborn as Octavian in Ecl. 5.64.”
While the Eclogues are the basis of the flabellum’s iconography, its purpose is informed from the First Georgic. This is reasonable given that the Vergilius Romanus manuscript most frequently studied and copied by the Carolingians contained the Eclogues, Georgics and Aeneid. A Carolingian scholar’s concept of the Golden Age would be affected from the study of all three writings, allowing readers to perceive a Golden Age ‘dialogue’ between Virgil’s works.88

Julia Hejduk recognizes such a conversation between Eclogue 4 and Georgic 1 in her compelling thesis on the role of Hebrew scripture in the work of Virgil.89 She begins by observing that the Genesis account of mankind’s punishment brought about through the serpent is reconciled in Isaiah’s prophecy of God’s Holy Mountain, where snakes are rendered harmless (Isa 11:8).90 Hejduk then compares this biblical thread to the advent of the Golden Age in Eclogue 4.24, when the serpent will die, and the end of the Golden Age in the First Georgic (1.129), when Jupiter will give poison to snakes.91


89 Hejduk, “Was Virgil Reading the Bible?” Vergilius 64 (2018), 71-102.

90 Ibid., 83.

91 Ibid., 83-84.
Encouraged by this train of thought, I propose that as Georgic 1 unfolds, its particular values speak to Eclogue 4. Georgic 1 begins with invocation to the gods and prayers to Octavian: “And you above all, Caesar, whom we know not what company of the gods shall claim ere long” (1.24-25). Veneration of Octavian in Georgic 1 substantiates the allegorical presence of Octavian cloaked in the Eclogues represented on the etui. The earthly paradise promised in the Fourth Eclogue, of a Golden Age under “the reign of Saturn” (4.6) is recalled in the First Georgic by a past age of earthly abundance “before the reign of Jove” (1.125), in which the labor of tilling or ploughing did not exist:

Before the reign of Jove no tillers subjugated the land:
even to mark possession of the plain or apportion it by boundaries was sacrilege; man made gain for the common good, and Earth of her own accord gave her gifts all the more freely when none demanded them.

G. 1.125-128

In Virgil’s bucolic poetry, the plough is emblematic of man’s relationship with nature through the ages. (In Eclogue 2.66 the wistful Corydon bemoaned the plough being dragged home by beasts of burden, while Eclogue 4.41 anticipates a new Golden

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92 Brooks Otis, Virgil, A Study in Civilized Poetry (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 215-216. In both the Eclogue Book and the Georgics an evil or corrupt past dominated by destructive passion is opposed to a new hope embodied in a savior (Caesar-Octavian) who represents the principle of resurrection and rebirth.

93 Did scripture speak to the poet, as Hejduk suggests? In Genesis 3:23 is written “And the Lord God sent him out of the paradise of pleasure, to till the earth from which he was taken.”
As the "the sturdy ploughman, too, will now loose his oxen from the yoke." As the Georgic unfolds, it presents an opportune paradox: the poem’s Iron Age agricultural character can be seen through the lens of Golden Age values.\textsuperscript{94} Nostalgia for the age before the plough evolves into a celebration of the plough and other agricultural equipage (associated with the deities of wheat and wine) necessary for man to possess the pastoral life saluted in the poem.

I must tell, too, of the hardy farmers’ weapons, without which the crops could be neither sown nor raised. First the share and the curved plough’s heavy frame, the slow-rolling wains of the Mother of Eleusis, sledges and drags, and hoes of cruel weight; further, the common wicker ware of Celeus, arbute hurdles and the mystic fan of Iacchus.

G. 1.160-166

As the poem ebbs, Virgil describes the apocalyptic weather portents surrounding the death of Julius Caesar, before offering an impassioned prayer for Octavian:

Gods of my country, Heroes of the land, you, Romulus, and you, mother Vesta, who guard the Tuscan Tiber and the Palatine of Rome, at least do not prevent this young prince from succoring a world in ruins!

G. 1.498-501

\textsuperscript{94} Perkell, “The Golden Age and Its Contradictions in the Poetry of Vergil,” 21. Labor omnia vincit (G. 1.145) would indicate the “goodness” of the Iron Age. In considering the Iron Age technologies enumerated, Perkell explains “…the mere listing of [the inventions] seems to many readers to constitute praise of man’s ingenuity.”
The poem’s praise of an agricultural ‘Golden Age’ and culmination in prayers for Octavian resonates with the allegories of the land regained through Octavian’s liberality expressed in the *Eclogues*.

**The Mystic Fan of Bacchus as Pagan-Christian Prefiguration**

The 9th century literati would know the myth of “Mother of Eleusis” (G. 1.163), Demeter, goddess of grain and agriculture who gave the plough to man. To her belongs the agricultural metaphor that countenances the presence of Virgil’s bucolic imagery on the flabellum: the *mystic fan of Iacchus* (G. 1.166), the winnowing fan of Bacchus, sacred also to Demeter, used to purify grain. Virgil’s fan (*uannus*) is derived from the Greek *liknon*, a large winnowing basket that was also used to carry first fruits to altars at Greek sanctuaries.95 Likewise, it was a winnowing basket attached to a long handle, used to toss grain in the air to allow the wind to separate the chaff. Citing Virgil, Jane Harrison explains “…the ‘fan’ is a light [agricultural] implement made of some wicker-work. The word ‘fan’ (*vannus*)...implies that it was used for ... ventilating, exposing to, or causing wind.”96 The poetic connotation of the *mystica uannus Iacchi* was familiar to Carolingian

96 Ibid., 293.
scholars through Servius’ commentary on *Georgics* 1.165-66 which interprets the mystic fan within the context of the Liberalia.\(^{97}\)

In the Carolingian schools, where students were conscious of pagan-Christian typology, the Servian account of the consecration of gifts in the Bacchic rite of Liberalia would invite an analogy to the act of consecration in the Christian liturgy. Jane Harrison explains that before Dionysos became the god of wine, he was the god of a cereal intoxicant and required the winnowing fan to purify the cereal grain, just as the winnowing fan served Demeter.\(^{98}\) The cleansing *mystica uannus* associated with the goddess of grain and god of wine prefigures the flabellum which safeguards the Eucharistic elements from contamination before and during their consecration.

Kessler notes that the flabellum has the mystical purpose of repulsing evil: “The flies the fan whisked away were thought to be the devil, as Isidore argued...which is why the guardians of Paradise hold flabella.”\(^{99}\) The winnower and flabellum each

\(^{97}\) Maurus Honoratus Servius, “Georgicon Liber I,” in *Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentarii*; Georgius Thilo et Hermannus Hagen. (Teubner, Leipzig, 1881) G.1.166. http://virgil.org/texts/virgil/serviusgeorgics.txt; Jane Harrison, trans. “Mystica Vannus Iacchi,” 293. “The mystic fan of Iacchus, that is the sieve of the threshing-floor. He calls it the mystic fan of Iacchus, because the rites of Father Liber had reference to the purification of the soul, and men are purified in his mysteries as grain is purified by fans. Others explain its being called 'mystic' by saying that the fan is a large wicker vessel in which peasants, because it was of large size, used to heap their first-fruits and consecrate it to Liber and Libera. Hence it is called 'mystic.'”

\(^{98}\) Harrison, “Mystica Vannus Iacchi,” 323.

possessed transcendental meaning: The Greeks believed that the 'fan' which physically purified grain had power mystically to purge humanity.”\(^{100}\) In a similar manner, the Christian is metaphysically purged of sin through partaking worthily of the Eucharist, metaphorically purified by the flabellum. Yet, the fan’s destiny is consummated in scripture. In the Gospels of Matthew 3:12 and Luke 3:17, the evangelists write identically of the winnowing fan that will separate the good from the evil: “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will...cleanse his floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” St. Hilary’s commentary on Matthew’s Gospel (c. 350), familiar to the Carolingians, states “The function of the fan is to separate the fruitful from the unfruitful.”\(^{101}\)

The Prophet Isaiah, Typology, Fulfillment and the Fan

The scriptural prerogative of the winnowing fan testifies to its very attendance in salvation history, especially considering that it first emerges in the symbolism of the Old Testament. The synchrony between Isaiah’s prophecy, Eclogue 4 and Georgic 1\(^{102}\)

\(^{100}\) Harrison, “Mystica Vannus Iacchi,” 323.


\(^{102}\) Hejduk, “Was Virgil Reading the Bible?” 83. Hejduk refers to “...the return of the Golden Age in Eclogue 4, which draws so heavily on Isaiah’s imagery…”
further reveals the typological implication of the fan. Isaiah 30:23-26 expresses the promise of paradise in pastoral language reminiscent of bucolic poetry:

And rain shall be given to thy seed, wheresoever thou shalt sow in the land: and the bread of the corn of the land shall be most plentiful, and fat. The lamb in that day shall feed at large in thy possession: And thy oxen, and the ass colts that till the ground, shall eat mingled provender as it was winnowed in the floor. . . And the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days: in the day when the Lord shall bind up the wound of his people, and shall heal the stroke of their wound.

Isaiah’s vision embodies an otherworldly state of natural abundance kindred to the Golden Age proclaimed by Virgil in the Fourth Eclogue, while the tilling of the ground and the sowing of seed recall the goodness of labor characterized in the First Georgic. Isaiah’s imagery of the world to come adopts the worthiness of agriculture and its trappings: the beasts of burden “shall eat mingled provender as it was winnowed in the floor.” Here the Judean prophet foresees the purifying winnower – the fan, in light of vitam venturi saeculi. The fan of Isaiah foreshadows and perfects the fan of Dionysos, the mystica uannus Iacchi of Virgil and the fan of St. Matthew.

The studious endeavors of an unknown medieval artist or patron sparked the understanding that inspired the flabellum’s artistic scheme. Scriptural commentaries on

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103 “the life of the world to come” is from the Nicene Creed, c. 325, the profession of belief recited at Mass since the 4th century.
Isaiah studied by the Carolingians would have nourished this understanding.\textsuperscript{104} For example, John Cassian’s commentary on Isaiah 30:32 (\textit{Conferences}, c. 425) intimates progression; Cassian distinguishes the journey to “spiritual knowledge” which will sow “the seed of the word of salvation.”\textsuperscript{105} The concept of spiritual peregrination is echoed by the Virgilian scenes of the etui in that their pre-Christian meaning will be superseded by “spiritual knowledge” personified by the Virgin Hodegetria and the beatific saints depicted on the vellum fan.

Bede’s commentary on Isaiah 30:26 (c. 725) adjudges Isaiah’s \textit{renewed} heaven and earth: “...there will be a new heaven and a new earth after the judgment – which is not one heaven and earth replacing another but these very same ones which will shine forth...”\textsuperscript{106} Isaiah’s prophecy anticipates Virgil’s Fourth \textit{Eclogue} which heralds the \textit{return} of the Golden Age. In turn, the allegorical Fourth \textit{Eclogue} foreshadows the renewed heaven and earth that is awaited by Christians.


\textsuperscript{105} Thomas C. Oden, Steven A. McKinion, eds. \textit{Isaiah 30:18-33}, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament X. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 221. “When by this system and in this order you too have come to \textit{spiritual knowledge}, you will certainly have, as we have said, not barren or idle learning, but what is vigorous and fruitful. And the seed of the word of salvation that has been committed by you to the hearts of your hearers will be watered by the plentiful showers of the Holy Spirit that will follow.”

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
But for you child, the earth untiled
will pour forth its first pretty gifts, gadding ivy with foxglove everywhere,
and the Egyptian bean blended with the laughing briar;
unbidden it will pour forth for you a cradle of smiling flowers.  
Unbidden, the goats will bring home their udders swollen with milk,
and the cattle will not fear huge lions.  
The serpent too, will perish, and perish will the plant that hides
its poison...

(Ecl. 4.18-25)

For the medieval monks, when the fan was closed and not in use, the allegorical
scenes on the etui signified humanity’s longing for the “fulness of time” (Gal. 4:4), the
Augustan Peace, during which Christ incarnate would enter the world. When the
vellum fan was opened and employed at Mass, its Christian iconography of salvation -
the Hodegetria in the company of saints, girded by the vine border symbolizing the tree
of life and Eucharistic nourishment – supplanted the presaging pagan images of the
etui. The flabellum’s learned patron undoubtedly beheld the role of the mystica uannis
lacchi distinguished in Rome’s sacred rites and Virgil’s georgic abode as prefiguring the
eminent task of the fan used in the Christian liturgy, where at once, allegory, typology,
prophecy, and fulfillment reverberate in the artistic program and liturgical function of
the Flabellum of Tournus, to honor the Eucharistic sacrifice, offered until the end of time,
in expectation of the new heaven and new earth foretold by the prophet Isaiah. ☝️