

PHOENIX FROM THE ASHES:
LUCRETIUS AND ENNIUS IN HERCULANEUM

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Otto Skutsch in memoriam

The Library in Herculaneum

When the king of Naples dug for art treasures under the lava in Herculaneum in the 1750's, he also came upon a library consisting of two thousand heavily carbonized and petrified papyrus scrolls. By means of a glue method invented by A. Piaggio eight hundred scrolls were unrolled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The remaining one thousand and eight hundred scrolls were regarded as hopeless.¹ In the 1980's, however, Piaggio's method was refined by the Norwegian Brynjulf Fosse and the opening of the scrolls has now started again in the National Library of Naples, where they are housed.²

The papyri aroused great expectations when they were found. One looked forward to new tragedies of Euripides, the Annals of Ennius, and unknown books of Tacitus. The disappointment was great when what came to light were dry, philosophical works in Greek. The so-called Papyrus Villa, where the library was found, turned out to be an Epicurean school on Roman soil with Philodemus of Gadara, a contemporary of Cicero, as head master. Scores of treatises under his name were unrolled: "On Rhetoric", "On Signs", "On Death", "On Music", "On Economy", "On Piety", "On the Gods", etc.³ When Fosse resumed the opening, Professor M. Gigante, who is the director of the international papyrus centre in Naples, prayed: "no more Philodemus!" There *was*, of course, more Philodemus, but also something different and interesting which indicates that the old expectations had not been all that unrealistic.

Some fifty Latin papyri had been unrolled using Piaggio's method but they were so damaged that practically nothing could be read; an exception was a poem by an unknown author on Octavian's victory at Actium.⁴ New works by Philodemus, on slander and on other philosophical schools, have come to light with Fosse's method, but also fragments from two Latin authors: Lucretius and Ennius.

Lucretius

The remains of the Lucretius papyri, crushed into numerous pieces, had been stored away, without numbering, in a drawer. The pieces contained text from *De Rerum Natura*, Books 3, 4, and 5 (an example is given in fig. 1). This means that the whole of Lucretius had once been present in the library of the Papyrus Villa.⁵

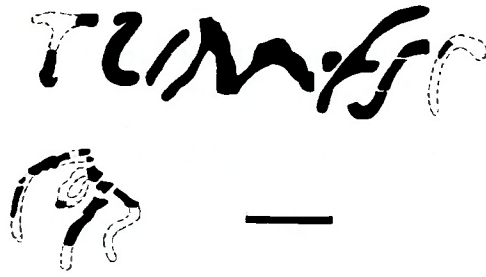


Fig. 1. Reconstruction of PHerc. senza numero from cassetto CXIV, fr. A. Measuring rod = 0.5 cm. Interpunction between words in the first line helps to identify the text as Lucretius V, 1301-1302:

[et quam falciferos arma]tum esclendere currus.]
 [inde boves lucas turr]ito] cor]pora, taetras.]

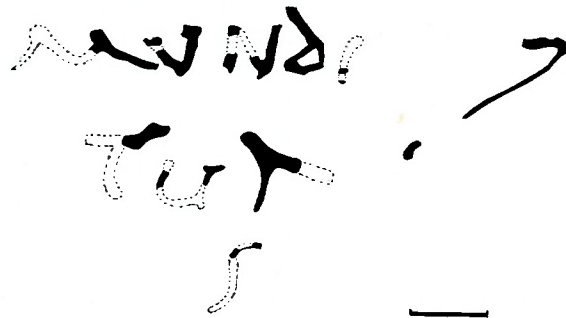


Fig. 2. Reconstruction of PHerc. 21, pezzo 2, fr. 1, lower part. Measuring rod = 0.5 cm. Transcript:

IMUNDI >[
]TUR·[
]SI

Distinction mark at end of first line. Interpunction after word ending second line.

This discovery links Lucretius firmly with the Epicurean school in Herculaneum. Modern and popular theories advocating that Lucretius was a lone wolf having no contact with contemporary Epicureanism have suffered a serious set-back. The exceptionally large letters in the Lucretius papyri⁶ as well as the thin quality of the papyrus⁷ point to the central position of Lucretius in the school.

The Microscope Method

A microscope method was of help in reading the blackened and tiny Lucretius fragments.

The text was microphotographed with colour slides, the slides put under a stereomicroscope with an illumination from below, and then studied in magnification. The handwriting was copied by means of a drawing device attached to the microscope which gave an accurate representation of the letters (cf. figs. 1-4).⁸

This method is of general palaeographical interest and has also helped greatly in deciphering the Ennius text (figs. 2-4).



Fig. 3. Reconstruction of PHerc 21, pezzo 1, fr. 1. Measuring rod = 0.5 cm. Interpunction in second line helps to identify line 2-4 as Ennius, *Annales VI*, 183-185 (Skutsch). An important tool of identification was I. Vahlen's *Ennianae poesis reliquiae*, *Index sermonis*, which is virtually a concordance, giving "*non cauponantes bellum sed belligerantes.*"

The Annals of Ennius

Papyrus Herculanensis no. 21 was partly opened in 1965 by A. Fackelmann.⁹ In 1988 the unrolling of the papyrus was resumed by T. Starace using the method developed by B. Fosse.¹⁰

The identification of the text was hampered by the state of the papyrus and the archaic forms of the Latin letters (cf. figs. 2-4). Before the unrolling was resumed, the material was also too scanty to allow any certain identification. Professor F. Sbordone, who was the first to read the papyri in 1965, took it to be a sacred text,¹¹ and for a while we thought it was a Roman comedy.¹² That was before, however, a distinction mark (>) had been observed in one of the new fragments (see fig. 2). This sign is known from the *Actium* poem as indicating the end of a hexameter. In addition, in another new fragment (see fig. 3) one could read the left part of verses 183-185, Book VI (Skutsch) from the *Annals of Ennius*. The verses contain King Pyrrhus' answer to Fabricius when the consul came to ransom the prisoners after the Battle of Heraclea:

Nam [

[Ne]ç mi [aurum posco nec mi pretium dederitis:]

Non c[au]ponantes bellum sed belligerantes]

Ferro, n[on auro vitam cernamus utrique.]¹³

"Gold for myself I ask not; no, to me ye shall not pay a price. No chaffering war, but waging war, not with gold, but with iron - thus let us of both sides make a trial for our lives" (Warmington's translation).

When Lucretius has been found in Herculaneum, it is not surprising that Ennius should also be there.¹⁴ Ennius was Lucretius' master of poetry (cf. *Lucr.* I, 117, 121), and it is not impossible that it is Lucretius' own copy of Ennius we now see before our eyes.

The Inglorious End of King Pyrrhus

The theme of Book IV of Ennius' *Annales* was the war with Pyrrhus. Some of the new fragments appear to come from this book. The king's notorious impudence (*petulantia*) seems to be mentioned. Decius Mus' devotion in the Battle of Ausculum has apparently been described. The book seems to end with the very name of Pyrrhus, in its Archaic form "Burrus", together with the *coronis* or the concluding sign which is known from several Greek papyri from Herculaneum.¹⁵

The papyrus is badly broken and most of the fragments are deplorably tiny. Best preserved is fragment 1 from *pezzo* (piece) 7 (cf. fig. 4). It has an extension that may give hopes of regaining something new of the Pyrrhus story. The transcript runs as follows:

1]RÇI[

2]N̄UMQU[.] M̄[

3]R̄TUR̄·IN̄ORA[.]>[

4]N̄T̄·ET̄MAGIS̄I[.]S̄[

5]Ç[.]N̄TRAR̄[.]Ī[.]RA[

6]ĀUERUNT̄·ĀUR[

7]REGES̄·SUD̄.[

8]N̄TUR̄ NEFRAT̄.[

9]M̄MORSESTESETA[

10]ERUNT̄·INDUP[

11]..ET̄UIMAR[

12]AT̄[.]A[

Worth noticing are the interpunctuation (cf. fig. 1) between words in lines 3,4,6,7,8,10, and the distinction mark (cf. fig. 2) after line 3. The second E in line 9 is inserted under the preceding T (cf. fig. 4). Lines 11 and 12 have been lost since 1965. They have been reconstructed from a photograph taken by Professor Sbordone (cf. note 11).

In my presentation of the papyrus fragment in *Cronache Ercolanesi*, I had restricted myself to just this transcript. But in a lecture which is what this paper started out as, it is tempting to let the imagination flow a little more freely.

There is a certain story about Pyrrhus, related by Dionysos of Halikarnassus, Appian, Diodorus Siculus, Cassius Dio, Livy, Plutarch, and others,¹⁶ which could fit the expressions found in the transcript. It is the story of how Pyrrhus, bankrupt after his Sicilian campaign, robbed the temple of Porserpina in Locri and the dire consequences this sacrilege had for him.

Already in line 1 we seem to be in the realm of death; ([O]r̄ci) might point to the temple of Porserpina at Locri. The ancient authors write that the enormous wealth of the temple had never (numqu[a]m, line 2) been touched but was buried out of sight (in ora[s], line 3) of the multitude.¹⁷ Pyrrhus had his scruples (cf. c[on]tra[ri]a i[u]ra, line 5), but his financial need was more (magis, line 4) pressing.¹⁸ He plundered the temple and placed the gold (aur[um], line 6) in ships which he sent along to Tarentum.¹⁹

Then something happened which could scare even a king (reges suda[sse], line 7):²⁰ a storm sprang up and, although the seamen perished in the waves (cf. vi mar[is], line 11), the ships laden with the treasures were driven back safely ashore on to the beaches at Locri.²¹

Pyrrhus tried to appease Porserpina with numerous sacrifices, even letting his own comrades (fratre[s], line 8), who had assisted him in the temple robbery, be killed ([neca]ntur, line 8), but the goddess remained inexorable.²²

ΠΕΡΕΙ·ΣΥΔ·
 ΝΤΙΛ·ΝΕΦΑΤ
 ΝΝΑ·Ν·ΕΣΕ·ΕΤ
 ΕΛΥΝΤ·ΙΝΔ

Fig. 4. Reconstruction of PHerc. 21, pezzo 7, fr. 1, lower part, left side = text lines 7-10. Measuring rod = 0.5 cm.

It was because of this sacrilege, and not for any military reason, that Pyrrhus was defeated by the Romans.²³ That Pyrrhus himself was not unaware of the wrath of the goddess, is shown by his own memoirs.²⁴ Porserpina even demanded his death which he met in Argos.²⁵ In our Ennius-text, the goddess seems to reveal herself (in a dream?) in order to tell the king of his imminent end ([ia]m mors est, es et, line 9).

Pyrrhus' last campaign (cf. *indup[er]ator*, line 10) took place in the Peloponnesus against Antigonos.²⁶ Plutarch reports that Pyrrhus "saw the stormy sea that surged about him" ²⁷ during a street fight in Argos, although in Argos he must have been on dry land indeed. Presumably he had a vision of the storm which Porserpina had sent against his ships outside of Locri (*et vi mar[is]*, line 11). The king was lightly wounded by an Argive soldier and turned upon the man. The soldier's old mother, who was watching from the housetop, lifted up a tile and threw it at Pyrrhus. The king's neck was crushed, he fell from his horse and was beheaded by one of Antigonos's men.²⁸

We may perhaps add that this mother was Porserpina in disguise and clad in black (*at[r]a*, line 12).

The Future of Herculaneum Studies

In 1985 the Piaggio Laboratoty was established in the Officina dei Papiri in the National Library in Naples. This has greatly forwarded the new glue method of unrolling the papyri.²⁹

A method of removing so called *svrapposti* by means of an alcohol solution has also been developed by B. Fosse.³⁰ *Svrapposti* are layers of papyrus which conceal the underlying text. New texts have been revealed in Epicurus' *On Nature*, Philodemus' *On Rhetoric* and other works.

Under the surveillance of F. C. Störmer the insects which house in the papyrus collection,³¹ the ink used in the papyri,³² and the curious white covering which can be observed on a large number of the scrolls, have been examined.³³ The white stuff tells something about what happened to the books during the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79; a cloud rose from the ground and covered the papyri, among other things with particles of lead. Lead does not regularly appear in lava. An obvious theory is that it stems from the plumbing system in Herculaneum.

There already exists a computer-compiled concordance to Philodemus in the Officina.³⁴ Two computer methods for the reconstruction of texts have been developed in pilot projects, mainly under the surveillance of E. S. Ore.³⁵ So far, however, it has not been possible to put them to practical use owing to lack of funds and personnel. It is to be hoped that this situation will not last very much longer. The methods may revolutionise Herculaneum studies.

The greatest difficulties for the text reconstruction are the numerous *lacunae* and the fragmentarily preserved letters. The one method can be termed *lacunology*; the computer can present possible supplements to the *lacunae* drawn from the whole of preserved Greek and Latin literature.

The other method can be termed *literalogy*; by comparing fragmentary letters to whole letters from the same hand, the computer can assist in reconstructing the original letters.

The possible applications of the methods go beyond the Herculaneum papyri to papyrology in general, to epigraphy, to the reconstruction of all fragmentarily preserved texts, and even to the reconstruction of partially preserved artefacts.

Notes

- ¹ Cf. M. Capasso: *Storia fotografica dell'Officina dei papiri ercolanesi* ; Napoli, 1983, 116 ff.
- ² B. Fosse, K. Kleve, F. C. Störmer: "Unrolling the Herculaneum Papyri"; *CErc.* 14, 1984, 9-15; M. Capasso: *Nuovi esperimenti di svolgimento dei papiri ercolanesi* ; Napoli, 1987; M. Capasso, A. Angeli: "Papiri aperti col metodo Osloense (1983-1989): descrizione e classificazione"; *CErc.* 19, 1989, 265-269.
- ³ Complete bibliography can be found in M. Gigante: *Catalogo dei papiri ercolanesi* ; Napoli, 1979.
- ⁴ Cf. M. Gigante: *op. cit.* ; W. M. Lindsay: "The Bodleian Facsimiles of Latin Papyri from Herculaneum"; *CR* 4, 1880, 441-445.
- ⁵ K. Kleve: "Lucretius in Herculaneum"; *CErc.* 19, 1989, 5-27.
- ⁶ Compare the size of the letters in fig. 1 with the Latin letters in figs. 2-4. The letters in the Greek papyri are even smaller.
- ⁷ Cf. the *carta regia* of Catullus 22.6.
- ⁸ K. Kleve, E. S. Ore, R. Jensen: "Letteralogia: computer e fotografia"; *CErc.* 17, 1987, 141-150 (English version *SO* 62, 1987, 109-129).
- ⁹ Fackelmann made some experiments in opening the papyri during the 1960's, but eventually gave up. Cf. M. Capasso: *Op. cit.*, 1983, 122 ff.
- ¹⁰ K. Kleve: *Ennius in Herculaneum* ; *CErc.* 20, 1990.
- ¹¹ F. Sbordone: "Nuovi frammenti dei papiri ercolanesi"; *PP* 103, 1965, 107-113, esp. 108-110.
- ¹² K. Kleve: *op. cit.* , 1989, 6, n.9.
- ¹³ A dot beneath a letter indicates that the letter can only be read partially.
- ¹⁴ Cf. M. Gigante: *Introduction to "La Villa dei Papiri"* ; Second Supplement to *CErc.* 13, 1983, 5; "La biblioteca di Filodemo" ; *CErc.* 15, 1985, 5.
- ¹⁵ K. Kleve: *op. cit.*, 1990.
- ¹⁶ See D. Kienast: "Pyrrhus vom Epeirus"; *RE* XXIV, 47, Halbband, SP. 153, 49-63. According to our reconstruction Plut. Pyrr. 34 should be added to the sources mentioned there (cf. Kienast: *Sp.* 161, 17 ff.). In relating the story we have used Cary's translation of Dionysos, White's of Appian, Moore's of Livy, and Perrin's of Plutarch.
- ¹⁷ D. H. 20.9 (19.9); D. S. 27.4.2; Liv. 29.8.9, 18.4.
- ¹⁸ D. H. *loc. cit.*; App. Sam. 12.1.
- ¹⁹ D. H. *loc. cit.*;
- ²⁰ D. H. *loc. cit.*, (19.10); App. Sam. 12.2; D. S. 27.4.3.
- ²¹ D. H. *loc. cit.*; App. Sam. *loc. cit.*; Liv. 29.8.10-11, 18.5. The reason why the expression "vi maris" appears so late will be made clear below.
- ²² App. *loc. cit.*; D. S. *loc. cit.*; Liv. 29.18.6; D. H. *loc. cit.*; (9-10).
- ²³ D. H. *loc. cit.* 10 (19.11); Liv. *loc. cit.*
- ²⁴ D. H. *loc. cit.*
- ²⁵ Liv. *loc. cit.*
- ²⁶ Plut. Pyrrh. 22 ff.; Liv. *loc. cit.*; Aur. Vic. Vir ill. 35.10.
- ²⁷ Plut. Pyrrh. 34.1. B. Perrin's translation.
- ²⁸ Plut. *loc. cit.* 2f.

- ²⁹ Cf. the article by Capasso, Angeli mentioned in note 2 and M. Gigante, M. Capasso: "Il ritorno di Virgilio a Ercolano"; *SIFC*, S.III, vol. 7.
- ³⁰ see the forthcoming issue of *Cronache Ercolanesi*.
- ³¹ F. C. Störmer *et al.*: "Insects in Herculaneum Papyri"; *CErc* 16, 1986, 159.
- ³² F. C. Störmer *et. al.*: "Ink in Herculaneum"; *CErc* 20, 1990.
- ³³ F. C. Störmer *et. al.*: "What Happened to the Papyri during the Eruption of Vesuvius?"; *CErc* 16, 1986, 7-9.
- ³⁴ K. Kleve, J. Songstad: *A Concordance to Philodemus*; 1975.
- ³⁵ K. Kleve, I. Fønnes: "Lacunology. On the Use of Computer Methods in Papyrology"; *SO* 56, 1981, 157-170.