

THE LATIN POPYRI IN HERCULANEUM

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The Latin papyri in the Papyrus Villa represent 10% of the Greek ones. This percentage corresponds to the relation between Latin and Greek texts in general. The few Latin papyri, then, do not necessarily indicate that there was a greater interest in Greek than in Latin literature in the Villa.

Nearly all Latin papyri have been heavily damaged, first by mud and water which washed out most of the text, and next by carbonization. The difficult state of the Latin papyri is the reason why they have remained almost unknown to this day.

An exception is the fairly well preserved PHerc. 817, the so called *Bellum Actiacum*, an hexameter poem which deals with the Egyptian war of Octavianus and the suicide of Cleopatra. If Gigante's theory is right, that Varius is the author, the poem must have been written between 31 and 14 B.C. This theory agrees with the type of writing, which may be called a Pre-Classical Capital Script, a forerunner to the Classical Capital Script which appears in the first century AD.

The Oxford and Naples *disegni* were drawn in the last century from 30 of the 62 Latin papyri. They were an important contribution for their time. On the basis of 20 Oxford *disegni* Lindsay made his survey of the Latin papyri in CR 1890. He was able to show that the papyri contained remains of hexameter poems, speeches and panegyrics.

It is, however, arbitrary what has been drawn and what not. There is far more text preserved in the papyri than shown in the *disegni*. The *disegni* are further made freehand and give no reliable picture of the real handwriting. If we want to compare the size of the letters, the *disegni* are quite useless.

A new method for micro photographing and microscope drawing of papyrus texts made it possible to decipher fragments from Ennius and Lucretius. These methods are now used on the Latin papyri at large.

About 10.000 micro photos have so far been taken. They cover half of the papyri. Care has been taken to spread the photos so that they give an impression of the papyri as a whole. The goal is to have a photo-collection where every square millimetre of the papyri is recorded.

Early Roman Script which corresponds to the graffiti writing in Pompeii, can be found in the Ennius and Lucretius papyri. It is a rugged handwriting which uses several of our lower-case letters (a, b, d, h, p, r). The theory, then, that the lower-case letters have developed from the fifth century uncials and the ninth century Carolingian minuscules seems to be wrong.

The two Capital Scripts use only upper case letters (A, B, C etc.). The rugged appearance of the Early Roman Script has disappeared, and the letters run smoothly.

The Pre-Classical Capital script is a simple and elegant writing without extra adornment, whereas the Classical Capital letters are furnished with extra "heads" and "feet", which make them somewhat heavy. The same type of script occurs in the Gallus papyrus from Egypt.

In addition to letters all the script types use interpuncts between words, a Roman invention which is not found in Greek papyri. Distinction signs (/) are placed at the end of hexameters, accent signs to mark the *ictus* and paragraph signs (_) under a line or a verse to mark a pause. Only the paragraphs are known from the Greek papyri.

The extensive use of accents in the *Bellum Actiacum* poses a problem as one should think that the Romans in Augustan times were so well versed in scanning hexameters that they had no need for such extra help. The papyrus may be an edition for beginners or for some public recitation where all precautions had to be taken.

In the Ennius papyrus one also finds the coronis which marks the end of a book and is well known from the Greek papyri. Perhaps there once occurs a *deleatur*-sign in the form of a cross (x). In that case our habit of "crossing out" a letter is very old. In the Greek papyri letters are deleted by putting a dot above them or with a horizontal stroke.

30 of the Latin papyri are written in Early Roman Script and so probably belong to the first century BC (before 31).

11 papyri are written in Pre-Classical Capital Script. They probably belong to the last part of the first century BC (from about 31).

17 papyri are written in Classical Capital Script and belong to the first century AD (until 79).

The distribution of the scripts suggests that the library in the Papyrus Villa has been an active library, kept up to date to the bitter end.

The papyri with Early Roman Script from republican times outnumber the papyri with Capital Scripts from imperial times. We thus have a fair chance of regaining some old Latin literature.

At least 11 papyri with Early Roman script contain hexameters, which can be seen by the occurrence of distinction signs. Two of the papyri also contain Greek script, probably terms or citations.

At least three papyri with Pre-Classical Capital script (from early imperial times) contain hexameters. At least three papyri with Classical Capital script (later imperial times) contain hexameters. One papyrus contains Greek script.

Decipherment is time-consuming: taking photos, drawing pictures, reconstructing letters, restoring text. To make it quicker and easier several computer programs have been developed: for word lists, search for words and letter combinations, graphics for reconstructing fragments of letters and enhancement of photos. As soon as the programs become practicable, they will be announced in the *Cronache Ercolanesi*.

When Lindsay wrote his article more than a hundred years ago, he had not seen the papyri himself, but knew only a limited amount of *disegni*. All the same he strongly recommended a further study of the papyri: "It would be a long and laborious business, but quite worth doing."

Today, with better techniques, equipment and methods, I want to make Lindsay's words my own. It still *is* a long and laborious business, but quite worth doing.

(The lecture was accompanied by colour slides and handouts with bibliography, illustrations of letters, list of script clusters, and examples of texts.)

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