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P.MICH. VII 459: A WRITING EXERCISE WITH LATIN VERSE

aus: *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 216 (2020) 69–72

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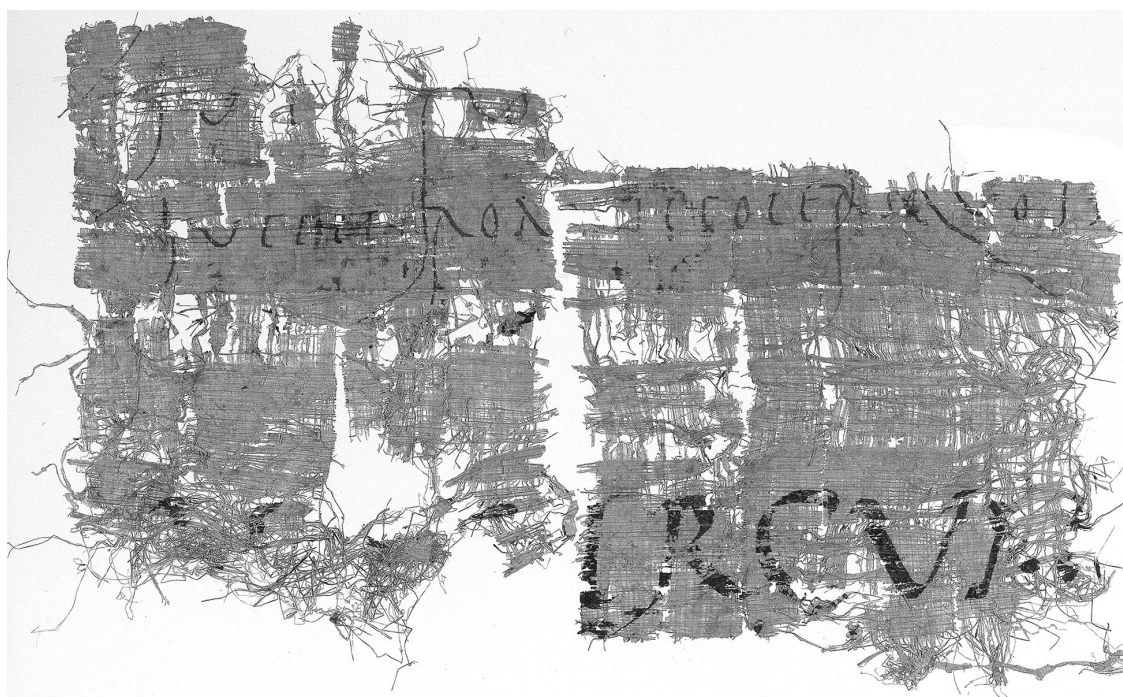


Fig. 1. The reconstructed *recto*

In the middle of the writing frame, a blank space separates an upper (ll. 1–3) and a lower (ll. 4–5) section. The upper section has been employed to copy at least three times, and possibly more, a Latin hexameter of an unspecified author. Since we only have the first three feet of the verse (— ∪ ∪, — ∪ ∪, — —), it is also possible that the hexameter was not copied in its entirety.

One is puzzled by the traces of the two letters after *quo*, visible only in l. 3. The last letter, on the edge of the lacuna, is represented by the lower portion of an upright stroke that is hooked at the bottom: *i*[, *n*[or *s*[are all possible. As for the letter immediately following *quo*, one can see a tall upright, which might or might not be interrupted by the lacuna above it. Depending on the status of this letter (complete or incomplete), two possibilities can be envisaged.

(a) The letter might be complete, and therefore – as in Sanders’ edition – a tall *i*, like that at the beginning of the verse (*Iuppiter*). If that is the case, one is struck by the apparent hiatus between *quo* and *i*. Sanders apparently separated *quo* and *i*. [so that with *i*. [should begin a new word. This sort of hiatus is infrequent in Latin hexametric poetry: one normally sees it when *i* has a consonantal value,⁹ and the association of *quo* and vocalic *i* is much rarer.¹⁰ One must remember, however, that Latin poetry found on papyri as a writing exercise is not always metrically consistent: e.g. the sequence *Aeneas Dardaniae* in *PSI XIII 1307 verso*¹¹ recalls the *Aeneid*, but does not match any known verse of Vergil and is not an hexameter (— — — — ∪ —). Therefore, one cannot assume this particular (and incomplete) piece of poetry to be grammatically and/or metrically faultless. Alternatively, *quo* and *i* might be united, forming *quoi*, an old form for *cui* mentioned by scholars and grammarians (e.g. Quint. *inst.* 1,7,29 or Vel. *gramm.* VII 76,3) and attested in early Latin poetry.¹² Old forms normally do not appear in Latin writing exercises on papyrus, but this does not rule them out.

⁹ As in e.g. Verg. *Aen.* 1,544–545 *rex erat Aeneas nobis quo iustior alter / nec pietate fuit nec bello maior et armis*; 4,156–157 *at puer Ascanius mediis in uallibus acris / gaudet equo iamque hos cursu, iam praeterit illos*; Ov. *epist.* 2,54 *quo iam tot pignora nobis?*; Val. Fl. 2,306–307 *arcem nata petit, quo iam manus horrida matrum / congruerat*.

¹⁰ See Lucil. 180–182 *Marx quo me habeam pacto, tam etsi non quaeris docebo, / quando in eo numero mansi quo in maxima non est / pars hominum*.

¹¹ LDAB 4139, TM 62947.

¹² See e.g. Plaut. *Bacch.* 543 *nullus est quoi non inuideant rem secundam optingere* or Enn. *ann.* 278–279 *Skutsch ingenium quoi nulla malum sententia suadet / ut faceret facinus leuis aut mala*. I owe this suggestion to R. Ast, who also noticed that

(b) The letter might be incomplete: a tall *s*, the upper, diagonal stroke of which was lost in the lacuna above the letter. As one gets here palaeographically different versions of *n* in *omnipotens* (see below), one might as well get different versions of *s* (this *s* would look different than that in *omnipotens*). Reading *quos* . [or *quo s* . [after *Iuppiter omnipotens* presents no metrical problem, but does not match any known Latin verse either.

No final decision between these two alternatives can be made at this stage.

The script can be defined an old Roman cursive as most of the letters are cursive in origin (most notably *p*, *q*, *r*, *s*), but probably due to the literary nature of the text, ligatures are avoided: the letters have been carefully written and detached from one another, as if in an attempt at calligraphic style. Some contrast of width is to be seen between ‘wider’ letters (*m* and *u*) and narrower ones (notably *o*, which has a singularly elliptical shape). At least *m* preserves its fully capital form in three strokes. *N*, on the other hand, is seen both in its capital (*omnipotens*) and cursive shape (*omnipotens*); its left upright trespasses well below the writing line. The same can be seen in *q* and *r*. Parallels for these three letters projecting towards the lower portion of the line are e.g. in *P.Oxy.* XLIV 3208 (Fig. 2).¹³ This palaeographical comparison suggests the 1st century AD as a likely period for the drafting of this manuscript.

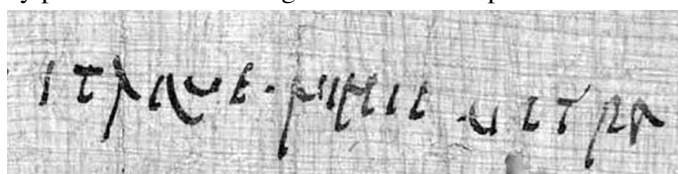


Fig. 2. *P.Oxy.* XLIV 3208, l. 3 *itaque · nihil · ultra*

The lower section contains scant remnants of two Latin lines, written in a neatly executed Roman ‘rustic’ capital, where only the word *circum* can be read.¹⁴ The letters are decidedly larger than those in Roman cursive, and *chiaroscuro* (shading) has been evidently – though not excessively – employed. The same scribe might be recognized here and on the *verso* (see below); he might also be the same person who penned the upper section. A comparison with the Roman capital in the already mentioned *PSI* XIII 1307 *verso*,¹⁵ roughly contemporary to this text, can be made: the letters are narrower, but *r* is quite similar. Despite being much later and featuring much narrower letters, also the Roman capital in *P.Oxy.* XLI 2950¹⁶ is comparable.

At l. 4, before *circum*, one sees faint traces of three letters: the fibres are heavily torn apart and damaged, and spots of ink appear to be displaced. The first letters might be *r*; or, even if one cannot see other instances of these letters, *p* or *b*. The second can be more confidently read as *e*. Almost nothing remains of the last one. Perhaps]*RE*Š,]*PER* or]*PE*Š? Finally in l. 5, the traces of the first letter might match the top of *c*.

As for the *verso*, Sanders’ text runs as follows:

]ri co[]mos f[
2]ri co[]o . . [

if we read *quoi* for *cui*, this reminds one of Verg. *Aen.* 4.206 *Iuppiter omnipotens cui nunc Maurusia pictis*. In state-of-the-art Vergilian editions the variant *quoi* for *cui* never appears; nevertheless, this is a striking coincidence which ought to be noted.

¹³ 1st c. BC–1st c. AD, TM 78573. The papyrus is being re-published by A. Bernini (Heidelberg) in *CLTP*. This type of *r* can also be seen in ostraca in *O.Berenike* III (namely, 290 = TM 641778; 333 = TM 641821; and 416 = TM 641904; all dated to the second half of the 1st AD); a similar *q* is in *P.Mich.* III 159 (AD 37–43, TM 78513).

¹⁴ The reference text for this script is now P. Fioretti, Sulla genesi della capitale romana ‘rustica’, *Segno e Testo* 12 (2014), pp. 1–48.

¹⁵ The image can be seen in <http://www.psi-online.it/images/orig/PSI%20XII%201307%20v.jpg?1365958834>.

¹⁶ AD 285 (after), TM 16514. The image can be seen in <http://163.1.169.40/gsd/collect/POxy/index/assoc/HASH3155.dir/POxy.v0041.n2950.a.01.hires.jpg>.

The reconstructed *verso* (Fig. 3), on the other hand, can be thus read:

 A]VRICOMOS .[
 2 A]V^vRIC^cO^oM^m[OS

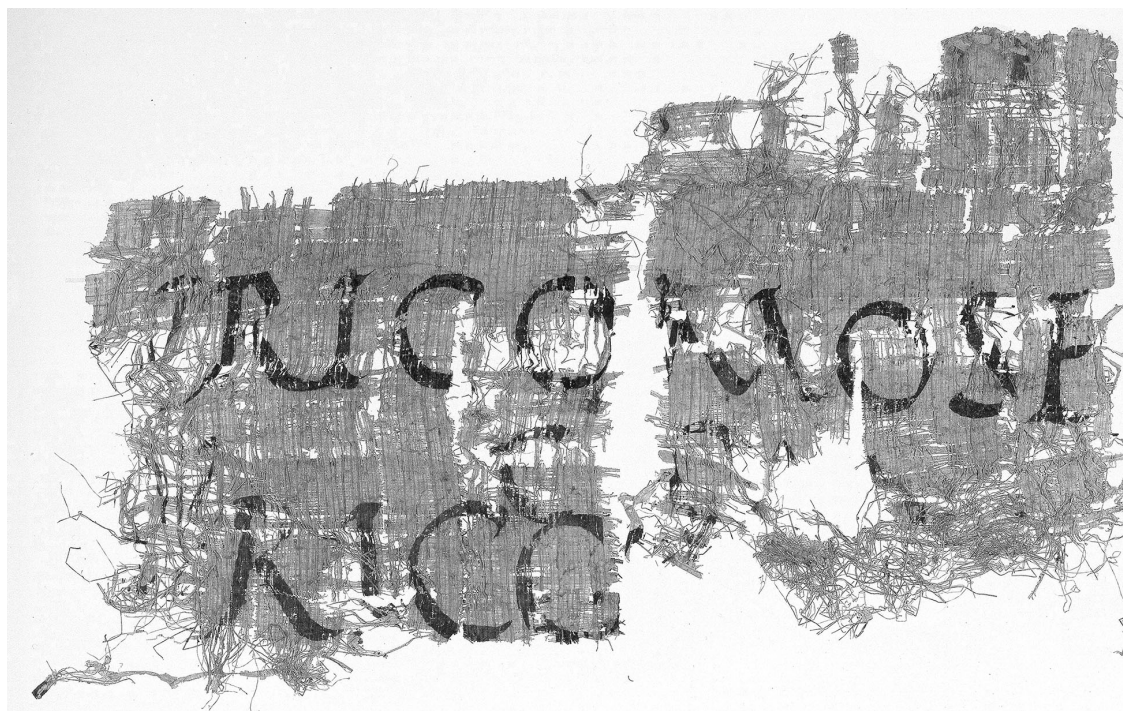


Fig. 3. The reconstructed *verso*

The only remnant of the original text is a Latin word in the masculine plural accusative, normally found in hexametric poetry due to its choriambic nature (—∪∪—): it may be *auricomos* ‘covered with golden foliage’, ‘golden-haired’¹⁷ or *lauricomos* ‘covered with laurel foliage’.¹⁸ Here, more than on the *recto*, one can appreciate the ornamental serifs the scribe puts at the top of uprights and oblique strokes. After the adjective, one can see a letter which Sanders identified as *f*. I am not sure whether it is, in fact, an *f* with a large ornamental curve on the bottom,¹⁹ or rather an *e*, as I can see the upright and all the expected three horizontal strokes, roughly of the same length. Also *p* might be possible. In the upper margin, close to the rupture of the fibre, traces of ink can be seen, which cannot be connected to any specific letter. After l. 2 was written, either the scribe or someone who came after him copied the letters *u*, *c*, *o* and *m* of *lauricomos* in the interlinear space between ll. 1 and 2, each letter in close proximity to its counterpart in l. 2. This is difficult to explain: it is perhaps the result of further writing practice, and evidence of the re-use of the text.

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¹⁷ *ThLL* II col. 1494 s.v. *auricomus*: see Verg. *Aen.* 6,140–141: *sed non ante datur telluris operta subire / auricomos quam quis decerpserit arbore fetus*.

¹⁸ *ThLL* II.2 col. 1059 s.v. *lauricomus*: see Lucr. 6,152–613: *lauricomos ut si per montis flamma uagetur / turbine uentorum comburens impete magno*.

¹⁹ As per R. Ast’s suggestion, *f*[might point to *f*[etus, and suggest a sequence (*auricomos fetus*) clearly taken (or inspired) from the already quoted *Aen.* 6,141.