

JAY FISHER, *The 'Annals' of Quintus Ennius and the Italic Tradition*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014, 200 pp. ISBN 978-1-4214-1129-3. \$69.95.

Fisher's book, a revision of his 2006 Princeton dissertation, is one of a series of studies of Ennius' *Annals* that have appeared in close succession to each other, each approaching the fragmentary epic from a different perspective and intersecting with each other only obliquely<sup>1</sup>. Fisher's work distinguishes itself from the others in this recent series, and indeed from all previous studies of the *Annals*, in that it represents a quest for the holy grail of an elusive Italic linguistic heritage of Ennius' evidently Hellenising epic. That such a daunting task should have attracted few other knights errant is not surprising: while no one doubts that Latin had a history prior to the third century and that that history was active in Ennius' use of language, our access to it in any form is limited in the extreme, and our chances of making palpable and interpretable connections to the surviving language of the *Annals* even slighter.

In order to populate the poem's Italic linguistic history with detail, Fisher seeks out expressions ("traditional collocations") historically tied to indigenous ritual practice or occasionally to warfare. These expressions consist of fixed elements that in their combination admit of some variation; fundamentally, they represent constellations of words that, as a result of their recurrence in specific contexts, over time acquire further "irreducible meanings" additional to their literal ones (pp. 3-4): thus, for example, *vires vitaque* (*Ann.* 37, at the beginning of Ilia's dream) may be a phrase associated with the language of curses: an Oscan equivalent is found in a *defixio* from Cumae, and weaker instances, containing only one or the other of the two nouns, are found in Latin curse tablets, sometimes in combination with *corpus*, also at *Ann.* 37 (pp. 151-4); as a result, Ilia's language may be more doom-laden than is clear from the literal meaning of her words alone. Fisher thus seeks out such variable and storied expressions as are recurrent in any combination of extant Latin, Oscan, Umbrian, Etruscan, and occasionally Greek. Wherever possible,

<sup>1</sup> The others of that series are V. Fabrizi, *Mores veteresque novosque: rappresentazioni del passato e del presente di Roma negli Annales di Ennio*, Pisa, 2012, which is primarily concerned with the *Annales* as a medium of cultural memory; N. Goldschmidt, *Shaggy Crowns: Ennius' Annales and Virgil's Aeneid*, Oxford, 2013, a study of the interrelationship of the two poems named in the title, including in their ability to function as forms of cultural memory; and J. Elliott, *Ennius and the Architecture of the Annales*, Cambridge, 2013, a study of the origins of our accounts of the epic, culminating in a meditation on the source of its power as a form of memory of the past.

his evidence originates in inscriptions, curse tablets, cult titles (however attested), dedications and the like; but, because the volume of evidence thus accruing is not great, the bulk in the end originates in Roman literary sources, where possible but not always in coincidence with non-literary ones. Fisher is aware that using literary sources is less than ideal because of the tendency of literature to seek out expressions that have no necessary connection to historical practice, especially when already made notable by previous literary use. He justifies the frequent inclusion of literary material by reference to Feeney's and Rüpke's arguments about the inextricability of literary tradition from the language of cult and vice versa (pp. 19, 149). Once a "traditional collocation" has thus been identified, Fisher reads it as testimony to a ritual tradition dating back to the central Italian *koinê* period, characterised as a period from the seventh to the fourth centuries BCE when the speakers of the languages named exercised intense mutual influence on each other, so that their shared ritual practice can be assumed to have left discernible traces in the surviving remains of their languages (pp. 4, 26).

In Fisher's reading, Ennius' *Annals* are then a hybrid not only of Greek and Roman but also of common Italic culture as expressed in references to ritual and military discourse thus identified. The Greek elements are made manifest by the dactylic hexameter and by direct allusions to Greek poetry; the Roman ones by references to specifically Roman phenomena, such as the cult of Jupiter Stator, as opposed to the undifferentiated Italic god Jupiter; and the common Italic ones by features shared by Rome with the other participants in the central Italian *koinê*, including ones whose real Greek origin had effectively been naturalized and forgotten. It is Fisher's endeavour to identify, or, where the evidence fails him, to gesture towards possibilities for uncovering the third and least knowable of these. The hybridity that Fisher postulates is *prima facie* likely, given that Ennius' Latin inevitably had far more indigenous history than is accessible to us today; and, despite the dearth of evidence, Fisher is able to make persuasive cases (if not universally) for particular instances of it. His energies are largely dedicated to elucidating the pay-off for the reading of individual fragments that results from taking this Italic linguistic history, where he is able to construct it, into account—but he has an additional, recurrent suggestion about the return on attending to this hybridity: as articulated on p. 5, "[t]he Italic contribution to the *Annals* should serve as a powerful reminder that Latin [literature] ... is not simply Greek literature translated into another language but rather a hybrid of cultural elements that underpins our very understanding of what it means to be "literature" and what it means to be poetry [in the later Western tradition at large]".

The problem with this engaging suggestion is that it admits of little proof and no progress: despite Fisher's reiteration of the value of the *Annals* as an (albeit opaque) medium for ancient Italic cultural contributions to our

literatures and to our forms and understanding of multiculturalism, their shadow remains so dim as to be relatively uninformative. Fisher's book reminds us that these cultures must have had a role in determining the language of an epic crucial to the tradition as we know it, and it demonstrates some possibilities for how to read that role; but it can do little to underwrite significant analogies, develop a real history or in any satisfying way explain what we see elsewhere. For the present reader, the value of the book lies instead in being reminded that the indigenous background to Ennius' language existed in far more detail than we can confidently access it, and that simple despair is not the only possible approach to the problem; also, in the thought-provoking individual interpretations that Fisher's use of his difficult evidence sustains.

In the first chapter, "Ennius and the Italic Tradition" (pp. 1-26), Fisher explores four fragments of the *Annals*: *Ann.* 232 and *Ann.* 240-1 (both discussed below), and two prayers, *Ann.* 26 (address to Tiber) and *Ann.* 102-3 (*quod mihi rei que fidei regno vobisque, Quirites, / se fortunatim feliciter ac bene vortat*) in terms of their proposed evocation of the "traditional collocations". Thus, in Fisher's reading, *non semper vostra evortit nunc Iuppiter hac stat* (*Ann.* 232) plays with an antonymic response between the Roman cult title *Iuppiter Stator* (evoked by *Iuppiter hac stat*) and *Iuppiter Versor* (evoked by *evortit* in proximity to the latter phrase). *Iuppiter Versor* is the equivalent of an attested Oscan cult title that, though it cannot be proven on surviving evidence, Fisher suggests had been naturalized into Latin (with possible amalgamation from Greek Ζεύς Τροπαῖος) long before Ennius' day. In his analysis, Fisher focuses on the possibility that M. Atilius Regulus conceived the Roman cult title, at the time when, according to Livy, he vowed and built the temple to Jupiter Stator in the context of the Third Samnite War, in response to his success over the Oscan-speaking Samnites, putative worshippers of a *Iuppiter Versor*. On Fisher's reading, then, Ennius' text would reflect a preceding historical action attributed to (or pre-existing historiographical tradition surrounding) Regulus, harnessing the weight of opposing cult titles in the act. Fisher frames this discussion (p. 5, p. 10) with reference to the ill-fitting editorial supposition that, since Macrobius attributes the fragment to Book 7 and we think we know that that book contained the narrative of the Second Punic War, the speaker may have been Hannibal—who would then have been referring back to events at more than a generation's remove. Was Hannibal then trying to make claims on Roman *Iuppiter Stator*? Such interpretive possibilities are fleetingly raised but not pursued; neither would any ancient evidence provide grounds for such discussion.

This example illustrates some of the strengths and weaknesses of Fisher's approach. His thought-provoking reading undoubtedly makes the fragment "mean more". With the Roman cult title *Iuppiter Stator* he is of course

on solid ground. That is less the case with the hypothetical universality for all Oscans of a *Iuppiter Versor*, a title attested in a single inscription from Lucania; elsewhere in his arguments the evidence for his proposals is even scantier (e.g. pp. 64-5 on *pulcerrima* and *praepes*, pp. 155-7 on *die pater genitor* in relation to *o Romule, Romule die...* [Ann. 106-8]); although, to his credit, when confronted with lack of evidence, Fisher is routinely open and direct. Original readers of the *Annals* are also required by Fisher's proposals to cross the distance between *non semper vostra evortit nunc Iuppiter hac stat* and the antonymic titles *Iuppiter Stator* and *Iuppiter Versor* on their own recognizance. Neither is this exceptional: as he is well aware, Fisher's readings elsewhere are similarly—indeed, often, rather more—demanding of the reader. Fisher addresses this point by making Ennius a “subtle and sophisticated” poet (p. 10) who engages in “elegant and playful allusion rather than ... simple appropriation” (p. 74); similar thoughts recur *passim*. Ennius' readers, for their part, are as attuned to his demands as the Alexandrian poets' audience was to their challenging allusions—another frequently obtruding notion. But the problem with the analogy to Alexandrian poetry is that, while in the latter case we have ample surviving evidence for the complexities in question and for later readers' ability to read and make returns on those complexities, that is not the case with the language of Italic ritual discourse, and the analogy proposed to some extent highlights that deficit. The evidence for Fisher's argument overall is sufficient to be suggestive and to make his approach and his readings worthy of attention, but it is at the same time weak enough that recourse to the model of Alexandrianism to explain why the putative references to common Italic culture appear as distant as they do from the language of the *Annals* fails to inspire confidence.

Furthermore, one of our primary desiderata for understanding Ennius' epic would be a sense of the identities and capabilities of his original audience, something of a million dollar question; but Fisher's Ennius pre-emptly that question, by presupposing a reader able to follow labyrinthine substructures of meaning, operating variously at the level of sound, etymology or theme (e.g. on pp. 62-4, in an exploration of the auspicate of Romulus and Remus at Ann. 72-91, Fisher suggests that connections between *auspicio*, *exspectant*, *spectant*, *avis*, *avidi*, *conspicit* and *Aventinus* produce a form of ring composition that “may not have gone unnoticed by a careful reader”). The commonly tentative phrasing of his arguments reflects Fisher's awareness that he is not infrequently testing the bounds of credibility, along with those of his evidence.

Fisher's reading of Ann. 240-1 (Iuno Vesta Minerva Ceres Diana Venus Mars / Mercurius Iovis Neptunus Volcanus Apollo) effectively illustrates his important and well-made point about the inseparability of common Italic ritual collocations and Greek poetry as influences on Ennius' language in

the *Annals*: both points of origin produce phenomena that are in practice, at least from our perspective, indistinguishable, so instantiating some of the broader cultural hybridity that, according to Fisher's compelling case, we should where we can be reading into the epic. The fragment's content can, on the one hand, readily be read as Greek, in complement to its metre: the number of its elements reflects the canonical Greek number of Olympians, as well as the practice of naming gods in Greek vase-painting; Fisher cites a parallel for the twelve-name list in a scholion to Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 2.531-2 (pp. 172-3 Wendel 1958); etc. At the same time, Fisher points out, no Greek list is identical to Ennius'; all those that Ennius lists were worshipped at Rome under the names Ennius gives them, and Jupiter, Minerva, Venus, Ceres, Apollo and Mars had Oscan aspects too; and Fisher can cite indigenous precedents for the form of the list, including on a Praenestine bronze *cista*, thus enabling him to raise the possibility that such lists reflect naturalized Italic practice as well as evidently Greek practice. He points to analogous lists also in Varro's *Satires* and in Gellius and Plautus. For Fisher, the fragment thus represents "a nativized concept recharacterized by novel Greek elements" (p. 19).

The second chapter, "The *Annals* and the Greek Tradition" (pp. 27-56) opens with the point that the tradition of literary hybridity to which Livius Andronicus, Plautus and Ennius are testament has non-literary analogues, for example, in Italic inscriptions using the Greek alphabet. This chapter picks up on the theses described above, by arguing that the language of Roman ritual is present even in imitations of Homeric formula or lines otherwise steeped in Greek literary tradition. Thus, *Ann.* 469-70 (the "even if I had ten tongues and a heart of bronze" imitation of *Il.* 2.489-90) uses the language of Italic curse tablets (pp. 48-53); the parallel in question is between the phrase *lingua loqui* (as in *Ann.* 469 and Plautus, *Truc.* 224-6, where Fisher suggests the context is funereal) and *linguas ligo* or negated *loqui ... posse* (with Oscan equivalent), attested in the curse tablets—the gap between the phrases being once more representative of the distance Fisher expects Ennius' audience to cover unassisted. Fisher further suggests that the fragment's strange syntax mimics the loss of the ability to speak, in accordance with the sentiments of the curse tablets. This too is a move replicated elsewhere: for example, use of augural terminology in the Romulus and Remus passage at *Ann.* 72-91 "seems to prompt, perhaps even compel, certain word choices in the passage to the point that they overpower, and occasionally obscure, the surface narrative" (pp. 84-5). The difficulty with thus using reconstructed Italic background to explain syntactical and semantic oddities is that such oddities must to some extent be the product of textual corruption, lack of almost every form of context, and (relevantly for *Ann.* 469-70) transmission processes that play havoc with syntax. The attempt to get past these difficulties to an interpretation of the transmitted text is a courageous one,

but such courage can neither dispel nor justify ignoring the realities of the pitiful textual situation with which we are faced.

Other aspects of the chapter also reflect symptomatic problems: Fisher (p. 49) is quick not only to assign *Ann.* 469-70 to Book 6 on the basis of the difficult papyrus published by Kleve (*Cronache Ercolanesi* 20, 1990, 5-16); following Flores, he goes as far as to present it conjoined with *Ann.* 169 (*quis potis ingentis oras evolvere belli?*), the opening line of Book 6, as we understand from Cicero—a move by no means underwritten by the fragment's transmission and justified, as far as the ancient evidence is concerned, by no more than the single letter *i*- surviving from the line preceding *Ann.* 469 in the Herculaneum papyrus. With *Ann.* 469-70 now coloured with language of the curse tablets and arrayed at the outset of the Pyrrhus-narrative of Book 6, Fisher gets to a larger argument: that threatening chthonic undertones are present throughout Book 6—an example of the broader visions of Ennian strategy that punctuate the study. Here Fisher draws in other fragments attributed to Book 6 to suggest that *Ann.* 469-70 may have been used by Ennius as part of a series of moves implying that Rome's war with Pyrrhus represented a conflict between the forces of chaos, aligned with the chthonic gods evoked in curses, and the forces of order, aligned with the gods of Roman cult (pp. 31, 54). Here as elsewhere, for the present sceptically inclined reader, these larger interpretations tend to be based on insufficient evidence and too little argumentative substructure, along with too ready an acquiescence in the fragile efforts of editors, to carry full weight.

In Chapters 3 and 4, Fisher argues that latent ritual phraseology undermines the overtly positive connotations of the narrative. Thus, in Chapter 3 (pp. 57-86), "Ritual and Myth in the *Augurium Romuli* (*Annals* 72-91)", allusions to the language of ritual on the one hand elide differences in time and practice between the narrative moment, that is, the augurate of Romulus and Remus, and Ennius' present day, by implying comparable augural procedure; on the other, those same allusions, where they are associable with inauspicious results, may shade the description of Romulus' augural success with hints of foreboding. Similarly, Chapter 4, "Ritual, *Militia*, and History in Book 6 of the *Annals*" (pp. 87-126), which focuses on Pyrrhus' speech at *Ann.* 183-90, sees Pyrrhus unintentionally misusing the language both of Roman military procedure and of religious ritual so as to foreshadow his own eventual defeat; his ability to perform the newly relevant core Roman values of self-control, austerity and piety is undermined by his apparent ignorance of Roman ritual procedure. I found Fisher's arguments around Pyrrhus at *Ann.* 183-90 some of the most intriguing of the book, and some of the best supported by surviving evidence. Later in the chapter, he draws phrases from other fragments into relation with Pyrrhus' language (thus the *accipe daque* of *Ann.* 32 with Pyrrhus' *accipe dictum* at *Ann.* 187); here, the evidence again weakens, and the distance between the phrases in question again, to me at least, is striking.

At the end of the chapter, Fisher reads *Ann.* 191-3 (the *devotio* of Decius Mus) as the mirror image of Pyrrhus' inability to maintain the *pax deorum* through due reciprocal exchange with the gods. But if Decius instantiates proper Roman procedure in symbolic opposition to Pyrrhus, the picture is again complicated because it is unclear that Decius' *devotio*—if such we are witnessing at *Ann.* 191-3—was successful. As above, confidence in editorial juxtapositions of fragments underlies the interpretations proposed, as does confidence in editorial suggestions as to context; if those suggested contexts are challenged, the study's argument is threatened along with them. Neither does Fisher confront the (perhaps too obvious) question of how far the apparent ideological complexities he discusses are the result of a lacunose record.

The final chapter, "Ritual, Kinship, and Myth in Book 1 of the *Annals*" (pp. 127-62) points out how, in Book 1, Roman history is presented as family history over three generations. In this context, kinship system reference is primary, and kinship-designators take precedence over proper names: Aeneas is *pater* in Ilia's address, as the childless Romulus is elsewhere; but, because Aeneas is apparently assumed to a place beside the gods, and Romulus apparently deified, ritual system reference, in which *pater* is a common title for Roman male gods, is also latent. This ambiguity is only made more prominent by traditional ritual collocations of prayer, such as *tendebam manus*, or *voce vocabam* with its Umbrian equivalent—both expressions used by Ilia in her address to her father Aeneas. The association of *pater* and the root *gen-* as it appears in other phrases in Book 1, including in addresses to the gods (e.g. *genetrix patris*, Ilia to Venus at *Ann.* 58), is further indicative of the overlap between kinship and ritual system reference, with its destabilization of the boundary between mortals and immortals. One of the questions this chapter made salient for me was that of whether "traditional collocations", even if correctly identified, would have been sufficiently powerful to override syntactical boundaries for c. 2 and c. 1 Roman audiences: here, one of the collocations in play is the phrase *prognata patre*, recalled for Fisher by *prognata pater* (*Ann.* 36)—even though the words of the Ennian line belong to different phrases, as Fisher is of course aware. For Fisher, here and elsewhere, connections of sound and/or semantics are sufficient to override syntactical expectations—a notion with which I had trouble.

The book concludes, beyond its endnotes, with a brief, reiterative epilogue, a bibliography and a general index. The index includes a list of the collocations discussed, though absent is a list of the Ennian lines that come into consideration. The line of thought in this book is not always tidy or easy to follow, but its main propositions are clear, and the text is clean, and typos

few and far between<sup>2</sup>. While a number of Fisher's proposals are more solidly grounded, I found myself reading many more as imaginative possibilities for the *kinds* of relations Ennius' language may have borne to earlier Italic ritual language rather than as anything securely underwritten by the surviving evidence. The questions Fisher raises are fascinating ones, worth all the effort he invests in them. His study simultaneously demonstrates how fraught our paltry evidence is and how challenging it is to get to satisfactory answers.

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<sup>2</sup> I noted these: *meo* surely goes with *collegae*, not with *fidei* (p. 23); "word" for "words" (p. 33); "Livius," for "Livius." (end of p. 40); "Decimus Mus" for "Decius Mus" (p. 53); *pulcer praepes* for *pulchra praepes* (p. 65); *signormum* for *signorum* (p. 71); *cepere* for *capere* (p. 89); *Aecidae* for *Aeacidae* (p. 92); frequent reference in Ch. 4 to *Ann.* 183-90 (Pyrrhus' speech) as *Ann.* 183-91; the penultimate line of p. 107 requires "him" after "under"; *cirumis* for *circumis* (p. 139); *quis* for *qui* (p. 144); "was in" for "in" (n. 15, p. 174); "Frieheit" for "Freiheit" in the bibliographical entry for M. von Albrecht (1964).