

TWO NOTES ON VARRO'S *DE RE RUSTICA*

I. The *tres libros indices*

In the introduction to book 1 of the *De re rustica*, which also serves to introduce the work as a whole, Varro explains that he wishes to be of some benefit to his relations while he still lives, comparing himself to the Sibyl whose books were of use even after she died. He ends with a summary explanation of why he wrote his agricultural treatise¹:

quocirca scribam tibi tres libros indices, ad quos
reuertare, siqua in re quaeres, quem ad modum
quidque te in colendo oporteat facere. (1.1.4)

The phrase *libros indices* has occasioned little editorial discomfort, though the preceding *tres* has. The situation ought to be the reverse.

Varro's claim to dedicate all three books to his wife Fundania is considered problematic, since books 2 and 3 each have a different dedicatee. As well, he states in the preface to each of those two books that he has written only the first book for his wife². Hirzel sought a solution in emendation, and cleverly conjectured *scribam tibi <e>t*

¹ Citations from the *De re rustica* are from G. Goetz, *M. Terenti Varronis rerum rusticarum libri tres*, Leipzig 1929². I would like to thank the two anonymous readers for their comments and suggestions.

² 2. praef. 6: *e quis quoniam de agri cultura librum Fundaniae uxori propter eius fundum feci, tibi, Niger Turrani noster ... de re pecuaria breuiter ac summam percurram...* 3.1.9: *...tres libros institui, e quis duo scripsi, primum ad Fundaniam uxorem de agri cultura, secundum de re pecuaria ad Turranium Nigrum; qui reliquus est tertius de uillaticis fructibus, in hoc ad te mitto.*

res <et> *libros indices*³. He thereby reduces the material Varro dedicated to his wife to the *res* of the first book and the long list of other authors, the *libros indices*, which begins at 1.1.8. However, the *tres* is not as problematic as it first appears, for Varro again refers to three books shortly after the initial dedication and the catalog of Greek authors⁴. In addition, a change in dedicatee has a precedent in Varro's own *De lingua Latina*⁵. Alternative explanations for Varro's dropping of Fundania after the first book of the *RR* have been offered, most notably that she had either died or found another husband in the interval between the composition of books 1 and 2⁶, but whatever the explanation may be, there is no compelling reason to emend the *tres*.

Libros indices, on the other hand, remains a puzzle. Hirzel's emendation leaves the phrase intact⁷, and it is not clear how the plural *libros indices* could refer to the single list of 50 names which occurs somewhat later at 1.1.7. Varro does promise there a list of Greek and Roman writers (*Graecis et nostris*), but while he immediately offers a catalog of Greeks (and one Carthaginian)⁸, there is no corresponding list of Roman authors. One might wish to argue that Varro intended two lists, one of which does not appear in the manuscripts due either to textual corruption or an incomplete work. However, there is no sign in the manuscripts of such a lacuna, nor could carelessness easily explain the omission⁹.

³ R. Hirzel, *Der Dialog*, Leipzig 1895, I, 555 n.1. See R. Martin, *Recherches sur les agronomes Latins et leurs conceptions économiques et sociales*, Paris 1971, 224; K. D. White, "Roman Agricultural Writers I: Varro and His Predecessors", *ANRW I.4*, 1973, 483.

⁴ 1.1.11: *quo brevius de ea re conor tribus libris exponere...*

⁵ See H. Dahlmann, "M. Terentius Varro", *RE Suppl.* 6, 1935, 1204.30ff.

⁶ C. M. Francken, "Varroniana", *Mnemosyne* 28, 1900, 24.

⁷ Hirzel, *Der Dialog*, I, 555 n.1 also suggested that *tres libros* might be a gloss on *indices*.

⁸ 1.1.7: *qui Graecae scripserunt dispersim alius de alia re, sunt plus quinquaginta.*

⁹ See F. Zahlfeldt, *Quaestiones criticae in Varronis rerum rusticarum libros tres*, Berlin 1881, 4-5.

Furthermore, if the work were incomplete or unpolished, there would be even less reason to emend the *tres*. More important, however, is that even though *index* on its own could refer to an author list, it is not clear that *liber index*, in the singular or plural, could bear the same signification.

What Varro could have meant by *tres libros indices* is still unclear. Lists of authors or subjects in other works are referred to as an *index*, and Varro does introduce the list of names with the cognate *indicabo*¹⁰. Yet the list of authors is introduced for a different purpose than the *libros indices*. The catalog of authors, as Varro states, is for cases in which Fundania cannot find the information she seeks in the *RR*, while the *libros indices* are for Fundania to return to when she wishes to find any information she is seeking about farming within the *RR* itself¹¹. Thus, the *libros indices* would have to refer to material contained in the *RR*.

While Hirzel's conjecture at least had the merit of adhering more closely to the sense of *index*, modern editions of the *RR* unanimously retain *tres libros indices*, and translators have rendered it as "three handbooks" or something very similar¹². Although these translations attempt to offer a suitable meaning for the context and with some regard for the signification of *index*, it is doubtful that the Latin can bear such a meaning. The expression was odd enough that Lambertz, author of the *ThLL* article on *index*, felt compelled to add a gloss to explain the meaning of *libros indices*: "magistros, suasores; comparat Sibyllae libros." Lambertz's admirable attempt nonetheless betrays an uneasiness about the expression, and such unease is justified.

Outside of the phrase *digitus index*, the word *index* is never used as an adjectival modifier without further specification.

¹⁰ See O. Regenbogen, "πῖναξ", *RE* 20.2, 1950, 1454.38ff.

¹¹ 1.1.7: *In quis* [sc. *sermonibus*] *quae non inerunt et quaeres, indicabo a quibus scriptoribus repetas et Graecis et nostris*. 1.1.4: *...tres libros indices, ad quos reuertare, siqua in re quaeres, quem ad modum quidque te in colendo oporteat facere*.

¹² Hooper-Ash: "three handbooks"; Traglia: "tre libri a guisa di prontuario"; Heurgon: "un manuel pratique en trois livres"; Flach: "drei Bücher als Wegweiser schreiben."

When it does modify a noun, it is invariably accompanied by a dependent genitive, and is rather predicative or appositional than adjectival (e.g., Suet. *Iul.* 81.4 *libellumque insidiarum indicem*, Val. Max. 4.2.7 *eius epistolam <in> iudicio ultimae necessitatis indicem*)¹³. When combined with a noun signifying some form of written text, *index* usually carries the negative sense of “informing on” rather than a neutral “providing information,” as the examples show. Moreover, an *index* in reference to written works is never a “handbook.” A written *index* without further specification is a title, summary, table of contents, or list of names (equivalent to the Greek πῖναξ), and is often accompanied by an explanatory or possessive genitive¹⁴. *Libros indices*, then, if such a phrase could exist, would require a very broad and loose interpretation to arrive at “handbook.” But even if one were in consideration of Varro’s eccentric Latinity to grant the translators’ “handbooks,” the meaning is particularly ill-suited as a description for Varro’s three digressive and expansive dialogs, so unlike the treatises of Cato and Columella.

Following Hirzel’s lead, a simple emendation based on a common error may provide a better solution: *tres libros <et> indices*. What would these *indices* be? Quite simply, they would have been indexes, equivalent to a modern table of contents, for

¹³ Also Cic. *leg. agr.* 2.4 *uocem uiuam prae uobis indicem uestrarum erga me uoluntatum ac studiorum*; Liv. 7.3.7 *clauos indices numeri annorum*; 7.37.2 *altera corona eiusdem honoris index*; Vitr. 1.1.6 *porticum Persicam ex manubiis laudis et uirtutis ciuium indicem*; 1.6.4 *flantis uenti indicem uirgam teneret*. The phrase *seruus index* is found once in Livy (8.15.8), though here too *index* is predicative.

¹⁴ Cic. *de or.* 2.61: *deceptus indicibus librorum, qui sunt fere inscripti de rebus notis et inlustribus, de uirtute, de iustitia. . .*; Hort. fr. 8: *indicem tragicorum*. Sen. *epist.* 39.2: *indicem philosophorum*. Suet. *Cal.* 49.3: *sunt duo libelli diuerso titulo, alteri ‘gladio,’ alteri ‘pugio’ index erat*. Plin. *nat.* 30.4: *indicibus quoque uoluminum eius positis*. Gell. 11.16.2: *cum adlatus esset ad nos Plutarchi liber et eius libri indicem legissemus, qui erat περι πολυπραγμοσύνης*; 3.3.1: *qui pleraque Plauti comoedias curiose atque contente lectitarunt, non indicibus Aelii nec Sedigiti. . .* Quint. *inst.* 10.1.57: *ut non indicem certe ex bibliotheca sumptum transferre in libros suos possit*.

the three books, and it is these to which Fundania could refer to when she sought information about farming. This eliminates the suspect phrase, as well as explains the plural, but is there any evidence that Varro wrote *indices* for the *RR*? There is in fact a surviving *index capitulorum* at the head of book 1 in some of the manuscripts, notably the oldest (*Parisinus* 6842 A, 12th/13th c.) and the lost *Marcianus*, thought to be the source of all extant manuscripts (used by Poliziano to correct Merula's *editio princeps* of 1472)¹⁵. Heurgon, while somewhat cautiously attributing the index to Varro, points out some errors between its contents and that of the text, and thus concludes, in line with his view of the entire *RR*, that it was left incomplete¹⁶. Yet even though there are errors and this "table of contents" does not correspond to any numbered divisions of the text except those found in the *codex Florentinus* (*Laurentianus* 51.1, 15th c.)¹⁷, the index is not necessarily in the same condition in which Varro wrote it. However, much like the *index librorum Varronis* traced back to Jerome (*epist.* 33), it may nonetheless have its origins with Varro.

Indices or tables of contents by authors in antiquity can be posited for only a few works, but it is significant for the *RR* that two of these, from Cato and Columella, are also for agricultural treatises. Cato's *index* would be the oldest known, though its attribution to Cato depends upon the interpretation of a disputed phrase¹⁸. Columella, however, explicitly refers the reader to his

¹⁵ See D. Flach, *Marcus Terentius Varro: Gespräche über die Landwirtschaft. Buch 1*, Darmstadt 1996, 53.

¹⁶ The mention of the *idus Augustae* in the index would seem to indicate a post-Varronian date, though it is possible, as J. Heurgon notes (*Varron: Économie rurale, livre premier*, Paris 1978, 91), Varro could have written this in the last months of his life in 27.

¹⁷ See H. Keil, *M. Porci Catonis De agri cultura liber, M. Terenti Varronis rerum rusticarum libri tres*. vol. 2, fasc. 2: *Commentarius in Varronis rerum rusticarum libros tres*, Leipzig 1891, 80; D. Albino, "La divisione in capitoli nelle opera degli antichi", *Annali della facoltà di lettere e filosofia* 10, 1962-1963, 222-3; J. Heurgon, *Varron: Économie rurale*, 91.

¹⁸ *praef.* 4: *nunc ut ad rem redeam, quod promisi institutum principium hoc erit*. See Albino, "La divisione", 223-4.

at 11.3.65 (it has not survived), and notably, it is different from the list of Greek and Roman predecessors he gives at 1.1.7-14. Outside of the agricultural tradition, Pliny the Elder and Gellius provided *indices* of sorts for their diffuse works¹⁹. These *indices capitulorum* are called by different names (*argumenta*, *capita rerum*, and Pliny's periphrasis *quid singulis contineretur libris*), but it is at the very least plausible that Varro had provided something similar for his work. An additional piece of evidence raises plausibility to probability.

The relative clause which serves to explain the purpose of the *indices* in Varro's work is strikingly similar to expressions used by other authors to justify their *indices*. Varro claims his are a means by which Fundania can find material on how to farm:

ad quos reuertare, siqua in re quaeres, quem ad modum quidque te in colendo oporteat facere.

The other authors for whom we have definitive evidence for some form of index express the purpose for including such a guide in similar terms²⁰.

Colum. 11.3.65

...omnium librorum argumenta subieci, ut cum res exegisset, facile reperiri posset, quid in quoque quaerendum et qualiter quidque faciendum sit.

Plin. *nat. praef.* 33

...quid singulis contineretur libris, huic epistolae subiunxi summaque cura, ne legendos eos haberes. tu per hoc et aliis praestabis ne perlegant, sed, ut quisque desiderabit aliquid id tantum quaerat et sciat quo loco inueniat.

¹⁹ In the next sentence, Pliny adduces Valerius Soranus as a Latin precedent. For Pliny's *index*, see W. Kroll. "Plinius d. Ä.", *RE* 21.1, 1951, 300.11-2. For Gellius, see P.L. Schmidt, "Paratextuelle Elemente in lateinischer Fachprosa", in J.C. Fredouille, M.O. Goulet-Cazé, P. Hoffman, and P. Petitmengin (edd.), *Titres et articulations du texte dans les oeuvres antiques*, Paris 1997, 227.

²⁰ See Albino, "La divisione", 226.

Gell. *praef.* 25

capita rerum, quae cuique commentario insunt,
exposuimus hic uniuersa, ut iam statim declaretur
quid in libro quaeri inueniri que possit.

The echoes give a strong indication that Varro did indeed provide *indices* just as these other authors did, and for much the same reason.

Varro was accustomed to organization. His *Antiquitates* were carefully organized under chapter headings, of which he informs the reader in the opening fragments and which permitted Augustine to give a detailed account of the structure of that work²¹. The *De lingua Latina* as well was carefully structured, and at the beginning of each new section Varro maps out the grouping of topics²². A separate *index* would not be necessary in these cases, but the manner in which he presented his agricultural work would almost demand one. *Indices* would be useful not only for a standard work on agriculture, but even more so for one in a dialog form without a clear organization of the topics treated. Given the form of the *RR*, Fundania or any other reader would certainly have a difficult time finding information on a specific topic, but *indices* for each of the books would solve this difficulty.

A final issue: what happened to the *indices* for books 2 and 3? As Zahlfeldt points out, Nonius cites the *RR* 52 times, in each case from the first book and each time specifying *in primo libro*²³. As Nonius never cites from books 2 or 3, but was clearly aware of their existence, these books must have become separated at some point in the transmission. It was not unusual for works of more than one book to have an *index* before each book, so it is understandable that the *indices* for books 2 and 3 would have been lost²⁴.

²¹ *ARD* fr. 4 (Cardauns) = Aug. *ciu.* 6.3.

²² E.g., *ling.* 5.1.

²³ Zahlfeldt, *Quaestiones criticae*, 5.

²⁴ See P. Petitmengin, "Capitula païens et chrétiens", in J. C. Fredouille, M. O. Goulet-Cazé, Ph. Hoffman, and P. Petitmengin (edd.), *Titres et*

II. A Simple Transposition

[6] Fundanius, Fructuosior, inquit, est certe fundus propter aedificia, si potius ad antiquorum diligentiam quam ad horum luxuriam derigas aedificationem. illi enim faciebant ad fructum rationem, hi faciunt ad libidines indomitas. itaque illorum uillae rusticae erant maioris pretii quam urbanae, quae nunc sunt pleraque contra. illic laudabatur uilla, si habebat culinam rusticam bonam, praeseptis laxas, cellam uinariam et oleariam ad modum agri aptam et pauimento procliui in lacum, quod saepe, ubi conditum nouum uinum, orcae in Hispania feruore musti ruptae neque non dolea in Italia. item cetera ut essent in uilla huiusce modi, quae cultura quaereret, prouidebant. [7] nunc contra uillam urbanam quam maximam ac politissimam habeant dant operam ac cum Metelli ac Luculli uillis pessimo publico aedificatis certant. quo hi laborant ut spectent sua aestiua triclinaria ad frigus orientis, hiberna ad solem occidentem, potius quam, ut antiqui, in quam partem cella uinaria aut olearia fenestras haberet, cum fructus in ea uinarius quaerat ad dolia aera frigidiorum, item olearia calidiorum. Item uidere oportet, si est collis, nisi quid impedit, ut ibi potissimum ponatur uilla. (1.13.6-7)

The final sentence seems woefully out of place as a conclusion to Fundanius' remarks, for it has nothing directly to do with the contrast between a villa constructed according to older standards, in which practical considerations took precedence, and one built following contemporary concerns for pleasure, which are now the determining factor. He is not stating that villas used to be built on hills for practical reasons, but now they are not: he certainly would have expressed this as a contrast as he had the other items. In addition, the *item* opening the final sentence makes little sense.

articulations du texte dans les oeuvres antiques, Paris 1997, 497; Schmidt, "Paratextuelle Elemente", 227. The opening of book 2 seems to indicate a lacuna.

It would fit much better at the end of the paragraph immediately preceding as a conclusion to Scrofa's discussion, which as it now stands concludes thus:

aedificium facere oportet, sub quod tectum totam fundi subicere possis messem, quod vocant quidam nubilarium. id secundum aream faciendum, ubi triturus sis frumentum, magnitudine pro modo fundi, ex uni parte apertum, et id ab area, quo et in trituram prorueri facile possis et, si nubilare coepit, inde ut rursus celeriter reicere. fenestras habere oportet ex ea parti, unde commodissime perflari possit. (1.13.5)

The advisability of building on a hill if at all possible, which currently concludes Fundanius' brief discussion, would more logically follow from the concern about windows and breezes expressed by Scrofa. As well, the sentence, if transposed, would serve as a real end to the discussion of where best to place and how best to build a villa which Scrofa began at 1.12. Finally, the *item* makes much better sense in this context, since building on a hill would likewise help the *villa* to capture breezes.

Scrofa's final sentence contains *fenestras habere* which may have been confused with the *fenestras haberet* of Fundanius' (next-to-) last sentence, and the presence of *item* at the beginning both of the transposed sentence (*item videre oportet*) and of the final clause preceding this sentence (*item olearia calidiorem*) would also explain the transposition.

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