Introduction: History and Poetry in Ennius’ Annals
Joseph Farrell and Cynthia Damon

Studies of Ennius’ Annals have grown frequent in recent years, but they are not so common that a new contribution should require any special apology. At the same time, the range of topics and approaches found in recent studies has become much wider than before, so that a new intervention does perhaps require an explanation of its basic assumptions, methods, perspective, and goals, beyond what might be expected of any work of scholarship.

That is particularly true at the present moment. Most scholarship on the Annals prior to 1985 was principally concerned with establishing the text of this highly fragmentary work and, in a more general sense, with understanding its original form. In that year the appearance of Otto Skutsch’s edition, which is concerned with these matters to a very high degree, perhaps unexpectedly made possible a change of direction. It took some time for the impact of Skutsch’s work to be felt, but the existence of an authoritative text equipped with a copious commentary eventually proved useful to scholars interested in literary, historical, and cultural interpretation. Many of these scholars either endorsed the assumptions on which Skutsch’s edition is based or simply took them for granted, and a few have taken them even further. In short, however widely or explicitly shared the basic assumptions of Skutsch’s work may be, the work itself has to be seen as the one indispensable prerequisite for the boom in Ennian studies that has occurred in these last few decades.

Now the situation has changed again. Just a few years ago the assumptions on which Skutsch’s edition and its main predecessors are based were fundamentally questioned by Jackie Elliott, one of the contributors to this volume. It is not yet entirely clear what this will mean over the long run.

Footnotes:
1 This introduction has benefited greatly from suggestions and critiques provided by Jackie Elliott, Sander Goldberg, Jason Nethercut, and A. J. Woodman.
3 Elliott 2013.
The readers will see that the essays in this volume owe as much to Skutsch as does any other recent study of the *Annals*. At the same time, they are not, by any means, committed to the assumptions underlying his edition. On the contrary, this volume constitutes a first effort to assess where prevailing editorial assumptions have taken us, to evaluate their results in the light of Elliott’s critique, and to begin to chart a course for future research. While the positions taken by the various contributors are hardly identical, they accept that there is much to be learned about the *Annals* by striking out in new directions, questioning received opinion, and emphasizing what we do not know about many points of interest, instead of clinging to assumptions that may not, in fact, be valid.

The methodological issues involved include some that are fundamental to any sort of research, not just on this author or work but in classics and indeed the humanities in general. What constitutes progress in literary scholarship, and how can we be sure that the findings of our predecessors offer a firm foundation on which to build? Can one in the end distinguish between criticism that aims to establish matters of fact and other, less verifiable or falsifiable forms of interpretation? Is it even possible to disentangle questions of interpretation from questions of evidence, be it textual, factual, or contextual? In one sense, this is nothing but a special case of an issue that classicists have always faced, which is the perceived need to establish a tolerably reliable text before attempting any form of “higher” criticism. We say “perceived” need because the idea that one form of criticism is entirely prior to or (in whatever sense) higher than the other begs a number of questions. Perhaps the most important of these involves the assumption that the two kinds of criticism can be separated from one another. This point has been debated by classicists, vigorously and even acrimoniously at times, for decades.¹ The history of Ennian studies, however, suggests that most of us long for an authoritative text that offers a stable object of inquiry. By seeming to offer that, Skutsch’s edition potentiated the recent surge in Ennian studies and the turn from questions of textual and source criticism to those of literary, historical, and cultural interpretation of the poem and its reception.

There is no need to recapitulate here the main points of Elliott’s critique, but it will be useful to state a few points of departure for the

¹ The classic statement of this problem is by Nietzsche in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* ([1887] 2001: 99–100), where he declares, “philology presupposes a noble faith, – that for the sake of a few who always ‘will come,’ but are not there, a very great deal of painstaking, even unclean work needs to be done: it is all work in usum Delphinorum.” See recently Tarrant 2016: ch. 6, “Textual criticism and literary criticism: The case of Propertius.”
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essays that follow. The first of these has to do with the fields over which Ennius claims expertise. His principal editors, including Vahlen and Skutsch, and a number of virtuoso scholars, including Eduard Norden and Scevola Mariotti, shared a conviction about the formal models of the Annals in the realms of what Ennius dubbed (if the text is sound) res atque poemata. These editors and scholars read the phrase as signaling that Ennius himself put first the events that are the content of the Annals and allowed his own role in making the narrative to come second. For those reading the phrase thus, even in a passage that presents Ennius as alter Homerus, the dream represented by frs. 1.2–11 (2–13), the historicity of his narrative, not its poetic expression, is in some sense Ennius’ primary concern. Like most earlier editors Vahlen and Skutsch act on this assumption, placing enormous emphasis on Ennius’ relationship to a particular – but not extant – form of institutional record-keeping, the annals of the Roman pontifical college, and to a historiographical form believed to be descended from it and sharing the name annales. The poem, they believed, was a year-by-year chronicle of events, all in their proper order, with nothing left out. Livy’s Ab urbe condita, where extant, offered the most convenient point of comparison, and the pages of Skutsch’s commentary are full of arguments that a word or concept in an otherwise unplaceable fragment is comparable to a passage of Livy, and that the fragment therefore concerns the same historical event and belongs in the analogous position in the poem’s structure. The assumption is convenient if the goal is to put the remaining fragments of the Annals back into their (putatively) original order, and we will return to this point. The work of “restoring” the Annals on this basis proceeded slowly, even to the point of occupying entire careers; but the sense that those involved were making progress – because the assumptions that they shared permitted them to take part in what seemed to be a project possessed of an almost scientific rigor – was

4 Fr. 1.11 (12–13) latus <per> populo res atque poemata nostra | <clara> cluebunt. On the form used in citations of the Annals in this volume see p. 22 below. The phrase res atque poemata, which is transmitted by the source of this fragment, can serve as a shorthand for the historical content and poetic form of the Annals despite the textual problems in these lines. Even res atque has been questioned (cf. Skutsch 1985: ad loc. “Ilberg’s tergaque remains attractive”), but the use of res for “content” is paralleled at fr. **7.1 (266) scripere alii rem. However, Skutsch’s inference that “Ennius feels himself to be a rerum scriptor” (1985: 371) – a historian, in other words – is undermined by the fact that in the latter passage rem seems to mean “the [aforementioned] topic” of the first Punic War (ibid.). In context, res and poemata – modified by nostra, erro sovo – function as a compound subject for cluebunt (an emendation for cluebunt) and seem to be a hendiadys for “my Annals” or, as Goldberg and Manuwald 2018 translate it, “our subject and our poetry.” (Skutsch ignores nostra.) It may be relevant that Ennius’ contemporary Cato does not use res for the historical content of his Origins but gesta (FRHist 5 [Cato] Frb populi Romani gesta).
strong, as was the impression that the editors had achieved solid results. What is equally true, but not often noticed, is that the same procedure grants Ennius a great deal of credit as a historian and historiographer. That is to say, not only did Ennius (according to these editorial assumptions) narrate all of Roman history from the fall of Troy to the capture of Ambracia (in Book 15) and beyond (in Books 16–18), leaving nothing out along the way, but he did so with an outlook comparable to that of Livy. Can that possibly be the case?

Before trying to answer this question, let us also conjure with the fact that these same editors and scholars consider Ennius, like other Latin poets, especially in epic, to be highly implicated in the close formal imitation of poetic models. Once again, this assumption is useful to editors who wishes to impose order on the disiecti membra poetae. Just as it seemed possible to restore the order of the surviving fragments with reference to the chronology of Roman history, so too have intertextual arguments been used to adumbrate the larger contexts to which some of the surviving fragments, terse and even enigmatic as they often are, might originally have belonged. This procedure has always been more controversial than that of emphasizing the annalistic content of Ennius’ poem, and it should be particularly controversial now, after a generation of Latinists has largely redefined the nature of poetic intertextuality itself.

The procedure followed by Norden, in particular, relies on a very specific and rather narrow conception of how Latin poets worked. If the point of creating a literature in Latin was to produce a canon of texts based closely on that of the Greeks, then one could almost say that the Odyssey of Livius Andronicus was not only (perhaps) the first work of Roman literature composed with this purpose in mind, but also the most successful, because as far as we can tell it was a translation that departed from its model only as absolutely necessary to interpret the Homeric poem for a Roman audience.

Even on the surviving evidence, however, we can say that the poem falls short of close imitation in one crucial aspect: instead of Homer’s dactylic hexameter, Livius used the native Italic Saturnian meter, which has a beauty of its own but one very different from that of his model. In the Odyssey Livius made a different metrical choice than the one he made in his dramatic works, where the Latin iambic senarius is a close

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5 Livius’ epic tends to assume a conceptual priority in histories of Latin literature by analogy with the epics of Homer, although we do not in fact know whether he composed his epic before or after he began to produce dramatic scripts. On Livius’ approach to translation Mariotti [1952] 1986 remains fundamental, and Feeney 2016 is now essential for the issues of Roman translation more broadly.
approximation of the Greek iambic trimeter. Livius was followed in his metrical choices by Gnaeus Naevius, so that it was left for Ennius to complete the domestication of Homer, or the foreignization of epic verse, by adopting Homer’s meter. Eventually, all Roman epic poets followed suit and the Saturnian was abandoned, so that Ennius, not Livius, was remembered as the Roman Homer, at least until the time of Vergil.

For editors, however, Ennius’ success in adapting Homer’s meter to Latin does not offer much to the goal of reconstructing the poem. In fact, while Ennius often imitates Homeric expressions that contribute to the poem’s texture at the level of versecraft, he appears only seldom to imitate Homeric episodes and other structures that might permit us to make inferences about the architecture of the *Annals* on a larger scale. The poem simply is not an *Iliad* or an *Odyssey* in either of the ways that the poems of Livius and Vergil very obviously are. Although fragments of Livius’ poem, as a translation, can usually be placed in an order based on that of the Homeric original, for the *Annals* there is no such Homeric original. Although the structure of the *Aeneid* as a whole can be related in detail to the structures of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, that of the *Annals* cannot. This might seem to be an insuperable problem, but editors found a way. Rather than reconstructing the *Annals* with reference to Ennius’ imitation of Homer, they did so instead on the basis of later poets’ assumed imitations of Ennius. The same assumption that canonical poetry develops by almost slavish imitation of its predecessors once again justified a reconstructive procedure, since a passage of the *Annals* imitated by (almost always) Vergil could be imagined as possessing the structure and other essential features of the imitation: thus a famous scene in (say) the *Aeneid*, such as the opening of the gates of war in Book 7, was assumed to replicate a closely similar Ennian episode. In this way, Ennius has been made (so to speak) to borrow some of Vergil’s prestige: being revealed as the original genius behind some of the later poet’s most striking and memorable episodes, he is absorbed into a line of epic succession that begins with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and leads to the *Aeneid*. The ideal expression of this lineage can perhaps be seen in a pair of passages attested for Book 15, in which Ennius is said to imitate passages from *Iliad* 12 and 16, and

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6 For the principal episodes that rework particular Homeric models, see n. 8 below and *vel. inc. fr.* *7.15* (469–470) on the hundred-mouths *topos* discussed by Nethercut (Chapter 9) in this volume.

Vergil to imitate both the two Homeric passages and Ennius’ imitations in *Aeneid* 9. The fact that these passages occur in the final book of the *Annals* in Ennius’ original design has seemed to suggest that his desire to be the Roman Homer was in evidence throughout the poem, not just at the beginning or occasionally thereafter, and has encouraged the supposition that a Homeric ethos must have pervaded the *Annals*, even in ways that are not explicitly attested in the fragments that we have. Of course, this assimilation of Ennius to Homer on the one hand and to Vergil on the other entails a cost, which may be substantial. At a minimum, with respect to Homer, Ennius is branded as derivative and is compared, inevitably to his disadvantage, with the greatest of all Greek and Roman writers; and, with respect to Vergil, he is seen as laboring under the inferior aesthetic standards of his own time, upon which later generations would inevitably improve. In addition, Vergil’s imitation of Homer takes place in a poem that, like the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, has a mythical subject, so that certain questions about propriety involving style and substance simply do not arise. Ennius, on the other hand, must be evaluated on how well he has adapted the conventions of mythical poetry to his historical subject. In this sense, the two fields over which – on the reading discussed above – Ennius claims expertise, *res atque poemata*, are in conflict with one another.

The issues involved here are important, and cannot be ignored. Moreover, the way that *res* and *poemata* have traditionally been understood may distort Ennius’ actual achievement. Granting that the *Annals*, with its historical subject matter and poetic form, comprises two fields that literary historians usually treat as separable, we may nevertheless doubt whether Livy’s history on the one hand or Vergil’s poetry on the other ought to be

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8 Fr. 15.4 ≈ *Il*. 12.127–145 and fr. 15.5 (391–398) ≈ *Il*. 16.102–111; cf. Verg, *Aen*. 9.672–683 and 806–814, respectively. Skutsch 1985: 558 comments, “It can hardly be doubted that the two Ennian fragments, both quoted from Book XV, stood in the same relation to each other as the two Virgilian passages.” In fact, this is somewhat unlikely. The two Istrian brothers, like the Homeric Polypoetes and Leonteus, are defending their camp, while Ajax in a very different episode is carefully withdrawing from the Trojan assault *into* the safety of the same Greek camp. The two episodes are combined in Vergil: Pandarus and Bitias have dared to open the gates of the Trojan camp and take the fight to Turnus, who slays one of them, enters the camp, but then finds himself enclosed in it and outnumbered, so that he has great difficulty withdrawing *from* the camp to safety. Ennius’ Istrians are presumably defending their own camp, but we do not know whether his heroic tribune is defending his own camp, like Ajax, or attacking the enemy camp, like Turnus. Anything is possible, but it seems more likely that Ennius did not connect the two Homeric episodes than that he did so, with Vergil then reproducing exactly a frankly unlikely scenario. Skutsch further connects the appearance of a rainbow in fr. 15.6 (399) to the appearance of Iris warning Turnus to retreat from inside the Trojan camp at *Aen*. 9.803. On the rainbow fragment, see Farrell, Chapter 3 in this volume.
invoked as a standard of achievement in any simple sense. This may even be true of Homer, in spite of the extravagant claims that Ennius makes with regard to his predecessor. Rather than imagining what this expression and these claims might mean, especially in cases where we have only equivocal evidence, if any at all, we will make better progress if we retreat from many of the conventional assumptions that have grown up around the Annals in the process of giving the poem the form that it has assumed in the edition of Skutsch.

Whatever else a new agenda for Ennian studies may comprise, a few elements seem indispensable. These include innovation, authority, influence, and interpretation, which define the four subdivisions of this volume. Let us take them in order.

**Part I. Innovation**

It should not need to be stressed that Ennius was a remarkably innovative poet: he is, famously, the first to compose Latin dactylic hexameters, the inventor of Roman satire, author of the first (partially) surviving prose treatise in Latin, and so on. Yet this aspect of the poet does not receive the emphasis it deserves, despite the Annals being labeled by Adrian Gratwick, in his review of Skutsch 1985, “the most ambitious poem ever written in Latin.” Instead, methods of attempting to determine the structure and contents of Ennius’ poem and to understand its place in the process of translatio studiorum have caused editors to emphasize the putative similarities between the Annals and the models mentioned above, the pontifical records on the one hand and Homer on the other. On this view, the Annals is not so much an innovative poem in its own right as a chronicle versified as Homer might have done it, had he written in Latin.

Instead of approaching the Annals from this familiar angle, the three papers in Part I introduce some of the new possibilities that Ennius saw in hexametric poetry and developed in the Annals. The splendor and disruptiveness of these innovations are reflected in the Ennian alignments – poet and peacock in Book 1, poet and Discordia in Book 7 – discussed by Patrick Glaubhier in Chapter 1, “Hybrid Ennius: Cultural and Poetic Multiplicity in the Annals.”

The first claim has attracted critical attention but no satisfactory explanation: the peacock image is, to say the least, not easily compatible with the traditional image of Ennius, the font of staid Roman values. Worse, or better still, this Ennius-peacock can be understood as a Discordia-equivalent. When Ennius claims that he has “dared to unlock” (fr. 7.2
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[211] nos ausi reserare) the doors (or springs) of the Muses, we need to remember that the boldness *topos*, which is almost tediously familiar from its adoption by later poets, had to begin somewhere, and we cannot find an earlier instance than this. In other words, Ennius is not being conventionally bold: he is insisting on the unprecedented nature of his undertaking. Admittedly, his claim is tendentious and polemical, since Naevius had written an epic poem on the subject of the Roman past before Ennius, and the *Punic War* might itself be described as a discordant mixture (see further below), just as Ennius describes his *Annals*. But if we read this statement from the perspective of its reuse by later poets, we risk viewing Ennius merely as the inventor of a disingenuous claim to originality that really advertises belatedness. Through the figures of the peacock and Discordia, Glaauthier suggests, Ennius presents himself and his text as cultural hybrids that are loud, unruly, and polyvocal. And in the decrepit poet of Book 16 we have yet another attention-seeking Ennian body. As Glaauthier argues, the multiplicity of the poet of the *Annals* offers a potent symbol for the multiplicity of Romanness itself, and his paper is a protracted critique of the habit of judging Ennius on the basis of preconceived notions, some inherited from antiquity, some generated by scholars.

This line of reasoning can be taken farther. For instance, it is no accident that Ennius links his hybrid, even monstrous, self-presentation to the figure of Discordia. In addition to her other attributes, Discordia is a philosophical allegory, and to say that Ennius is a philosophical poet is a bathetic understatement. Of course, it is well known that Ennius also composed a philosophical poem entitled *Epicharmus* and translated the *Sacred History* of Euhemerus into Latin. Skutsch had no difficulty in accepting this reality,9 and even asserted the temporal priority of the *Sacred History* (1985: 3), but he did not give it the kind of emphasis that would have encouraged appreciation not only of philosophy as a theme in Ennius’ work (including several kinds of philosophy: more on this in a moment) but also of hybridity in Ennius’ authorial career: in writing the *Sacred History* Ennius becomes the *prōtos heuretēs* of Latin literary prose and the author of the first philosophical treatise in Latin, as well. In general, however, Ennius’ earlier works tend to be incorporated into larger, more

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9 See, e.g., Skutsch 1985 on fr. **1.1 (1) *Musae*; “The Pythagorean influence may in part have come from Ennius’ south-Italian background, his *Epicharmus*, and the poem itself of the *Annals* strongly suggest it”; on fr. **1.1 (1) magnum ... Olympum; “Familiar from his youth in southern Italy with Pythagorean ideas.”
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familiar narratives, treated as unimportant anomalies, or even ignored. They are central, however, to Virginia Fabrizi’s Chapter 2, “History, Philosophy, and the Annals,” which sets Ennius’ masterpiece, and specifically its philosophical content, against the background of the poet’s broader intellectual project.

Philosophy is not, or is not supposed to be, your stereotypical Roman pastime. Indeed, Ennius’ death in 169 BCE occurred fourteen years before the famous Embassy of the Three Philosophers, the event that is supposed to mark the starting point of any serious acquaintance with philosophy at Rome. But, for that matter, Ennius probably made his assertion that no Latin writer before him was “a language expert” (fr. **7.1* [209] dicti studiosus) some years before the equally famous and supposedly game-changing – at least with respect to philology – embassy of Crates of Mallos, if that did not happen until after the poet’s death.

The just-so stories of ancient cultural history should not be allowed to obscure the fact that an interest in philosophy pervades not only the Annals but also the rest of Ennius’ output. It is worth noting that, if one looks at the philosophical content of the Annals against the background of Ennius’ intellectual project, once again a rather different impression of the poem emerges. It is certainly possible to grant that Ennius’ first readers or listeners will have had different levels of experience with cultural translation and even with artistic translations from Greek into Latin, and different levels of sophistication in their interests. That said, even if not all of Ennius’ readers were of the most advanced sort, neither must we reduce the poem’s message to something that only his least cultivated readers could have perceived. Nor is it a question of addressing two different audiences in the way that allegorical interpreters appear to have assumed that Homer did, smearing the honey of sometimes scandalous myth on the rim of a cup filled with improving philosophical lessons. Concentrating on the four-element theory and the immortality of the soul, Fabrizi explicates the cultural translations that Ennius performs, innovations both terminological and conceptual, arguing that he makes available – but not mandatory for all readers – a powerful analytical link between philosophical concepts (strife,
the four elements, the soul, the generative forces in the universe) and Roman realities (war, gods, rulers, state). In this sense, the philosophical element in the Annals is more than the reflection of an existing tradition of relating epic poetry to philosophy in general or to any particular philosophical school, and more than the application of a hermeneutic strategy used to defend Homer from the disapproval of certain critics. Rather, philosophy is implicated at a deeper level in the reinterpretation of the Greek cultural and intellectual tradition present in the history and poetry of the Annals, itself a narrative of (among other things) historical change and cultural transfer.

A particular area in which our understanding of the Annals may be diminished by hyper-awareness of Homer as Ennius’ most important predecessor has to do with the gods. The final paper in the first part of this volume (Chapter 3), Joseph Farrell’s “The Gods in Ennius,” teases out the components of an Ennian theology, or rather theologies, first focusing on Book 1, which features gods with both Hesiodic (and perhaps Callimachean) antecedents alongside the Homeric Olympians, then showing the emergence in later books of a more rationalizing and possibly more contemporary theology. Taking seriously Ennius’ interest in Euhemerism, as his translation of the Sacred History suggests we should, Farrell opens our eyes to a conception of the divine that is quite different from anything that Ennius can have invented from raw materials found either in Homer or in Homer’s ancient critics. The gods of the Sacred History are mortal men who became great culture heroes and were revered after their death as if they were immortals. Notably, they were rulers and administrators who created political and social institutions. In the Annals Romulus – whose deification seems to be the invention of Ennius (Skutsch 1985: 205; Cole 2006) – conforms rather closely to this Euhemeristic pattern. This does not mean that there is no difference between the Annals and the Sacred History in the representation of the divine. It is true, however, that the surviving fragments of the Annals that we can place securely suggest both that the traditional “divine machinery” of Greek and Roman epic was less prominent in Ennius’ poem than it was in Homer or Vergil, and that it may have been prominent only in the early books of the poem. In other ways, as well, Ennius signals his interest in a conception of divine genealogy articulated by Hesiod and then reinterpreted by Euhemerus, as against Homer’s approach. On the other hand, evidence is surprisingly scarce for the theory that institutions of the Roman state cult drove Ennius’ conception of the gods. On the whole, it seems possible that the rationalizing element that is so prominent in the Sacred History is hinted at in the more