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Toward a new edition of *PHerc.* 817, the *Carmen de Bello Actiaco*

Multispectral imaging opens new opportunities for reading the Herculaneum papyri. Some of these papyri have never been read before, because their carbonization obscured the traces of ink they contain. But even already familiar texts need to be treated anew and subjected to careful editing. This paper presents new readings of a familiar text and seeks to open the way for the publication of a new edition of the *Carmen de Bello Actiaco*, sometimes known as the *Carmen de Bello Aegyptiaco*.

Papyrus Herculanensis 817 is the best preserved Latin papyrus from the Villa of the Papyri. The *Carmen de Bello Actiaco* has attracted careful attention and ingenious commentary for over 250 years. Indeed, the first textual evidence disseminated from any of the Herculaneum scrolls was a portion of two contiguous hexameters which Paderni reported in a letter dated within a month of the scrolls' discovery.

All editors intending to work with *PHerc.* 817 have to deal with its unphotogenic nature. The carbonized papyrus is difficult to read. Virtually all editors since Ciampiti (1809) have relied upon two sets of facsimile drawings, the Oxford and the Neapolitan *disegni*, made shortly after the scroll was unrolled. Baehrens (*PLM* 1897) did not edit his text of the *Carmen* by consulting the papyri, but using the facsimiles. Garuti's edition (Bologna 1958) even combined readings from the Oxford and Neapolitan facsimiles to render new, composite facsimiles. Too heavy reliance upon the *disegni* — and too little autospy of the carbonized papyri — has led editors into incorrect readings. While Courtney's fragments in *FLP* (1993) admittedly "aspir[e] to no papyrological precision," they perpetuate some of the more insecure readings introduced by earlier editors. Some new editorial work on *PHerc* 817, based upon both facsimiles and autopsy, was published by Immarco in a series of articles in the early 1990s. But new tools for Herculaneum papyrology help the modern editor overcome the faults and limitations of the *disegni*.

Since the last published edition of *PHerc.* 817 appeared, two significant developments in Herculaneum papyrology have occurred, namely the 1996 purchase of binocular microscopes by the NEH Philodemus Project and the application of multispectral imaging technology by scholars from Brigham Young University since 2000. Each of these developments moves a 21st-century editor's access to the previously obscured text of the *Carmen de Bello Actiaco* considerably further forward than was conceivable earlier. The introduction of the microscopes, according to Janko (*Philodemus on Poems*, 48) necessitated "that every papyrus in the collection … be reread." Regarding the multispectral images, he states that "all future work on the Herculaneum papyri will benefit [from the BYU images]" (ibid., "preface"). Indeed, these new digital images provide distinctly improved legibility for the texts of the Herculaneum papyri. Not only is the digital reproduction often essential to augmenting what can be seen with the naked eye, but the images provide more reliable results than any other previous attempts to reproduce the texts. This paper serves in part as a prolegomenon to future work on *PHerc* 817, giving evidence for some new readings in this unique work of Latin poetry.