

Lucretius on stone

The fortune of Lucretius is reflected also on stone: the epigraphic versifiers show to have a good knowledge of his poem

- Lucretius did not receive the same treatment as Vergil and Ovid in inscriptions: yet, the first line of *De rerum natura* was a widely famous refrain among inscribers
- Simple reminiscences from *De rerum natura* are in general more frequent than precise quotations, which anyway are not rare, especially in Pompeii
- Funerary inscriptions concerning the issue of future life are apparently the most fertile ground for Lucretius' influence on stone
- The epigraphic documents containing Lucretian quotations come mainly from Rome, Pompeii, and Africa
- The phenomenon of the epigraphic diffusion of *De rerum natura* is not chronologically homogeneous; after the initial concentration in the first century CE, a consistent recovery happens in the late empire, mostly including Christian texts
- Curiously, contrary to the citations of Vergil and Ovid on stone, citations from *De rerum natura* are not longer than a hemistich
- Overall, fourteen probable quotations from *De rerum natura* can be counted in inscriptions, ranging from the first to the fourth century CE

The following catalogue of Lucretian quotations includes documents citing, more or less precisely, at least one hemistich of *De rerum natura*. Mere allusions, imitations, or reminiscences are not included: they are on the one hand much more frequent than *verbatim* quotations, but on the other hand harder to lead back safely to Lucretius' text

Lucr. 1, 1-2: **Aeneadum genetrix hominum diuumque uoluptas | alma Venus**
("mother of Aeneas and his race, darling of men and gods, | nurturing Venus")

i. CLE 1785, l. 1: AENEADV M GENETRIX
("mother of Aeneas")

Pompeii. First century CE before 79. Dactylic meter

ii. CLE 1525c, l. 6: AENEADV M ALMA PAREN[S PRAEMIA IVSTA TIBI]

("nurturing mother of Aeneas, [fair rewards to you ...]")

Erice, Sicily. First half of the first century CE. Elegiac couplets

Lucr. 1, 7-8: **aduentuumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus | summittit flores**
("... and your coming, for you the wonder-working earth sweet | flowers puts forth")

Lucr. 1, 228: **redducit Venus, aut redductum daedala tellus**

("... Venus restores, or, when it is restored, the wonder-working earth ...")

iii. CLE 469, ll. 2b-3a: LECTIS DAEDALA TELLVS | FLORIBVS EXVLAT

("the wonder-working earth for its picked | flowers rejoices")

Tebessa, Africa proconsularis. Third-fourth century CE. Dactylic hexameters

Lucr. 1, 22: **nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras**

("without you nothing comes forth into the shining borders of light")

iv. Cugusi 2007, p. 162, l. 5: NAM HANC TVLERAT GENITOR DIVINAE LVCIS AD ORAS

("for her parent had brought her into the shining borders of light")

El Kouïf, Africa proconsularis. Second century CE. Dactylic hexameters

Lucr. 1, 37: **equae tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore**

("... and, as he lies back, his breath hangs upon your lips")

v. CLE 1347b, l. 29: EQVE TVO SEMPER DILECTVS PENDEAT ORE

("... and (I beg that), forever beloved, he will hang upon your lips")

Roma. 390-394 CE. Elegiac couplets

Lucr. 1, 1014: **nec mare nec tellus neque caeli lucida templa**

("neither sea, nor land, nor the gleaming regions of the sky")

Lucr. 2, 1039: **susplicere in caeli dignatur lucida templa**

("(no one) thinks it worth while to look up towards the bright vault of heaven")

vi. CLE 1109, l. 29: IVSSIT ET IN CAELI LVCIDA TEMPLA TVLIT

("... order and brought into the bright vault of heaven")

Roma. Early third century CE. Elegiac couplets

Lucr. 2, 1: **suaue mari magno turbantibus aequora uentis**

("pleasant it is, when on the great sea the winds trouble the waters")

vii. Cugusi 2007, p. 154, l. 1: SVABE MARI MAGNO. BYZANTIA

("pleasant (it is, when) on the great sea. Byzantia")

Pompeii. First century CE before 79. Dactylic hexameter

Lucr. 3, 1017: **uerbera carnificies robur pix lammina taedae**
("stripes, executioners, condemned cells, pitch, red-hot plates, firebrands")

viii. CLE 903, l. 1: VERBERA CARNIFICIES FLAMMAS TORMENTA CATENAS
("stripes, executioners, flames, torments, chain")

Roma. 366-384 CE. Elegiac couplets

Lucr. 3, 999: **atque in eo semper durum sufferre laborem**

("... and always to endure hard toil in the pursuit of it")

Lucr. 5, 1272: **nec poterant pariter durum sufferre laborem**

("nor could they so well bear the hard work")

Lucr. 5, 1360: **atque ipsi pariter durum sufferre laborem**

("... and themselves equally to bear the hard work")

ix. CLE 850, ll. 1-2: [C]ORPORIS ADQVE ANIMI DIROS | SVFFERRE LABORES

("... to endure hard toil of the body and of the soul")

Pommern, Germania superior. Second century CE. Dactylic hexameters

Lucr. 4, 453: **denique cum suavi deuinxit membra sopore**

("further, when (sleep) has fast bound our limbs with sweet drowsiness")

x. CLE 481, ll. 6-7: HIC IACET AETERNO DEV|INCTVS MEMBRA SOPORE

("here lies, fast bound his limbs with eternal drowsiness")

Limoges, Aquitania. Second-third century CE. Dactylic hexameters

xi. CLE 2099, l. 1: NYMFIUS AETERNO DEVINCTVS MEMBRA SOPORE

("Nymphius, fast bound his limbs with eternal drowsiness")

Valentine, Aquitania. Fifth century CE. Elegiac couplets

Lucr. 5, 21: **dulcia permulcent animos solacia uitae**

("sweet consolations of life come to soothe our minds")

Lucr. 6, 4: **et primae dederunt solacia dulcia uitae**

("(Athens) first gave the sweet consolations of life")

xii. CLE 480, l. 3: DVLCIA RESTITVENS VETERIS SOLACIA VITAE

("giving back sweet consolations of old life")

Haydrah, Africa proconsularis. Third-fourth century CE. Dactylic hexameters

Lucr. 5, 962: **et Venus in siluis iungebat corpora amantum**

("and Venus joined the bodies of lovers in the woods")

xiii. CLE 950, l. 8: SIC VENUS VT SVBITO CO(N)IVNXIT CORPORA AMANTVM

("just like Venus immediately joined the bodies of lovers")

Pompeii. First century CE before 79. Dactylic rhythm

Lucr. 6, 1021: **sponte sua sursum possunt consurgere in auras**

("they (cannot) of their own accord rise up into the air")

xiv. CLE 279, l. 18: TANTAE MOLIS OPVS SVPERAS CONSVRGERE IN AVRAS

("work of such great a size rise up into the higher air")

Roma. 357 CE. Dactylic hexameters

Epigraphic quotations of *De rerum natura* cast further light on the cultural reception of Lucretius in the first centuries of the Empire: they offer a better understanding of its textual history and fortune