

We will first examine a very rare case of emendation *ope ingenii* in a historical text in prose. It involves two Latin authors closely related to each other, since they are Titus Livius (more particularly the concluding lines of the fourth decade) and the epitome taken from the same passage by the self-styled (but otherwise unknown) Iulius Obsequens: likely pen name of the author of the *Liber Prodigiorum* – composed in the late imperial age, between the 5th and 6th centuries: shortly before the catastrophic loss of most of the 142 books *ab urbe condita*.

Here is the couple of passages to be compared with each other, by a strange coincidence both transmitted by *testes unici* – that is printed books of early XVI century; in the circumstance, their ancient sources, namely medieval manuscript antigraphs, have been lost. In this form they have seen the light after a thousand-year sleep:

Iulius Obsequens, <i>Liber prodigiorum</i> , ed. Aldina (1508), p. 496	Titus Liuius, <i>ab urbe condita</i> 40, ed. Moguntina (1518)
In lectisternio Iouis terremotu deorum capita se conuerterunt. Lana cum integumentis, quae Ioui erant apposita, decidit. De mensa oleas mures praeroserunt.	Terra mouit. In foris publicis, ubi lectisternium erat, deorum capita quae in lectis erant auerterunt se, lanaque cum integumentis quae Ioui opposita fuit, decidit. De mensa oleas quoque praegustasse mures in prodigium uersum est.

And this is how we read them today:

Obsequens, <i>Liber prodigiorum</i> 7, ed. Mastandrea (2005)	Liuius, <i>Liber ab urbe condita</i> 40, 59, ed. Briscoe (1991)
In lectisternio [Iouis] terrae motu deorum capita se converterunt; lanx cum integumentis quae Ioui erant apposita decidit de mensa, oleas mures praeroserunt. Iouis <i>del. Jahn</i> , in <i>foris coni. Oudendorp</i> lanx <i>Cuper</i>	7 terra mouit; in fanis publicis, ubi lectisternium erat, deorum capita quae in lectis errant auerterunt se 8 lanxque cum integumentis, quae Ioui opposita fuit, decidit de mensa; oleas quoque praegustasse mures in prodigium uersum est. 7 fanis <i>Duker</i> : foris <i>Mog</i> 8 lanx <i>Cuper</i> : lanaque <i>Mog. Obs.</i> : laenaque <i>Scheffer</i> integumentis <i>Mog. Obs.</i> : intrimentis <i>Oudendorp</i> : legumentis <i>uel</i> leguminibus <i>Gilbauer</i> apposita <i>Sig., cl. Obs.</i> : opposita <i>Mog.</i> fuit <i>Mog.</i> : erat, <i>cl. Obs.</i> (erant) <i>Weiss.</i> mensa. oleas <i>distinxit Heus.</i> : decidit. de <i>Mog.</i>

The text of Obsequens (at the left) is now well settled, almost unchanged in modern editions starting with Otto Jahn's (Berlin 1853). There is therefore no need to linger over the variants concerning the athetesis of *Iouis* – there was no *lectisternium Iouis* among the rites of the ancient Roman religion, and for this reason Franz Oudendorp had corrected *in foris* thanks to the comparison with parallel lines of Livy. The philologists who later took care of the text also judged to be negligible other conjectures aimed at correcting *integumentis* with *intrimentis* (the first being translated in the Lewis-Short dictionary as “plate-covers, lids”, while the other is a technical culinary term attested only once in Apuleius (ThL VII/1, 51, 36 ss.]). Even less likely are *legumentis* or *leguminibus* (in his commentary Briscoe 2007 calls them “ridiculous”).

Perhaps more worth of attention are the variant and alternative readings *lana* / *lanx*: an *emendatio ope ingenii* made by G. Cuper, transmitted to Pieter Burman the Elder and by Burman to the young Frans van Oudendorp; this was how the amended word *lanx* entered for the first time the edition Julii Obsequentis Quae supersunt ex libro de prodigiis etc., Lugduni Batavorum 1720, after the learned

Strasbourgian scholar Joannes Scheffer (Julii Obsequentis De prodigiis liber etc., Amstelaedami 1679) had attempted to propose *laena*.

Undoubtedly, *lanx* adapts perfectly to the situation. A plate full of food was placed in front of the statue of Jupiter; when the earthquake struck, the dish *decidit de mensa*, fell from the laid table, and it was considered a further miracle that the mice enjoyed some olives in advance of the solemn public rite.

I edited the *Liber prodigiorum* almost twenty years ago, reproducing the text of these lines in the form adopted by almost all scholars over the last three centuries; but since publication, I have never stopped looking in my mind for a way to preserve *lanx*: to no avail. In fact, *lanx* is an extremely good conjecture, but it sounds very strange to me that the same error occurred in in the same word and in the same context, the two manuscript traditions being completely independent. Furthermore, a minor *error coniunctivus* concerns grammatical (syntactical) elements in the sentence: that is punctuation marking a strong pause after *decidit* rather than after *mensa*. I have not been able to find a good motivation for it, so I think it's necessary to offer a suitable hypothesis to explain the genesis of the parallel fault. Here it is.

The books *Ab urbe condita* were already hard to find, in fact almost unavailable, towards the end of the 4th century. The well-known *subscriptions* in the codes of the first decade tell us that in the political-cultural environment of the Symmachi-Nicomachi was set the philological revision *totius operis Liviani*. The aim was mainly felt by the senatorial aristocracy, caring to defend the glorious past of Rome from the attacks contained in the speeches and writings of the Fathers of the Western Church: starting with Saint Jerome and even more strongly Saint Augustine. We know that their generous resistance, their cultural and philanthropic efforts, were only partially successful, managing to save only 35 of the 142 books from the wreck, in the foggy obscurity of the Dark Ages.

Since Obsequens came to select and recount the *prodigia* that happened in the Roman world up to 17 B.C., the *Liber prodigiorum* was certainly written when one could read the complete work of Livy: so it is necessary to think that the defect existing at the end of the book XL was already found right in the copy from which the epitome was extracted – probably around the year 500, just before the chronicle of Cassiodorus.

That copy had to be the ancestor manuscript from which the *editio Moguntina* also derived. We must believe that the late-antique edition of Livy was written in capital letters, where the slide from LANX to LANA (a *lectio facilior*) is not surprising, given the frequency of the paleographic phenomenon.

Short bibliography

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