

McOsker

Introduction to Herculaneum Papyrology

In 79 CE, Mount Vesuvius erupted, burying both Pompeii and its less famous neighbour, Herculaneum. Just outside Herculaneum, along the road towards Naples, was a gigantic seaside villa—possibly the largest private residence known from Classical antiquity. In it was a library of philosophical texts, which were carbonized in the pyroclastic flow and buried underground. These circumstances paradoxically preserved them until they were rediscovered in 1752. The Herculaneum papyri are one of the most important sources for Hellenistic philosophy and for new Classical texts, but their precarious and fragmented state of conservation makes them difficult to edit and understand.

In this class, we will review the physical history of the papyri, from carbonization to dismemberment to contemporary attempts to reassemble them. The goal is to provide students with an advanced introduction to the innards of editions of these papyri. Students will become familiar with the 18th and 19th century sketches of the papyri (called '*disegni*') that are a major source for lost parts of the text as well as the infrared photographs that are now the basic tool of contemporary Herculaneumists. Then we will proceed through a series of case studies of various texts, possibly including Epicurus, Chrysippus, Polystratus, and Philodemus, working through the sources for these texts—reading them and discussing editors' choices—as well as their philosophical content. At the end of term, we will examine the most recently published texts recovered *via* x-ray tomography and a machine-learning algorithm from rolls that have never been physically unrolled (a book of Philodemus' *On Vices* and a work, possibly on perception or music, by an unknown author, possibly Philodemus). Exact choice of case study will depend on student interest, and student presentations are encouraged (you learn by doing).

The class is addressed to anyone interested in the papyri, but knowledge of Ancient Greek is expected.

Texts and Schedule

The instructor will provide editions and images for the texts chosen in consultation with the participants. Weeks 1 and 2 will be dedicated to background information about the papyri and their editions, possibly extending into Week 3; from Week 3 we will begin to read texts and examine their sources; Week 8 will be dedicated to the most recently published material.