

UNTARNISHED BOOKS AND VANISHED KINGS: NUMA, OVID AND ENNIUS*

ABSTRACT

*This article argues that the discovery of Pythagorean volumes in Numa's tomb in 181 B.C. may have played a significant role in the conception of the meeting between Numa and Pythagoras in the last book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, since several features of this event integrate very well into the discourse at the heart of Book 15 on the Greek origins of Roman culture and literature, on the immortality of poetry, and on the relationship between poetry and power. The article further argues that Ennius' *Annals* Book 15 may have covered the events up to 179, if that really was the year of Nihilior's dedication of the Aedes Herculis Musarum, and included the discovery of Numa's books in 181; and hence that Ovid may have used the Ennian account of this discovery as a model for the Numa–Pythagoras episode, appropriating the poetic and political meaning that it already had in *Annals* Book 15.*

Keywords: *Aedes Herculis Musarum*; censorship; Ennius; Numa; Ovid; Pythagoras; *sphragis*

Rome, 181 B.C.¹ While digging at the foot of the Janiculum Hill, some farmers chance upon two stone chests buried in the fields. The chests are promptly unearthed and unsealed. One, the coffin of Numa, is empty, the king's corpse having vanished; the other still contains Numa's writings on pontifical law and reportedly Pythagorean philosophy, which have remained untarnished over the centuries (Livy 40.29.3–8):

eodem anno in agro L. Petillii scribae sub Ianiculo, dum cultores agri altius moliuntur terram, duae lapideae arcae, octonos ferme pedes longae, quaternos latae, inuentae sunt, operculis plumbo deuinctis. litteris Latinis Graecisque utraque arca inscripta erat, in altera Numam Pompilium Pomponis filium, regem Romanorum, sepultum esse, in altera libros Numae Pompilii inesse. eas arcas cum ex amicorum sententia dominus aperuisset, quae titulum sepulti regis habuerat, inanis inuenta, sine uestigio ullo corporis humani aut ullius rei, per tabem tot annorum omnibus absumptis. in altera duo fasces candela inuoluti septenos habuere libros, non integros modo sed recentissima specie. septem Latini de iure pontificum erant, septem Graeci de disciplina sapientiae, quae illius aetatis esse potuit. adicit Antias Valerius Pythagoricos fuisse, uulgatae opinioni, qua creditur Pythagorae auditorem fuisse Numam, mendacio probabili accommodata fide.

That same year, when men working on the land dug deeper than usual in the earth of a field below the Janiculum belonging to a clerk called Lucius Petilius, two stone chests were uncovered, some eight feet long and four feet broad, with lids sealed with lead. Both chests were inscribed with Greek and Latin letters. On the first it was stated that Numa Pompilius, son of Pompo and king of the Romans, was interred there, and on the second that it contained the books of Numa Pompilius. On the advice of his friends, the owner opened these chests. The one which had borne the name of the buried king was found to be empty, with no sign of a

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¹ All the dates in this article, apart from those in bibliographical references, are B.C.

human body or of anything at all; all traces had been removed by the putrefaction of many years. In the other, two bundles tied with waxed ropes contained seven books each. They were not merely complete, but looked very new. Seven were in Latin dealing with pontifical law, and seven in Greek discussing a system of philosophy which could have existed in Numa's day. Valerius Antias adds that they were Pythagorean, by this plausible fiction lending credence to the widely-held belief that Numa was a disciple of Pythagoras. (transl. P.G. Walsh)

Regarded as a threat to Roman religion, these writings are publicly burnt by the *uicimarum* at the behest of the Senate, on the advice of the *praetor urbanus* Quintus Petilius (40.29.9–14). This is Livy's script; other accounts of this memorable event differ on minor details, but all agree on the two essential features of this story: the *miraculum* (Plin. *HN* 13.85) of Numa's unaged papyri and their public condemnation.²

In this article, I contend that the discovery of the Janiculum Hill Scrolls (JHS hereafter), certainly an event worthy of Ovid's fascination for the miraculous, played a major role in the conception of the Numa–Pythagoras episode in *Metamorphoses* Book 15. There is no textual evidence to prove this; instead, the whole argumentation will be largely based on thematic affinities.

Let us start by stating the obvious. First, the JHS were the most famous, if controversial, documents concerning Numa's equally controversial Pythagoreanism. It is therefore legitimate to posit that Ovid took them into consideration when he made Numa's Pythagoreanism the philosophical underpinning (however serious) of his epic.³ Second, the content of the JHS—half on Pythagorean philosophy (according to Valerius Antias) or some sort of Presocratic philosophy (*de disciplina sapientiae, quae illius aetatis esse potuit*), half on religious matters—broadly matches the content of the speech of Ovid's Pythagoras, who mixes Pythagorean tenets with Empedoclean–Lucretian teachings *de rerum natura*, alongside precepts on sacrificial rites.⁴

However, as I go on to argue, there are further analogies between the discovery of the JHS and the Numa–Pythagoras episode which penetrate more deeply into the poetics and politics of (the last book of) Ovid's epic.

² For comparative analysis of the sources, see G. Garbarino, *Roma e la filosofia greca dalle origini alla fine del II secolo A.C. Raccolta di testi con introduzione e commento* (Turin, 1973), 244–9; K. Rosen, 'Die falschen Numabücher. Politik, Religion und Literatur in Rom 181 v. Chr.', *Chiron* 15 (1985), 65–90, at 66–78; J.-M. Pailler, *Bacchanalia. La répression de 186 av. J.-C. à Rome et en Italie* (Rome, 1988), 624–39; A. Willi, 'Numa's dangerous books: the exegetic history of a Roman forgery', *MH* 55 (1998), 139–72; A. Storch Marino, *Numa e Pitagora. Sapientia constituendae civitatis* (Naples, 1999), 168–88; V. Rosenberger, 'Die verschwundene Leiche: Überlegungen zur Auffindung des Sarkophags Numas im Jahre 181 v. Chr.', in B. Kranemann and J. Rüpke (edd.), *Das Gedächtnis des Gedächtnisses: Zur Präsenz von Ritualen in beschreibenden und reflektierenden Texten* (Marburg, 2003), 39–59, at 40–4.

³ The affair of the JHS features among the Ovidian sources for Numa's Pythagoreanism in R. Crahay and J. Hubaux, 'Sous la masque de Pythagore. À propos du livre 15 des *Métamorphoses*', in N. Herescu (ed.), *Ovidiana. Recherches sur Ovide publiées à l'occasion du bimillénaire de la naissance du poète* (Paris, 1958), 283–300, at 291; F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso, Metamorphosen, Buch XIV–XV* (Heidelberg, 1986), 252; S. Stocchi, 'Pitagora e l'ultima metamorfosi di Ovidio', *Sileno* 31 (2005), 159–84, at 161–3. The JHS and *Metamorphoses* Book 15 are cited and discussed in parallel, but never explicitly linked, in P. Boyancé, 'Fulvius Nobilior et le dieu ineffable', *RPh* 29 (1955), 172–92.

⁴ A hint at this in A. Delatte, 'Les doctrines pythagoriciennes des livres de Numa', *BAB* 22 (1936), 19–40, at 32–3. On Ovid's Pythagoras, Empedocles and Lucretius, see P.R. Hardie, 'The speech of Pythagoras in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 15: Empedoclean epos', *CQ* 45 (1995), 204–14; C.P. Segal, 'Intertextuality and immortality: Ovid, Pythagoras and Lucretius in *Metamorphoses* 15', *MD* 46 (2001), 63–101; C. Barone, 'Omnia mutantur, nihil interit. Un epos pseudo-didascalico sul mondo in trasformazione' (Diss., University of Palermo, 2017), 118–65.

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Numa's books were written half in Latin and half in Greek (*septem Latini ... septem Graeci*). Livy further adds, alone among the extant sources, that both chests were engraved in the two languages (*litteris Latinis Graecisque utraque arca inscripta erat*), so as 'to bolster the claim that the books contained both Greek philosophy and Roman religious law'.⁵

The biculturalism and bilingualism of the JHS was a token of Numa's alleged philhellenism. The question of Numa's Pythagoreanism was a matter of political and intellectual debate between stout nationalists, unwilling to have the second founder of Rome raised in foreign culture, and philhellenes. A telling example is offered by Cicero's Manilius, who reacts with pride to Scipio's refutation of Numa's Pythagoreanism as a gross anachronism, relieved at the thought that Roman religion is not grounded in doctrines imported from overseas (*ac tamen facile patior non esse nos transmarinis nec inportatis artibus eruditos, sed genuinis domesticisque uirtutibus*, *Rep.* 2.29). The debate must have become topical in the increasingly Hellenized Rome of the early second century, in the decade of the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* and Cato's censorship, when the JHS were discovered.⁶ Scholars overall agree that Numa's volumes were forged *ad hoc*, the entire affair being but a *mise-en-scène* contrived by the Roman philhellene elite and/or contemporary Pythagorean sects to provide tangible evidence for Numa's Pythagoreanism,⁷ or alternatively by the opposite faction to condemn the Hellenizing trend by having those 'exotic' volumes found and publicly burnt at once.⁸

The shade of this debate on the Greekness and Romanness of archaic Rome integrates well into the last book of the *Metamorphoses*, when the westward transition of universal history from the Greek East to Rome that has taken place throughout the poem finally reaches its *telos*. The setting of the Numa-Pythagoras meeting, Croton, an Italian city founded by a Greek exile (just like Lavinium), is a symbolic venue for the colloquy between the Greek philosopher and the Roman king, and for the wedding of Greek and Roman cultures.⁹ The Lucretian voice of the Ovidian *uates* further invests Pythagoras with the (bi)cultural authority of the poet who turned Epicurus' Greek prose into Latin poetry and spread his philosophy in Rome, in a task of cultural assimilation

⁵ P.G. Walsh, *Livy, Book XL (182–179 B.C.)* (Warminster, 1996), 150.

⁶ See Garbarino (n. 2), 250–6; A. Grilli, 'Numa, Pitagora e la politica antiscipionica', in M. Sordi (ed.), *Politica e religione nel primo scontro tra Roma e l'Oriente* (Milan, 1982), 186–97; Rosen (n. 2), 78–90; E. Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy* (Leiden / New York / Copenhagen / Cologne, 1990), 158–70; D. Musial, 'Les livres de Numa: quelques reflexions sur l'hellenization de la culture romaine', in D. Musial (ed.), *Society and Religion. Studies in Greek and Roman History* (Toruń, 2005), 63–75. On the JHS and the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*, see Pailler (n. 2), 669–703; in Livy, see J. Briscoe, *A Commentary on Livy, Books 38–40* (Oxford, 2008), 484–5.

⁷ See Delatte (n. 4), 38–40; L. Ferrero, *Storia del pitagorismo nel mondo romano (dalle origini alla fine della repubblica)* (Turin, 1955), 231–5; K.R. Prowse, 'Numa and the Pythagoreans: a curious incident', *G&R* 11 (1964), 36–42; W. Speyer, *Bücherfunde in der Glaubenswerbung der Antike: Mit einem Ausblick auf Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 1970), 51–5.

⁸ See M.-J. Pena, 'La tumba y los libros de Numa', *Faventia* 1 (1979), 211–29; Gruen (n. 6), 163–70; Musial (n. 6).

⁹ See C.P. Segal, 'Myth and philosophy in the *Metamorphoses*: Ovid's Augustanism and the Augustan conclusion of Book XV', *AJPh* 90 (1969), 257–92, at 288–9.

thoroughly comparable to that of Numa's alleged Pythagoreanism. Finally, the evocation of the debate around the Greekness of Roman religion is central to *Metamorphoses* Book 15: an 'appendix' to the Numa section is formed by the story of the Romanization of the Greek cult of Hippolytus (15.497–546), shortly followed by the importation of the cult of Asclepius/Aesculapius (15.622–744), to whose Greek provenance Ovid draws the attention from the very opening of the episode (*unde*, 15.624).

There is a champion of philhellenism who stands out in this historical and literary debate: Marcus Fulvius Nobilior, consul in 189 and censor in 179.¹⁰ In the decade when the JHS were discovered, Nobilior triumphed over the Aetolian League in Ambracia, bringing back from there to Rome a legendary booty with innumerable Greek artworks. Among these artworks were the statues of the Muses, which he placed in the temple that he (re)dedicated to Hercules, the *Aedes Herculis Musarum* (*AHM* hereafter).¹¹ Then, he also moved the shrine of the Camenae, the Latin Muses, originally located in the grove of Numa and temporarily sheltered in the temple of Honos and Virtus, into the *AHM* (Serv. on *Aen.* 1.8). The transferral of the Greek Muses to Rome and their eventual cohabitation with the Camenae was a powerful symbol of the syncretic fusion of Greek and Roman literature and culture.¹²

Nobilior appears to have been an admirer of King Numa. The *Fasti* reportedly placed in the *AHM* by Nobilior (Macrob. *Sat.* 1.12.16) probably presented Numa as the great calendar reformer, whose reforms had been recently revived by the *lex Acilia de intercalando*, introduced in 191, at the start of the Aetolian War (*inito mox bello Aetolico*, Macrob. *Sat.* 1.13.21). Nobilior's devotion to the Camenae may also have had to do with his devotion to Numa, whose wife was closely related to the Latin goddesses (Livy 1.21.3). More importantly, Nobilior had interests in Greek, and specifically Pythagorean, philosophy, just like Numa.¹³ A fragment from Johannes Lydus's *De ostentis*, late yet likely to rely on authoritative sources,¹⁴ states that Fulvius, identified by most scholars with Nobilior, derived his theories on divinity and providence, of Platonic–Pythagorean matrix, from the books of Numa (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν Φουλάβιος φησιν ἐκ τῶν τοῦ Νουμᾶ ἱστορήσας, *Ost.* fr. 16A, page 47 Wachsmuth). Delatte's hypothesis that this fragment reports the actual content of the JHS and Boyancé's consequent conclusion that Fulvius' *Fasti* was no less than the JHS themselves are

¹⁰ See A. Walther, *M. Fulvius Nobilior. Politik und Kultur in der Zeit der mittleren Republik* (Mainz, 2016), 248–58.

¹¹ Ovid alludes to, and rewrites, this event in *Metamorphoses* Book 15 in the transferral of the statue of Aesculapius from Epidaurus to Rome.

¹² See E. Sciarino, 'A temple for the professional Muse: the *Aedes Herculis Musarum* and cultural shifts in second-century B. C. Rome', in A. Barchiesi, J. Rüpke and S. Stephens (edd.), *Rituals in Ink. A Conference on Religion and Literary Production in Ancient Rome Held at Stanford University in February 2002* (Munich, 2004), 45–56; E. La Rocca, 'Dalle Camene alle Muse: il canto come strumento di trionfo', in A. Bottini (ed.), *Musa pensosa. L'immagine dell'intellettuale nell'antichità* (Rome, 2006), 99–133, at 105–8; F. De Stefano, '*Hercules Musarum in circo Flaminio*: dalla dedica di Fulvio Nobilior alla *Porticus Philippi*', *AC* 65 (2014), 401–32, at 401–2; A. Hardie, 'The Camenae in cult, history and song', *CA* 35 (2016), 45–85, at 75–9. The Camenae were probably moved to the *AHM* at the same time as the temple was dedicated.

¹³ On Nobilior and Greek philosophy (especially Pythagoreanism), see Boyancé (n. 3); Storch Marino (n. 2), 192–6; V. Fabrizio, 'Ennio e l'*Aedes Herculis Musarum*', *Athenaeum* 90 (2008), 193–219, at 203–9; P. Vesperini, 'Retour sur Marcus Fulvius Nobilior, le temple des Muses et la philosophia', *BCACR* 120 (2019), 313–18. More sceptical: Walther (n. 10), 226–30.

¹⁴ Probably Varro's antiquarian works: J. Rüpke, 'Ennius's *Fasti* in Fulvius's temple: Greek rationality and Roman tradition', *Arethusa* 39 (2006), 489–512, especially 507.

unfortunately implausible;¹⁵ they take to the extreme the more reasonable assumption that the sudden appearance of a mix of Greek and Latin writings attributed to Numa can hardly have escaped the notice of the man, then in the heyday of his political career, who placed under the same roof the Muses imported from Greece and the Camenae of Numa's grove; and even that Nobilior may have somehow been actively involved in the JHS affair, whether in the debate that must have arisen thereupon or even in contriving the forgery itself.¹⁶

Nobilior's military and cultural achievements were recorded by Ennius and seem to have constituted the core of *Annals* Book 15, the last book in the original conception of the poem. *Annals* Book 15 is thought to have ended with the triumph of Nobilior in 187 (two years after the actual victory) and the subsequent dedication of the *AHM*.¹⁷ Indeed, one can hardly think of a more appropriate ending for a work aspiring to be the Roman version of the Homeric poems, composed by a poet who claims to be the Pythagorean reincarnation of Homer, than the physical (and linguistic) translation of the Muses, still dwelling on Mt Olympus in the proem (*Musae, quae pedibus magnum pulsatis Olympum*, fr. 1 Skutsch), to Rome, in the company of their Latin aliases (*Musas quas memorant nosce nos esse <Camenas>*, fr. 487).¹⁸ The dating of this dedication divides scholars: some think that the *AHM* was dedicated together with the *manubiae* of the Aetolian campaign (Cic. *Arch.* 27), shortly after the triumph itself, in 187; others prefer to date the event to 179, the year of Nobilior's censorship, as by Eumenius' later testimony (*Pan. Lat.* 9.7.3).¹⁹ Now, if the lower dating is correct, then *Annals* Book 15 may well have reached beyond Nobilior's triumph in 187, up to Nobilior's censorship in 179; more crucially, it may have in some way included, possibly towards the end, the discovery of the JHS in 181.²⁰

This hypothesis is appealing for several reasons. First, the lower dating would explain away the gap intervening in the eventful years between Book 15, thought to

¹⁵ See Delatte (n. 4), 35–8; Boyancé (n. 3), 184; Pailler (n. 2), 644–7. More cautious: Rüpke (n. 14), 505–6.

¹⁶ See Rosen (n. 2), 83–90. L. Hermann, 'Ennius et les livres de Numa', *Latomus* 5 (1946), 87–90 goes too far in arguing that Ennius was the ghostwriter of the JHS.

¹⁷ See O. Skutsch, 'Enniana, I', *CQ* 38 (1944), 79–86, at 79–81; O. Skutsch, *The Annals of Q. Ennius. Edited with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford, 1985), 5–6, 553. On Ennius, Nobilior and the *AHM*, see also I. Gildenhard, 'The "annalist" before the annalists: Ennius and his *Annales*', in U. Eigler et al. (edd.), *Formen römischer Geschichtsschreibung von den Anfängen bis Livius. Gattungen, Autoren, Kontexte* (Darmstadt, 2003), 93–114; Rüpke (n. 14), 508–12; Fabrizi (n. 13); P. Heslin, *The Museum of Augustus. The Temple of Apollo in Pompeii, the Portico of Philippus in Rome, and Latin Poetry* (Los Angeles, 2015), 202–7; Walther (n. 10), 230–5.

¹⁸ The attribution of fr. 487 Skutsch to Book 15 is debated but preferable, since there it would fittingly refer to Nobilior's bringing together of the Muses and the Camenae in the *AHM*: Skutsch (n. 17 [1944]), 81–2; Fabrizi (n. 13), 193–8, 214–16.

¹⁹ The *status quaestionis* of the dating of the *AHM* is outlined by De Stefano (n. 12), 403–5 with nn. 23–8. I have a strong preference for the lower date: see especially M. Martina, 'Aedes Herculis Musarum', *Dialoghi di Archeologia* 3 (1981), 49–68; A. Gobbi, 'Hercules Musarum', in M. Harari, S. Paltineri and M.T.A. Robino (edd.), *Icone del mondo antico. Un seminario di storia delle immagini*. Pavia, Collegio Ghislieri, 25 novembre 2005 (Rome, 2009), 215–33.

²⁰ A.S. Gratwick, 'Ennius' *Annales*', in E.J. Kenney and W.V. Clausen (edd.), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature* (Cambridge, 1982), 60–76, at 65 suggests that *Annals* Book 15 culminated in (or around) 184. The hypothesis is accepted by D.C. Feeney, 'Mea tempora: patterning of time in the *Metamorphoses*', in P.R. Hardie, A. Barchiesi and S. Hinds (edd.), *Ovidian Transformations. Essays on the Metamorphoses and its Reception* (Cambridge, 1999), 13–30, at 17–18 = D.C. Feeney, *Explorations in Latin Literature*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 2021), 183–203, at 188–9. However, a climax in the year in which Cato beat his rival Nobilior in the running for censorship (Livy 39.40.1–3) is rather unlikely—a defeat that Nobilior reversed in the elections of 179.

have ended in 187, and Book 16, which seems to start with the Histrian War of 178;²¹ if Book 15 ended with the dedication of the *AHM* in 179, however, then it comes as no surprise that the next book should start with the events of the following year.²² Second, Numa's 'literary' agenda would also match Ennius', the Roman poet who imported the Homeric hexameter into Latin epic and claimed to be a Pythagorean reincarnation of Homer. Antias also reports that the JHS came as two sets of twelve volumes each (Plin. *HN* 13.87); whatever the actual number of rolls, the 'Homeric' number reported by this version, 24, would have fitted well as a symbol for the 'Homeric' epic of the *Annals*. Third, the discovery of Pythagorean writings towards the end of the poem would have established a powerful ring-composition with the Pythagorean dream of the proem. One could speculate further that Ennius, in the same way as he presented himself as the Pythagorean reincarnation of Homer (fr. 3 Skutsch), may have presented Nobilior, the Republican epigone of Numa, as the Pythagorean reincarnation of the king, the utter disappearance of whose body, as Pailler suggests, does have the flavour of a metempsychosis after all.²³

Most importantly, however, the inclusion of the JHS tale towards the end of *Annals* Book 15, would have linked up with the *AHM*, dedicated in the closure of the poem. The presence of Greek and Latin books within the same chest would have been regarded as a literary version of the temple where Greek Muses and Latin Camenae came to live together in the form of statues: Nobilior's temple was the plastic realization of Numa's books.²⁴ And the presence of volumes on Pythagorean philosophy and Roman pontifical law within the same chest would have likewise been a literary version of the new Pythagorean Μουσείον²⁵ in which Fulvius placed his own Roman *Fasti*, inspired by Numa's like writings.

Owing to the fragmentary status of Ennius' poetry, this hypothesis is doomed to remain speculative, and whether we accept it or not should not affect my basic argument about Ovid and the JHS. But if this reconstruction gets anywhere close to what was there in Ennius' lost epic, then Ovid would have found the JHS tale, used as a foil for Nobilior's poetic temple, in *Annals* Book 15, an important model for *Metamorphoses* Book 15,²⁶ and appropriated the poetic and cultural symbolism already assigned to it by Ennius himself. The rest of this article explores the political symbolism of this story.

²¹ The problem is outlined (and ultimately left unsolved) by Skutsch (n. 17 [1985]), 564. J. Elliott, *Ennius and the Architecture of the Annales* (Cambridge, 2013), 301–2 leaves a double question mark on the initial year of Book 16.

²² An objection to this hypothesis could be the sudden acceleration of narrative pace in *Annals* Book 15, spanning through an entire decade (189–179), as opposed to Books 13 and 14, covering roughly one year each (192–190). This seems to be why S.M. Goldberg and G. Manuwald, *Fragmentary Republican Latin*, vol. 1: *Ennius: Testimonia, Epic Fragments* (Harvard, 2018), 310–11 remain sceptical about *Annals* Book 15 ending with the dedication of the *AHM*. However, sudden accelerations of this kind are not unparalleled in the *Annals*: see the handy table in Elliott (n. 21), 299–302. Besides, even if *Annals* Book 15 stops in 187, one would have to accept an acceleration of pace in Book 16 anyway, unless one wants the years 187–179 to be left entirely untold. Cicero's testimony (*Prov. cons.* 20), assigned to Book 16 by Skutsch (fr. viii), would obviously have to be reassigned to Book 15, as in Goldberg and Manuwald (this note), 310–12; pace Walther (n. 10), 192.

²³ See Pailler (n. 2), 639–44.

²⁴ An association between Numa's books and the statues of the Muses in the *AHM* is timidly suggested by Pailler (n. 2), 690.

²⁵ On the Pythagorean cult of the Muses, see Boyancé (n. 3), 182–4; Hardie (n. 12).

²⁶ On *Metamorphoses* Book 15 and *Annals* Book 15, see Feeney (n. 20 [1999]), 27–8 = Feeney (n. 20 [2021]), 199–201. The poetic reception of the 'first closure' of the *Annals* includes other Augustan (quasi-)closures: the originally final poem of Horace's *Odes* (*Carm.* 3.30); the 'other

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The tale of the two chests, one (no longer) containing a vanished king, the other his untarnished books, is a potential metaphor for the relationship between power and literature, evoking the material ephemerality of the former as opposed to the immortality of the latter. In particular, the funerary setting of the discovery, Numa's tomb, dramatizes the idea that books are memorials more eternal than the mausolea that rulers are wont to build for themselves.²⁷

Ennius applied this idea to his own poetry (cf. fr. 30, 44–6 Courtney). In two consecutive fragments from *Annals* Book 16, likely to belong to the proem and to be tightly interlinked with one another, the poet speaks of kings who 'seek statues and memorials and build fame' for themselves (*reges per regnum statuasque sepulcraque quaerunt, | aedificant nomen, summa nituntur opum ui*, fr. 404–5 Skutsch) and evokes the destructive power of time (*postremo longinqua dies confecerit aetas*, fr. 406). The fact that these fragments open the book which Ennius, according to Pliny (*HN* 7.101), added to *Annals* Books 1–15 to celebrate the Caecilii, which he may also have acknowledged in the new proem, 'all but compels us to assume that he contrasted the transient nature of fame based on the monuments with the eternal glory which his poetry would bestow on his heroes', à la Horace.²⁸ I would also link these fragments with those, equally from the proem of *Annals* Book 16, in which Ennius describes his growing age (fr. 401 Skutsch) and the weakening of his body (fr. 402; cf. *nunc senio confectus quiescit*, fr. 523): with another 'Horatian' move, the poet may be anticipating his approaching death and the subsequent survival, with his *melior pars*, in the form of his poetic work. In these terms, the discovery of the JHS three years before the Histrian War, wherever Ennius may have narrated or alluded to it (towards the end of *Annals* Book 15?), would also match with the proem of *Annals* Book 16: for the image of a royal tomb found empty and a 'literary' tomb still full of brand-new books would set up the same type of contrast between the ephemeral memorials of kings and the imperishable monument of the *Annals*.

The potential of the JHS as a symbol for the immortality of poetic works as opposed to the transience of earthly and royal things occurs in two key sections of *Metamorphoses* Book 15, intratextually linked with one another (like *Annals* Books 15 and 16?), in which Ovid dramatizes the relationship between literature and power: first at the

closure' of the *Aeneid*, the Palatine temple of Apollo on Aeneas' Shield (*Aen.* 8.720–8), as already was the poetic temple in the medial proem of the *Georgics* (3.10–39); and Philippus' restoration of the *AHM* at the end of the (first half of the) *Fasti* (6.797–812). See A. Barchiesi, *Il poeta e il principe. Ovidio e il discorso augusteo* (Rome and Bari, 1994), 272–7; C.E. Newlands, *Playing with Time. Ovid and the Fasti* (Ithaca, 1995), 209–18; A. Hardie, 'The *Georgics*, the mysteries and the Muses at Rome', *PCPhS* 48 (2002), 175–208, at 195–200; P.R. Hardie, 'Poets, patrons, rulers: the Ennian traditions', in W. Fitzgerald and E. Gowers (edd.), *Ennius Perennis: The Annals and Beyond* (Cambridge, 2007), 129–44, at 137–40; Heslin (n. 17), 210–11, 255–319.

²⁷ Rosenberger (n. 2), 44 suggests that the two tombs represented for Numa a Horatian *monumentum aere perennius*. Ovid would have no doubt relished the idea of himself, like Numa, vanishing and turning into his own books, a transformation prematurely accomplished in Tomis: see especially M. McGowan, 'Pythagoras and Numa in Ovid: exile and immortality at Rome', in P. Mitsis and I. Ziogas (edd.), *Wordplay and Powerplay in Latin Poetry* (Berlin and Boston, 2016), 241–57, which grounds Ovid's exilic metamorphosis in the Numa–Pythagoras episode. In *Metamorphoses* Book 15, however, Ovid escapes any self-identification with Numa; so, the analogy between Ovid's bibliomorphosis and the JHS tale cannot be pushed any further.

²⁸ Skutsch (n. 17 [1985]), 568. See G. Mazzoli, 'Il frammento enniano *laus alit artis* e il proemio al XVI libro degli *Annales*', *Athenaeum* 52 (1964), 307–33.

beginning of the book, in the Numa–Pythagoras episode, in whose protagonists scholars rightfully see ‘figures’ of Augustus and Ovid;²⁹ then at the end, in the final diptych of Augustus’ and Ovid’s apotheoses.

To begin with, metempsychosis is for the Ovidian *uates* a remedy against bodily transience (*corpora, siue rogos flamma seu tabe uetustas | abstulerit, mala posse pati non ulla putetis; | morte carent animae semperque priore relictas | sede nouis domibus uiuunt habitantque receptae*, *Met.* 15.156–9). In particular, Ovid’s Pythagoreanism, borrowed from *Annals* Book 1 (fr. ii–iv Skutsch), is a way of surviving time *through poetry*: as in Ennius, reincarnation is a mechanism of poetic succession and self-perpetuation in the future hexametric tradition.³⁰ Through this kind of literary metempsychosis, Ovid’s *uates* will escape the fate that awaits his interlocutor (*sine uestigio ullo corporis humani aut ullius rei, per tabem tot annorum omnibus absumptis*, *Livy* 40.29.5).

This contrast is formulated again at a crucial point of Pythagoras’ speech, where the philosopher restates that wordly things are subject to the inexorability of *uetustas* (*Met.* 15.234–6):

tempus **edax** rerum tuque inuidiosa **uetustas**
omnia destruit uitataque dentibus aevi
paulatim lenta consumitis omnia morte.

Time, the devourer of things, and you, jealous old age,
you destroy all things and, after blighting them with the teeth of age,
little by little you consume all things in slow death. (transl. D.E. Hill)

The adjective *edax*, reused shortly afterwards with reference to the destructive nature of fire (*naturae edaci* [sc. *ignis*], 15.354), is highly evocative of Horace’s (Ennian) assertion of the everlasting nature of his poetic monument as opposed to the time-bound and perishable materiality of royal tombs (*exegi monumentum aere perennius | regalique situ Pyramidum altius, | quod non imber edax, non Aquilo inpotens | possit diruere aut innumerabilis | annorum series et fuga temporum*, *Carm.* 3.30.1–5).³¹ Pythagoras’ allusion to the Horatian contrast of kings’ and poets’ afterlives is a prophecy of the fate awaiting the two interlocutors: Numa’s tomb will be found empty (*per tabem tot annorum omnibus absumptis* ~ *consumitis omnia morte*; *regali situ*, ‘royal decay’;³² *innumerabilis annorum series*), whereas Pythagoras will survive in the form of his work.

In the epilogue to *Metamorphoses* Book 15, Ovid sets up the same contrast between bodily destruction after death and survival of the soul, between his *corpus* and his *pars melior* (*Met.* 15.873–6), presenting his afterlife as a form of poetic metempsychosis, an ‘Ennian’ transmigration of his ever-living and ever-newly-received poetry into his posthumous readers (*ore legar populi... uiuam*, 15.878–9; cf. *uolito uiuos per ora uirum*, *Enn.* fr. 44 Courtney).³³ In claiming immunity from time’s voracious tooth,

²⁹ See e.g. Crahay and Hubaux (n. 3).

³⁰ See Hardie (n. 4), 210–12.

³¹ See R.G.M. Nisbet and N. Rudd, *A Commentary on Horace, Odes, Book III* (Oxford, 2004), 370; P.R. Hardie, *Ovidio, Metamorfosi*, vol. 6: *libri XIII–XV* (Milan, 2015), 515.

³² On the double meaning of *regalis situs*, see A.J. Woodman, ‘*Exegi monumentum*: Horace, *Odes* 3.30’, in A.J. Woodman and D. West (edd.), *Quality and Pleasure in Latin Poetry* (Cambridge, 1974), 115–28, at 117–18; Nisbet and Rudd (n. 31), 369.

³³ See Stucchi (n. 3); Hardie (n. 31), 626; A.R. Torres-Murciano, ‘La *sphragis* de las *Metamorphosis* de Ovidio (XV 871–879). Metempsychosis, apoteosis y perdurabilidad literaria’, *Emerita* 84 (2016), 269–89.

Ovid picks up on Pythagoras' speech, alluding intratextually to it (*iamque opus exegi quod nec Iouis ira nec ignis | nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere uetustas*, *Met.* 15.871–2)³⁴ and spelling out its Horatian intertext.³⁵ Citing Horace almost explicitly (*siquid habent ueri uatum praesagia*, 15.879), Ovid presents his *opus* as a poetic *monumentum* immune to the tooth of time and fire. Unlike Horace, Ovid does not contrast his poem with royal monuments directly; however, he does contrast the fate of the poet with that of the prince by juxtaposing his own poetic apotheosis (15.871–9) with Augustus' imperial one, prophesied in the immediately preceding section (15.861–70). Once dead, the prince will leave our world (*orbe relicto*, 15.869) and remain forever absent from it (*absens*, 15.870); conversely, by being read (*ore legar populi*, 15.878), the poet will be kept alive (*uiuam*, 15.879) across the whole world (15.877) in the form of his immortal poetry.³⁶ As in Pythagoras' speech, the contrast between the absence of Augustus and the everlasting presence of Ovid's work among posterity matches the symbolism of the double tomb: one will remain empty, the other will preserve the poet reincarnated in his poem.

BURNING THE BOOKS: THE POET VS THE PRINCE

The continuation of the JHS tale, however, does not quite match with the idea of the immortality of literature. For shortly after being unearthed, these long-lasting papyri are destroyed by fire: it turns out that they are perishable after all. If Ennius and Ovid used them as symbols for their everlasting poems, how could the duration of these books through the centuries be disentangled from such an ill-fated ending?

In *Annals* Book 15, Ennius may have responded by playing on the intratextual link between the JHS and the *AHM*. As I suggested above, Numa's books would have anticipated the syncretic project of harmonizing Greek and Latin literature at the heart of Nobilior's temple. Now, in 181, perhaps towards the end of *Annals* Book 15, the JHS are burnt; just two years (and a few hundred lines) later, in 179, they 'resurge' in the form of a poetic temple. Through this metamorphosis into a monument the JHS have survived. The shrine of the Camenae housed therein, recovered after being struck by a thunderbolt a few decades earlier (*aeneam aediculam ... de caelo tactam*, *Serv. on Aen.* 1.8), would have worked as a symbol for the eventual 'rescue' of the JHS from the sacred fire of the *uictimarii*,³⁷ and more generally as a token for the ultimate immunity of literature to material destruction.³⁸

³⁴ See S.M. Wheeler, *Narrative Dynamics in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Tübingen, 2000), 150; Segal (n. 4), 92–3; Hardie (n. 31), 621–2.

³⁵ See e.g. E. Paratore, 'L'evoluzione della *sphragis* dalle prime alle ultime opere di Ovidio', in *Atti del convegno internazionale ovidiano, Sulmona, maggio 1958*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1959), 173–203, at 193; G. Rosati, 'L'esistenza letteraria. Ovidio e l'autocoscienza della poesia', *MD* 2 (1979), 101–36, at 119–21.

³⁶ See C. Moulton, 'Ovid as anti-Augustan: *Met.* 15.843–79', *CW* 67 (1973), 4–7; Barchiesi (n. 26), 262–4; Wheeler (n. 34), 144–51; Hardie (n. 31), 617, 628.

³⁷ Pailler (n. 2), 657–60 highlights the 'Jovian' nature of the fire with which the *uictimarii* burnt the JHS as the thunder-like fire of divine punishment. This makes the contrast with the thunder-struck shrine of the Camenae even more poignant.

³⁸ If the *AHM* at the end of *Annals* Book 15 was a model for *Ode* 3.30 (see n. 26 above), then Horace's 'Ennian' *monumentum aere perennius*, immune to natural agents, looks very much like the *aedicula aenea* of the Camenae, immune to the fire of thunderbolts.

Whether Ennius declined this contrast in political terms is hard to say, but plausible. His epic did not lack detractors in the conservative wing of nobility or among Nobilior's rivals. Above all was his former patron, Cato the Elder, who publicly attacked Nobilior's bond with Ennius (*Orat.* fr. 104 Sblendorio Cugusi; cf. *Mor.* fr. 2 Jordan) and who, probably in the same speech *In M. Fulvium Nobiliorem* (c.178), may have also criticized, among other aspects of Nobilior's censorship, the dedication of the *AHM*, if this was indeed dedicated *ex pecunia censoria* in 179.³⁹ Ennius' lightning-proof temple may have also been a response to these attacks and a claim that his poetry would be immune to the censorship that, on the advice of Cato's political ally Petilius, had recently turned the JHS into ashes.⁴⁰

Be that as it may, in *Metamorphoses* Book 15 we do find intratextual dynamics between the initial Numa–Pythagoras episode and the final epilogue that are similar to those which I have proposed between the JHS and the *AHM* for *Annals* Book 15. These dynamics are clearly declined in political terms: as I am now going to argue, Ovid, concerned with censorship throughout his epic (and beyond), capitalizes on the potential of the JHS affair as a symbolic narrative about the *conflictual* relationship between poetry and power.⁴¹

The reason for the public condemnation of the JHS was that they contained tenets undermining Roman religion (*pleraque dissoluendarum religionum esse*, Livy 40.29.11). In *Metamorphoses* Book 15, Numa attends a lecture that is no less 'unorthodox' than the Pythagorean volumes someday to be found in his tomb. The Ovidian Pythagoras is made to resemble Lucretius' Epicurus, the arch-enemy and vanquisher of traditional religion (especially *Met.* 15.62–74 ~ *Lucr.* 1.62–79). Indeed, although some of Pythagoras' teachings clash starkly with Epicurean doctrines (most notably, the tenet of metempsychosis), in other cases, such as when he engages with *De rerum natura* Book 6 to explain the causes of the thunderbolt, he seems to take more seriously the demythologized nature presented by Lucretius with the purpose of demonstrating the gods' disengagement from human affairs and the absurdity of traditional religion (*Met.* 15.68–72).⁴² Even more, the tirade against sacrifices (*Met.* 15.111–42, especially 127–35) explicitly endorses Lucretius' criticism against *religio*, responsible for atrocious crimes such as the sacrifice of Iphigenia (1.80–101; *saepius illa | religio*

³⁹ As H.H. Scullard, *Roman Politics, 220–150 B.C.* (Oxford, 1973²), 266–7 notes, Cato's criticisms against the Aetolian campaign (fr. 103–4 Sblendorio Cugusi) and against Nobilior's censorship (fr. 105–6) are better attributed to the same speech. Ennius may have fired back at Cato in *Annals* Book 15 (*huic statuum statui maiorum orbatus ahenis*, *Ann.* fr. 579 Skutsch, brilliantly restored by Kraggerud ~ *miror ... statuas deorum, exempla earum facierum, signa domi pro supellectile statuere*, Cato, *Orat.* fr. 72 Sblendorio Cugusi); E. Kraggerud, 'Ennius *Ann.* 579 Sk.', *SO* 89 (2015), 54–9.

⁴⁰ On the alliance between Cato and Petilius against the Scipiones, see Livy 38.54. On Cato's supposed involvement in the JHS affair, see Scullard (n. 39), 171–2; Rosen (n. 2), 88–9; Pailier (n. 2), 696–7. On Cato, Nobilior and Ennius, see H. Prinzen, *Ennius im Urteil der Antike* (Stuttgart, 1998), 289–301.

⁴¹ On censorship in Ovid's poetry, see P.J. Johnson, *Ovid before Exile. Art and Punishment in the Metamorphoses* (Madison, 2008) about the *Metamorphoses*; D.C. Feeney, 'Si licet et fas est: Ovid's *Fasti* and the problem of free speech under the Principate', in A. Powell (ed.), *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus* (London, 1992), 1–25 = Feeney (n. 20 [2021]), 2.15–36, about the *Fasti*. On the tradition of political and religious censorship by burning books, see C.A. Forbes, 'Books for the burning', *TAPhA* 67 (1936), 114–25; W. Speyer, *Büchervernichtung und Zensur des Geistes bei Heiden, Juden und Christen* (Stuttgart, 1981); D. Rohmann, 'Book burning as conflict management in the Roman empire (213 BCE – 200 CE)', *AncSoc* 43 (2013), 115–49.

⁴² See A. Barchiesi, 'Voci e istanze narrative nelle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio', *MD* 23 (1989), 55–97, at 77–8; V. Buchheit, 'Numa–Pythagoras in der Deutung Ovids', *Hermes* 121 (1993), 77–99, at 86–8.

peperit scelerosa atque impia facta, 1.82–3; *tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*, 1.101). No pontifical authority in Rome could ever have approved of this.

In fact, on returning to Rome, inspired as he may be by Pythagoras' lecture *de rerum natura* (*talibus atque aliis instructum pectora dictis*, *Met.* 15.479), Numa just trashes his notes and gets to teaching sacrificial rituals to his people (*sacrificos docuit ritus*, 15.483), against Pythagoras' prescriptions. The words of the *uir Samius* go unheard (*non credita*, 15.74); instead, the king heeds the local Camenae (*ducibus Camenis*, 15.482).⁴³ Numa's rejection of Pythagoras' foreign philosophy in favour of local sacrificial cults, if not a form of censorship strictly speaking, does still share a great deal with the Senate's decree to burn Numa's Pythagorean volumes owing to their incompatibility with Roman religion. The analogy is even closer in Valerius Maximus' version of the burning of the JHS (1.1.12), presented as a positive *exemplum* of religious 'protectionism' (*magna conseruandae religionis cura*), whereby Quintus Petilius gave the order to burn only Numa's volumes on Greek philosophy, as pernicious for traditional religion, whereas the Latin ones on pontifical law were saved and carefully preserved (*Latinos magna diligentia adseruandos curauerunt, Graecos, quia aliqua ex parte ad soluendam religionem pertinere existimabantur, Q. Petilius ... cremauit*). This Ovidian tale of Pythagoreanism dismissed in favour of (what is to become) traditional Roman religion may indeed allude to the censorship that Numa's Pythagoreanism will suffer in about five centuries.

The burning of Ovid's poetry by Augustan censorship is conjured up in the closure of the poem. The epilogue to the *Metamorphoses* can be read in terms of conflict, especially from an exilic perspective, as the proud stance of a poet presuming to be above the censorial power of Augustus. In particular, the claim that his work is immune to Jupiter's wrath and (to) fire (*iamque opus exegi quod nec Iouis ira nec ignis | ... poterit ... abolere*, 15.871–2) is easily understood as a reference to the wrath of Augustus, recently equated to Jupiter (15.857–60) and whose wrath against Ovid, *Caesaris ira*, is a form of *Iouis ira* in the exilic poems;⁴⁴ and as a hint at the possibility that the *Metamorphoses* might be condemned to public burning.⁴⁵ This final reference to the fire of Augustan censorship may contain the last allusion to the JHS and to the censorship that caused their destruction; but also a warning that, unlike the JHS, the *Metamorphoses* will eventually survive censorial fire, too.

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⁴³ See Barchiesi (n. 42), 77–82. In the *Fasti*, Ovid leaves it open to doubt whether Numa derived his reforms from Pythagoras or from Egeria (*siue hoc a Samio doctus, qui posse renasci | nos putat, Egeria siue monente sua*, *Fast.* 3.153–4); in *Metamorphoses* Book 15, he seems to incline towards the latter.

⁴⁴ See U. Schmitzer, *Zeitgeschichte in Ovids Metamorphosen: Mythologische Dichtung unter politischem Anspruch* (Stuttgart, 1990), 296–7; B.L. Wickkiser, 'Famous last words: putting Ovid's *sphragis* back into the *Metamorphoses*', *MD* 42 (1999), 113–42, at 120–8; Hardie (n. 31), 623; *contra* Bömer (n. 3), 488–9. On *Iouis ira* and *Caesaris ira* in exilic poetry, see K. Scott, 'Emperor worship in Ovid', *TAPhA* 61 (1930), 43–69, especially 57–8 with n. 51.

⁴⁵ See Segal (n. 9), 289–92.