

THE *GENS MEMMIA*,
LUCRETIUS' *HYMN TO VENUS*,
AND THE SANCTUARY OF TERRACINA:
A NEGLECTED HYPOTHESIS*

It is well known that the so-called *Hymn to Venus* that significantly opens the *De rerum natura* – serving as an introduction not only to Book I, but to the whole poem – is a very peculiar text which has caused many exegetical difficulties to scholars and commentators of Lucretius. One of these difficulties (perhaps the main one) is precisely the fact that this avowedly Epicurean poem opens with the invocation of a divinity (generally – but not universally¹ – regarded as a symbol and metaphor of pleasure, *voluptas*,² or the *Venus Fisica Pompeiana*³ with no real political implica-

*) I wish to thank Maria Rosaria Coppola, Silvia De Martini, Tiziano Dorandi, Emidio Spinelli, Peter Schenk, and the anonymous referees for their always useful and generous comments.

1) Since the secondary literature on this matter is really immense, in the present paper I limit myself to quote a very selective bibliography in order to achieve the goals of my article. On the identification of Venus, for instance, F. Giancotti (Il preludio di Lucrezio e altri scritti lucreziani ed epicurei, Messina / Florence 1978, 157–234) believes that Venus cannot be identified with Epicurus' concept of pleasure (ἡδονή). In his view, the goddess rather symbolizes – in accordance with the Epicurean principle of ἰσονομία (cf. Cic. nat. deor. 1.50,109; see D. Sedley, Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity, Berkeley / Los Angeles / London 2007, 155–158) – the *motus genitales auctificique*, while Mars represents the *motus exitiales*, the two respectively embodying the constructive and the destructive principle governing the perpetual cosmic balance.

2) See e.g. P. Boyancé, Lucrezio e l'epicureismo, Italian edition by A. Grilli, Brescia ²1985 (original French edition: Paris 1963), 78.

3) Countless studies have been published on the symbolism of Venus in Lucretius' *Hymn*. Here I will only refer to the rather widespread (see e.g. L. Piazzi [ed.], Lucrezio: Le leggi dell'universo, La natura, Libro I, Venice 2011, 135) identification of the goddess with the *Venus Fisica Pompeiana* (CIL IV 1520). According to G. Della Valle (Tito Lucrezio Caro e l'epicureismo campano, Naples 1933, especially 8–16), the link between the Venus of Pompeii and the opening lines of *De rerum natura* is a strong proof of Lucretius' Campanian origin. Della Valle's hypothesis was newly taken up by K. Kleve (Lucretius in Herculaneum, CErc 19, 1989, 5–27), who believed to have found traces of Lucretius' poem in some Herculaneum

tions),⁴ when Epicurean theology, while stating the existence of the gods, deprives them of the ability to act (for the better or worse) upon men and reality more generally.⁵ In order to solve this thorny problem, scholars have proposed several interpretations that make the *Hymn to Venus* compatible with the Epicureanism in which the Lucretian verses are steeped.⁶ Most of these relevant attempts – some more based on historical data, others on the philosophical and theoretical context – are certainly sharp and well documented enough to make the opening verses of the *De rerum natura* fundamentally agree with the rest of the poem.

From a merely historical point of view, by moving beyond more strictly philosophical and literary arguments, one – undoubtedly true – thesis which has been brought forward among

scrolls (for an updated overview on this matter see D. Obbink, *Lucretius and the Herculaneum Library*, in: S. Gillespie / P. Hardie [eds], *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, Cambridge 2007, 33–40, and M. Capasso, *Les papyrus latins d'Herculaneum: Découverte, consistance, contenu, traduit de l'italien par A. Ricciardetto*, Liège 2011, 63–86). The epithet *Fisica* very likely involves a philosophical concept, that is a certain doctrine of φύσις which can well be found in Epicurus' philosophy: see R. Schilling, *La religion romaine de Vénus: Depuis les origines jusqu'au temps d'Auguste*, Deuxième édition avec préface, Paris 1982, 383–388, and D. Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus*, Ithaca / London 1983, 82–95, and 226–234. See too the pioneering work by G. Della Valle, *La Venere di Lucrezio e la Venere Fisica Pompeiana*, *Rivista Indo-Greco-Italica* 19, 1935, 1–24 (extract). Finally see E. Curti, *Il tempio di Venere Fisica e il porto di Pompei*, in: P. G. Guzzo / M. P. Guidobaldi (eds), *Nuove ricerche archeologiche nell'area vesuviana (Scavi 2003–2006)*, *Atti del Convegno Internazionale*, Roma 1–3 febbraio 2007, Rome 2008, 47–60, and Id., *La Venere Fisica trionfante: Un nuovo ciclo di iscrizioni dal santuario di Venere a Pompei*, in: *Le perle e il filo: A Mario Torelli per i suoi settanta anni*, Venosa 2008, 67–81. Anyway, it should be pointed out that the notion of *voluptas* and the *Venus Fisica* can be connected with difficulty.

4) See J. Salem, *La mort n'est rien pour nous: Lucrèce et l'éthique*, Paris 1990, 26–28, and Y. Benferhat, *Civitas Epicurei: Les épicuriens et l'idée de monarchie à Rome et en Italie de Sylla à Octave*, Brussels 2005, 87–91. For a different (and more recent) 'political' representation of Lucretius' Venus see J. Colman, *Lucretius as Theorist of Political Life*, New York 2012, 14. But consider also the earlier L. Canfora, *Vita di Lucrezio*, Palermo 1993, 44–51.

5) On Epicurean theology see the recent and detailed monograph by H. Essler, *Glücklich und unsterblich: Epikureische Theologie bei Cicero und Philodem*, Basel 2011.

6) I will merely refer here to the important interpretation suggested by D. N. Sedley, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, Cambridge 1998, especially 23–28, who identifies several terms of clear Empedoclean origin in the *Hymn to Venus*.

many others is that Venus was the tutelary deity of the *gens Memmia* to which Caius Memmius, the (likely) dedicatee of Lucretius' work,⁷ belonged. On the basis of this fruitful perspective, the main purpose of this short note is to advance some considerations (especially concerning a few but significant numismatic data,⁸ and an archaeological observation⁹) in order to bring to scholars' attention a solid and appealing hypothesis formulated long ago by Filippo Coarelli.¹⁰ Unfortunately this theory has been largely forgotten. Coarelli's hypothesis offers a certainly privileged view to understand what was, among other possible and ascertainable reasons, one likely motivation why Lucretius decided to open his work with an invocation to the *Aeneadum genetrix*. So far, only sporadic hints about this point are to be found in some publications (especially ones on Roman archaeology), but to date a comprehensive study has yet to be conducted that, however succinctly, connects these basically isolated references, notices the importance of numismatic evidence and the possibility of a 'cohabitation' of Jupiter and Venus on Monte S. Angelo (Terracina), and provides a clear overall picture of a surely very significant matter – one which, in my opinion, should seriously be taken into account by any historically impeccable analysis of the 'incipit' of the poem. Such, then, is the main purpose of this short contribution.

The *gens Memmia* has been extensively studied: it was a plebeian family of Latin-Italic (or even Volscian) origin which in all probability had considerable properties at *Signia* and *Tarracina*. Perhaps the Terracina area is to be identified as the place of origin of this family, many of whose members held political offices of the

7) See below n. 13. For a recent and detailed profile of the addressee of Lucretius' poem see P. Vesperini, *La Philosophia et ses pratiques d'Ennius à Cicéron*, Rome 2012, 363–376. With regard to the general perspective of Vesperini's book it is in any case worth taking into account the arguments (and reservations) advanced by T. Dorandi, «Pratiche» della *Philosophia* nella Roma repubblicana, *CErc* 44, 2014, 167–177. See too Clay (n. 3 above) 212–225, who distinguishes the historical Memmius from the Memmius of the *De rerum natura*, whose profile is essentially Lucretius' own creation.

8) See below, 64 f.

9) See below, 66 f.

10) F. Coarelli, *I santuari del Lazio in età repubblicana*, Rome 1987, 113–140, especially 133–138. See too Id., *Lazio (Guide archeologiche Laterza)*, Rome / Bari 1984, 325–332. Coarelli's hypothesis is accepted by P. Longo, *Studio guida dell'area sacra di Monte S. Angelo*, Terracina 1991, 55.

highest level and enjoyed great economic prestige, thanks to their flourishing trade with the East.¹¹ If the Memmius mentioned by Lucretius is to be identified with Caius Memmius, who served as praetor in 58 BC and propraetor in Bithynia in 57 BC before his 'self-exile' to Athens (where, as we know from Cicero, he planned to demolish a house of Epicurus in the deme of Melite),¹² he first married Cornelia Fausta.¹³ Cornelia was the daughter of Lucius Cornelius Sulla and his third wife Caecilia Metella, who in turn was the daughter of Lucius Caecilius Metellus Dalmaticus. Subse-

11) Consider the significant evidence from Cic. De or. 2.240, and the inscription (CIL X 6329) stating that T. Memmius Rufus and his son – bearing the same name – built the amphitheatre in Terracina. A *L. Memmius T(iti) f(ilius)* of the *Ouf(entina)* tribe, called *Tarrachinensis* (CIL I² 2266 = III 6086), was buried in Ephesus around 100 BC. See, above all, F. Münzer, s. v. Memmius, RE XV 1 (1931) 602 ff., and L. Chioffi, in: Various Authors, *Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae*, in: *Epigrafia: Actes du colloque international d'épigraphie latine en mémoire de Attilio Degrassi pour le centenaire de sa naissance. Actes de colloque de Rome (27–28 mai 1988)*, Rome 1991, 338–344. See too the rather dated but still useful work by M.-R. de la Blanchère, *Terracina: Saggio di storia locale*, trad. e intr. di G. Rocci, pref. di F. Coarelli, Terracina 1983 (French original edition, Paris 1884), 69, and 110, and G. Mesolella, *La decorazione architettonica di Minturnae Formiae Tarracina: L'età augustea e giulio-claudia*, Rome 2012, 61.

12) From a letter written around 51 BC (Fam. 13.1; cf. Att. 5.11.6) we learn that Cicero, strongly urged by the Epicurean scholar Patro, intervened in order to preserve Epicurus' house in the Athenian deme of Melite when it was threatened with demolition. Cicero personally addresses the noble Caius Memmius, probably the same Memmius to whom Lucretius dedicated his poem. See L. Piazzzi, *Lucrezio: Il *De rerum natura* e la cultura occidentale*, Naples 2009, 18–22.

13) From a chronological point of view (see T. R. S. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, Volume II: 99 B.C.–31 B.C., New York 1952, 194), the identification of Caius Memmius (*L. f.*) with the addressee of Lucretius' work fits with the dating recently proposed by C. B. Krebs, *Caesar, Lucretius and the Dates of *De Rerum Natura* and the *Commentarii**, CQ 63, 2013, 772–779. Krebs states that the poem was available in 54 BC, when Caesar was able to read it thanks to his contacts with the brothers Quintus and Marcus Tullius Cicero (in any case, it is worth taking account of the later dating of the poem – that is, “in or after 49 BC” – proposed by G. O. Hutchinson, *The Date of *De Rerum Natura**, CQ 51, 2001, 150–162; contra K. Volk, *Lucretius' Prayer for Peace and the Date of *De rerum natura**, CQ 60, 2010, 127–131). A. Schiesaro (*Lucretius and Roman Politics and History*, in: S. Gillespie / P. Hardie [n. 3 above] 41–58, especially 53–54), in the wake of G. O. Hutchinson (159; one of the *denarii* of C. Memmius *C. f.* mentioned by Hutchinson – Crawford RRC 427/2 – is also quoted by Munro [n. 19 below] 33), recently has not hesitated to consider possible (or more preferable) the identification of the addressee of the Lucretian verses with C. Memmius (*C. f.*), tribune in 54 BC (see Broughton, 223).

quently Memmius repudiated Cornelia Fausta, who remarried Titus Annius Milo.¹⁴ Memmius' marriage with Sulla's daughter is a very important element which could testify to the politically and strategically close relationship between the Memmii and the *gens* of the Cornelii.

This closeness between these two families is traditionally consolidated by the fact that the Memmii, on the basis of Virgil (Aen. 5.116–117: *Velocem Mnestheus agit acri remige Pristim, / mox Italus Mnestheus, genus a quo nomine Memmi*; cf. also Servius' comment ad loc.: *nobiles autem familias a Troianis fuisse Iuvenalis ostendit, ut 'iubet a praecone vocari ipsos Troiugenas'. A quo nomine scilicet Mnesthei. Et Mnestheus sic est, ut Tydeus Tydei: nam diphthongos Graeca est*), boasted of an enviable Trojan descent from the legendary Mnestheus, a companion of Aeneas. Virgil – and this is no coincidence – emphasizes Mnestheus' famous skills as a navigator. This is a significant fact if one keeps in mind:

- (1) the ability, interests, and extensive trading of the *Memmii*;
- (2) the fact that one of the largest harbours of the Tyrrhenian, an extremely important trading outpost, was located just below the grand sanctuary of Monte S. Angelo in Terracina;¹⁵
- (3) the close relationship between the Memmii and Venus (and Sulla).¹⁶

On this latter point, it is particularly significant to notice that this relationship is confirmed by some coins mainly connected to the branch of the *gens Memmia* belonging to the Galeria tribe, which is likely to have hailed from Terracina too.¹⁷ In some cases the *monetales* of the family¹⁸ show Venus' profile on the prow of a

14) In this regard, I wish to point out in passing that Milo had quite a lot of trouble from his wife, if we are to trust Gellius (NA 17.18): in his work *Pius aut de pace* (p. 256 Riese) Marcus Varro apparently reported that Milo caught her in the act of adultery with the historian Sallust. On this topic see the dated but still useful A. Cipolla, *Cajo Sallustio Crispo e lo scandalo attribuitogli da Marco Terenzio Varro nel frammento del logistorico Pius aut de pace*, Cremona 1915.

15) See M. R. Coppola, *Museo Civico di Terracina: ceppi d'ancora, anfore, commerci per mare e territorio*, Rome 1999, 67–84.

16) Schilling (n. 3 above) 271–272.

17) See on this matter Coarelli 1987 (n. 10 above) 134, and T. R. S. Broughton, *Supplement to The Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, New York 1960, 41.

18) See Broughton (n. 13 above) 446.

galley, symbolizing not just victory but prosperous trade and the protection offered by the goddess (see the *quadrans* by L. Memmius Galeria of 106 BC = Crawford RRC 313/4). In other coins (e.g. the *denarius* of L. Memmius Galeria of 106 BC = Crawford RRC 313/1b) Venus is represented riding a chariot while Cupid flies towards her, bearing a wreath.¹⁹ These numismatic data cannot be underestimated, because the images represented on these coins legitimate the strong link between the *gens Memmia* and Venus' worship. That leads to validate the hypothesis that Venus was a tutelary deity of the *gens*: it is therefore likely that the Memmii had to do with the building (and the dedication) of the major sanctuary of Monte S. Angelo, and, from this point of view, it is difficult to believe that Lucretius did not know this important religious enterprise.

Much has been written about the archaeological site of Monte S. Angelo. Here I will not examine the issue in all its complexity, but it is worth recalling an absolutely crucial point. On Monte S. Angelo in Terracina it is possible to identify at least three religious buildings of different ages and sizes. According to Coarelli's view, the oldest is the sanctuary of the goddess Feronia (a deity connected with fertility, but also with slavery, and perhaps closely related to *Iuppiter Anxur* – just as Venus herself is frequently associated with Jupiter).²⁰ A sanctuary or a small place of worship dedicated to Feronia was already to be found on the *Via Appia* (under

19) Perhaps an overly sceptical approach to the numismatic evidence as (very likely) confirmation of the relationship between the goddess and Lucretius' dedicatee is taken by Giancotti (n. 1 above) 92; for a different point of view on the same issue see the much earlier H. A. J. Munro (ed.), *T. Lucreti Cari De Rerum Natura Libri Sex with Notes and Translation, Fourth Edition Finally Revised, Volume II: Explanatory Notes*, Cambridge / London 1893, 32–33.

20) See Schilling (n. 3 above) 91–98. On Feronia and her worship see the recent and significant work by M. Di Fazio, *Feronia: Spazi e tempi di una dea dell'Italia centrale antica*, Rome 2013, especially 71–72, and 85–96. On the minor temple, it is worth considering the perplexities raised by L. Quilici, *A proposito del tempio di Giove Anxur a Terracina*, *Ocnus* 13, 2005, 271–282: it is possible that the minor temple were a religious building, but that is not sure at all. As a matter of fact, “il terrazzamento di un edificio sacro e quello di una villa o altro edificio di prestigio non ha differenza in quest'epoca. Proprio la costruzione su questo terrazzo di un convento nel medioevo, rende più plausibile l'adattamento di edifici abitativi preesistenti piuttosto che il volume cubico di un tempio, del quale per altro una qualche traccia almeno cementizia della base dovrebbe esistere” (278).

the cliff of Leano),²¹ whence the cult reached Terracina and Monte S. Angelo.²² This is clearly evidenced by Horace in his very famous *Iter Brundisinum* (sat. 1.5.24: *ora manusque tua lauimus, Feronia, lympa*): the poet states that after a night voyage down the *Decennovium*, the navigable canal running along a stretch of the *Via Appia*, around ten o'clock in the morning he washed his hands in Feronia's waters. According to Coarelli's painstaking reconstruction, an older sanctuary dedicated to Feronia was located on Monte S. Angelo (which eventually became the site of the monastery of St. Michael the Archangel). A larger sanctuary – almost certainly including an oracle²³ – was then built in a later period. This has wrongly been identified with the sanctuary of *Iuppiter Anxur*, which may well have been still standing on Monte S. Angelo at the time, but in another part of the slope, perhaps behind the podium of the major sanctuary dedicated to Venus.²⁴

On the basis of some inscriptions,²⁵ two of which dedicated to *Venus Obsequens*,²⁶ it seems likely that this temple – directly facing

21) See G. M. De Rossi, *L'area di Monte S. Angelo a Terracina*, in: *Enea nel Lazio: Archeologia e mito, Bimillenario Virgiliano* (Catalogo della Mostra, Roma 22 settembre–31 dicembre 1981, Campidoglio / Palazzo dei Conservatori), Rome 1981, 80–82, especially 82, and Di Fazio (n. 20 above) 70.

22) On Feronia's worship at Terracina see P. Longo, *La Feronia volsca fra la tradizione sabina e la mitologia greca*, in: A. R. Mari / R. Malizia / P. Longo / M. Iride Pasquali / E. Pasquali (eds), *La Via Appia a Terracina: La strada romana e i suoi monumenti*, Terracina 1988, 159–170.

23) For this conclusion see already G. Lugli, *I santuari celebri del Lazio antico*, Rome 1932, 112–114.

24) For a brief but updated reconstruction of the architecture of the main temple see S. Franz, *L'architettura del Santuario sul Monte S. Angelo a Terracina*, in: *Religio: Santuari ed ex voto nel Lazio meridionale. Atti della giornata di studio*, Terracina 2004, 183–187.

25) The inscriptions are four in total. The first two were found in a votive deposit (*favissa*) in the area of the oracle, adjacent to the large sanctuary, with some votive objects, usually considered as 'votive toys' or *crepundia* (II century AC). These are two small votive bases supporting bronze statuettes. The first base dates from the Republican Age, and the other is perhaps a little later. (1) ILLRP [Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae, ed. A. Degrassi] 272: *Dexter / Veneri Opsequenti* [sic] / *l(ibens) m(erito) don(at)*; (2) NSA [Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Notizie degli scavi di antichità] 1894, p. 103: *Carpinatia / Fortunata / Veneri v(otum) s(oluit) l(ibens) m(erito)*. The archaeologist responsible for the first excavations on Monte S. Angelo, L. Borsari, acknowledged the authenticity of a third dedication (*ad Venere(m) opsequente(m)* [sic]) which was listed in the CIL (X 855*) among the *falsae vel alienae* inscriptions. Aside from these three inscriptions, there is another one occurring on the right-hand side of a block of local limestone: a sort

the harbour of Terracina – was dedicated to the worship of Venus,²⁷ a goddess much loved not only by the Memmii, but also (and at the same time) by Sulla. Among the many clues of Sulla's reverence for Venus one might mention *Veneria Cornelia Pompeianorum*, the colony of Pompeii ruled by the dictator, the name of which evidently refers to the goddess and her worship.²⁸ In all likelihood, the construction of the great temple of Terracina should be dated to the age of Sulla. From a passage by Pliny the Elder (NH 2.146: *In Italia inter Tarracinam et aedem Feroniae turres belli civilis*)²⁹ tem-

of mark indicating the exact location of the threshold. This inscription indirectly proves the presence of other gods in the sanctuary. It reads (according to Longo 1983–1984, see below, 316) *Beneris / Reginae / l[—]*; or (according to Coarelli 1987 [n. 10 above] 122) *Beneris / rece [—]*; or (according to Longo [n. 10 above] 49) *Beneris / receptac(ulum) / [—]?* For further information, in particular on the latter inscription, see P. Longo, *Nuova documentazione epigrafica di età romana da Terracina*, *AFLPer* (class) 21 n. s. 7, 1983–1984, 313–341, especially 316–317, and again *Id.* (n. 10 above) 49–50. On the votive deposit see M. I. Pasquali, *La stipe votiva di Monte S. Angelo a Terracina*, in: *Religio* (n. 24 above) 189–201.

26) The epithet *obsequens* (assigned not only to Venus, but also to Fortuna) can be explained in several ways. It may refer to Venus' answering the *obsequium* of believers (see Schilling [n. 3 above] 50), which would emphasize the goddess' care of her followers. *Obsequens*, however, may also be connected with obedience, in particular the obedience of slaves: this element would associate Venus with Feronia. *Venus Obsequens* had a temple in the Aventine in Rome, whose *dedicatio* by Quintus Fabius Maximus Gurges dates back to 295 BC. For chronological as well as other reasons, the great temple of Terracina may have depended on that of Rome.

27) The identification of the temple with that of Venus goes back to E. Petersen (1895), followed (1907) by G. Vaglieri (for the relevant bibliographical references see L. Boccali, *Esempio di organizzazione delle fonti antiche per la ricostruzione del quadro della vita religiosa di una città e del suo territorio in età preromana e romana: Terracina*, *CCG* 8, 1997, 181–222, 189 n. 55). Coarelli 1987 (n. 10 above), in any case, may be credited with the most comprehensive and detailed study about the relationship between the greater sanctuary and Venus.

28) On Sulla's worship of Venus see Schilling (n. 3 above) 272–295, and F. Santangelo, *Sulla, the Elites and the Empires: A Study of Roman Policies in Italy and the Greek East*, Leiden / Boston 2007, 158–171 (also for Sulla's colonial programme in *Campania felix*). On Sulla's route from Brindisi (or Taranto) to Rome see F. Verde, *Setia, Sacripontus* e la marcia di Silla verso Roma, *Studi Classici e Orientali* 62, 2016, forthcoming.

29) It is important to take into account that *belli civilis* is the reading proposed by K. F. T. Mayhoff in his critical edition of the *Naturalis Historia* (C. Mayhoff [ed.], *C. Plini Secundi Naturalis Historiae Libri XXXVII*, Vol. I, Libri I–V, Leipzig 1906, p. 182) in place of the word *bellicis* transmitted by the codices. For other readings see D. F. Detlefsen (Berlin 1866), H. Rackham (London / Cambridge, Mass. 1938): *belli Cae(sariani) temporibus*, and I. Sillig (Leipzig 1831), J. Beaujeu (Paris 1950), O. Schneider (Hildesheim 1967): *bellicis temporibus*.

poribus desiere fieri, nulla non earum fulmine diruta) we learn that this area was fortified with the construction of an impressive belt of turreted walls, which probably connected the oldest shrine of Feronia on Monte S. Angelo to the city of Terracina below. According to Pliny, the city walls were abandoned after having been repeatedly struck by lightning: the phenomenon can be interpreted as an account which has been seen to reflect Sulla's 'propaganda'. This becomes quite understandable if one considers the fact that the period of civil war described by Pliny should be that of the clashes between Marius and Sulla. The city walls built between Terracina and Monte S. Angelo probably served a genuine military function since they barred all access to the *Via Appia*, thus hindering the transit of men and troops from southern Lazio and Campania. In short, it is likely that this enclosure was simply built by Gaius Marius the Younger and his followers around 83 AD in order to prevent the passage of Sulla and his army after their successful military campaign in Campania. It cannot be ruled out, therefore, that Sulla's likely triumphant arrival in that very place – through which he was bound to pass in order to reach Rome, whose sacred boundary, or *pomerium*, he was to breach again with his army – was one of the reasons for the construction of the great sanctuary dedicated to the tutelary deity of the dictator: Venus. Considering the notable presence of Memmii at Terracina, and the matrimonial bond between Caius Memmius and Sulla's daughter, it is quite reasonable to assume that the great temple dedicated to the goddess and overlooking the harbour below – only slightly later in date than the sanctuary itself – was originally commissioned by the *gens Memmia*.

It is well known that the dedication of the major temple of Monte S. Angelo is a much debated question,³⁰ and it is objectively difficult (if not impossible) to establish for sure whether the major sanctuary was sacred to *Iuppiter Anxur* or Venus. Nevertheless, it is crucial to bear in mind that the ancient Italic and Roman sanctuaries were frequently 'sanctuaires accueillants', as it was re-

30) Against the identification of the major temple with that of Venus see, for instance, Quilici (n. 20 above), who confirms with meaningful arguments the traditional attribution of the greater temple to *Iuppiter Anxur*. For the same view see too L. Quilici, *Il Parco Monumentale «Tempio di Giove Anxur» e la Via Appia antica attraverso il territorio di Terracina*, *Orizzonti* 5, 2004, 109–116. For a more 'median' or 'compromissory' (but very plausible) view on the 'ownership' of the sacred area of Monte S. Angelo see now Di Fazio (n. 20 above) 71.

cently and plausibly showed.³¹ That means that a sanctuary could host not only a single deity, but it could be sacred to several deities. In the case of Terracina, if, on the one hand, the worship of Feronia and Venus in a single sanctuary is very problematic, the 'cohabitation' of Jupiter and Venus is not unexpected, since they have an associated worship in several Italic cities, such as Abella, Capua, Pompeii, and Lavinium.³² Accordingly to this view, it is not unlikely that the area of Monte S. Angelo hosted both the worships of Jupiter and Venus. To rule out the presence of Venus seems very implausible, since the epigraphical evidences attest that on Monte S. Angelo there was actually a religious cult of Venus.

Moreover, the *alma Venus* invoked by Lucretius in the opening lines of the *De rerum natura* is not only the ancestor of the Aeneads – let us not forget the Memmii's status as *familia Troiana* –,³³ but also the deity who through her presence enlivens the sea dotted with ships (ll. 1–4: *Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas / alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa / quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis / concelebras* [...]). The expanses of the sea smile to Venus (l. 8: *tibi rident aequora ponti*), since her advent is accompanied by the breath of the fruitful zephyr, announcing the generative power of the goddess who bestowed all gifts on Memmius (ll. 26–27: *Memmiadae nostro quem tu, dea, tempore in omni / omnibus ornatum voluisti excellere rebus*).³⁴

In conclusion, by assuming that the reconstruction (re)presented here actually works, it is clear that the archaeological data allows us to better contextualize and historically define one reason – among many possible others – which may have led Lucretius to combine his invocation to Venus with a dedication to the ad-

31) J.-C. Lacam, *Variations rituelles: Les pratiques religieuses en Italie centrale et méridionale au temps de la deuxième Guerre punique*, Rome 2010, 228. See too Quilici (n. 20 above) 275.

32) See above, 65 f., and Di Fazio (n. 20 above) 70.

33) See above, 64.

34) Nevertheless, it is important to notice that the sea could be considered as an image or 'metaphor' of water, one of the four elements of the well known Empedoclean tradition, on which Lucretius in all likelihood depends. Furthermore, it is needed to point out that in the opening lines (2–9) of the poem Lucretius clearly refers to the four elements (l. 3: *mare* / water; l. 3: *terras* / earth; l. 5: *lumina solis* / fire; l. 6: *venti* / air). See on this matter Sedley (n. 6 above) 24.

dressee of the poem, a key player in the major political and economic events of his day. As already stressed, this obviously does not mean that the suggested interpretation of Lucretius' *Hymn to Venus* is the only plausible one or that it is intended to weaken or dismiss all other exegetical hypotheses. However, reading the opening words of *De rerum natura* without paying scrupulous attention to the historical, epigraphical and archaeological evidence (especially the close links between the Memmii, their presence at Terracina, their economic and commercial prestige, Sulla, and, above all, the dedication to Venus of the great sanctuary of Terracina probably commissioned by the Memmii themselves) strikes me as a rather short-sighted operation. In all likelihood, Lucretius was perfectly aware of the ups and downs of the Memmii, and could not ignore the great temple of Venus which soared on Monte S. Angelo and must have been visible from the sea, even at a great distance.

For this reason, I believe that scholars focusing on Lucretius (be they historians of ancient literature, philologists, historians of ancient philosophy or archaeologists) would do well to take this reconstruction – supported by the numismatic evidence, and completed by the impressive possibility of the ‘cohabitation’ of Jupiter and Venus on Monte S. Angelo – into account, on the one hand, in order to examine the *Hymn to Venus* from a more synoptic and less restricted point of view; on the other hand, to better appreciate the subtle and tenuous balance between Epicurean orthodoxy and the attempt to adapt Epicurus’ teaching to Late Roman Republican society which can often be observed not just in Philodemus,³⁵ but also in Lucretius himself. The complex history of the major temple on Monte S. Angelo at Terracina, and its (hypothetical but likely) relationship with Lucretius’ *Hymn to Venus* would appear to further support this perspective.

Roma

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35) See M. Erler, *Orthodoxie und Anpassung: Philodem, ein Panaitios des Kepos?*, *MH* 49, 1992, 171–200, and M. Erbi, *La retorica nell’Epicureismo: una riflessione*, *CErc* 41, 2011, 189–205.