

# Demetrius Lacon - Main Biography

Post by “Cassius” of November 20, 2023 at 3:44 PM

[Demetrius Lacon - Wikipedia](#)

Demetrius Lacon or Demetrius of [Laconia](#) ([Greek](#): Δημήτριος; fl. late 2nd century BC) was an [Epicurean philosopher](#), and a disciple of Protarchus.<sup>[1]</sup> He was an older contemporary of [Zeno of Sidon](#) and a teacher of [Philodemus](#). [Sextus Empiricus](#) quotes part of a commentary by Demetrius on [Epicurus](#), where Demetrius interprets Epicurus' statement that "[time](#) is an accident of accidents."<sup>[2]</sup>

[Papyrus](#) scrolls containing portions of the works of Demetrius were discovered at the [Villa of the Papyri](#) at [Herculaneum](#). The major works partially preserved are:<sup>[3]</sup>

Quaestiones convivales (PHerc. 1006)

On the Puzzles of Polyaeus (PHerc. 1083, 1258, 1429, 1642, 1647, 1822)

On Geometry (PHerc. 1061)

On Poems (PHerc. 188, 1014)<sup>[4]</sup>

two untitled works (PHerc. 1786, 124)

In addition, he is the probable author of the following works:

On the Size of the Sun (PHerc. 1013)

On Fickleness (PHerc. 831)

an untitled work on textual criticism of Epicurus' writings (PHerc. 1012)<sup>[5]</sup>

an untitled theological work (PHerc. 1055)<sup>[6]</sup>

an untitled rhetorical work (PHerc. 128)

References<sup>[edit]</sup>

<sup>↑</sup> Diogenes Laertius, x. 26; Strabo, xiv. 2. 20

<sup>↑</sup> Sextus Empiricus, Against the professors, 10.219-27

<sup>↑</sup> John T. Fitzgerald, [Dirk Obbink](#), Glenn Stanfield Holland, (2004), Philodemus and the New Testament World, page 10. BRILL.

<sup>↑</sup> Demetrius Lacon, La poesia: (PHerc. 188 e 1014), ed. Costantina Romeo. Naples 1988.

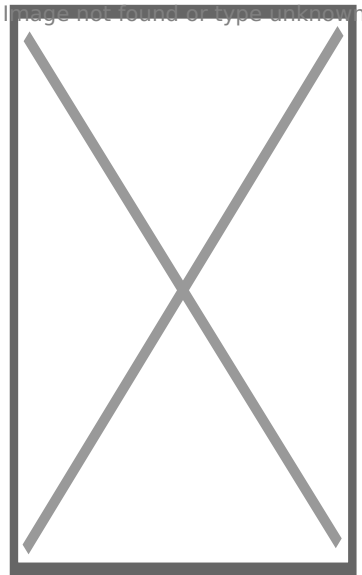
<sup>↑</sup> Demetrius Lacon, Aporie testuali ed esegetiche in Epicuro (PHerc. 1012), ed. Enzo Puglia. Naples 1988.

<sup>↑</sup> Demetrius, Lacon, La forma del Dio: PHerc. 1055, ed. Mariacarolina Santoro. Naples 2000.

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Post by “Joshua” of November 20, 2023 at 8:37 PM

On poems:



[La poesia : PHerc. 188 e 1014 : Demetrius, Lacon, active 2nd century B.C : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

328 pages ; 24 cm

archive.org

Greek text starts on page 94ish. (Borrow for 1 hour)

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## **Post by “Bryan” of November 25, 2023 at 1:45 AM**

Here is a version of PHerc 1055, which is attributed to our Demetrius. (Possibly for the first time in English. Comments and critiques are welcome. Greek is in the attachment.)

11. Clearly, men preserve the memories of what has been impressed in childhood. Because the soul remains, extending throughout the body, it grows entirely during childhood...

12. It is possible to preserve some of the bodies, and it is evident that memories are also preserved due to these previously imparted motions to the generative faculties of the mind...

13. He says that memories are preserved (in general, as much authority as we have over these matters to speak) although the material that forms the intellect is completely transformed.

14. Because of this, [the mind] possesses a direct reception of similar things, and when these are examined closely, they are not difficult to restore, and by such restorations, we leave god in

a human form - because clearly we connect [the form of a human] to a god.

15. Since we do not find reason in any other form apart from a human form, it is evident that we should leave a god in an anthropomorphic form so that, even with reason, he may have substance (so that he has a real existence along with the rational faculty). Therefore, we say that [a god] is anthropomorphic...

16. He [Bion] does not grasp our point even when he leads to it. For they say that if god is anthropomorphic because it has reasoning and shared vitality, we associate with god many other common properties of forms, such as hands, fingers...

17. ...[god] has a similar soul [to man]. Therefore, it is not necessary that if any animals have such a form that a god also has that form. But it will have the faculty of reasoning and, in addition to these common properties, it will also have many other properties in the highest degree...

18. "If indeed," he [Bion] says, "it has a human form, it is clear that it will have eyes, so it will also suffer from ophthalmia, and it will be affected similarly by the remaining senses." But this itself is similar to nonsense.

19. Therefore, it is completely convincing - as it comes from Bion, who first according to Theophrastus adorned philosophy with flowers - but what he left is unadorned due to his ignorance of the nature of things. This is, in fact, the argument: "we say that each species of living being has its own form in its own species..."

20. We say that "god is not the universe nor tireless sun or the full moon" but it is not possible to say this to a Stoic or a Peripatetic! For how does that which is spherical have its own form? Otherwise, those saying that [god is spherical] do not see that because it is proper for the nature of things...

21. Greater density and lesser density areas differ to the extent that the [greater density] is composed of more atoms, the [lesser density] of fewer atoms. As a consequence of this, that which is denser and capable of generating sensation, produces it - and conversely, that which is less dense and does not produce sensation, cannot set it into motion.

22. We should not exclude the things excluded from sight - because nothing perceptible is immortal. The density (of visible things) opposes this, receiving strong blows. And again, nothing translucent (διαφανές) is perceptible [ie visible by the 5 senses]. Since that which produces large counterforces with great weight for what is perceptible...

23. Of the things said in this way about Bion's thinking, I will establish this: Since every kind of living being has its own form within its own genus, but not in every way at once - so this same thing that happens in what is visible also happens in what is observable by reasoning.

24. Given that visible things harmonize with what is observable by reasoning, as we demonstrated previously, when what is visible does not oppose [what is observable by reasoning], this is also easily understood - and those things which were then discussed are circulated. Regarding these questions, dear Kointos, I have thoroughly applied myself...

25. But we say that the form of a god is not like what other philosophers attribute. Certainly, they would have seen that [a god] has shapes that are not spherical nor has judgments or angry dispositions or pettiness, but forms that stand apart in the sublime and dispositions rejecting everything lower - all directed towards its own bliss (μακαριότητα) and imperishability (ἀφθαρσίαν).

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### **Post by “Don” of November 25, 2023 at 8:34 AM**

That's great, [Bryan](#) !!

What is the "DND 1.123" citation you mention for your choice of "translucent (διαφανές)"?

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### **Post by “Bryan” of November 25, 2023 at 9:46 AM**

Oh, that is just Cicero and his discussion in De Natura Deorum "membris hominis praeditum omnibus usu membrorum ne minimo quidem, exilem quendam atque **perlucidum**, nihil cuiquam tribuentem nihil gratificantem, omnino nihil curantem nihil agentem."

διφυῆς did not make any sense to me, and διαφανές is used by the good Robert Philippson ([https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Robert\\_Philippson](https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Robert_Philippson)) and Vincenzo de Falco.

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### **Post by “Don” of November 25, 2023 at 12:38 PM**

Thanks!

For ease of reference:

123 "Epicurus is making fun of us, though he is not so much a humorist as a loose and careless writer. For how can holiness exist if the gods pay no heed to man's affairs? Yet what is the meaning of an animate being that pays no heed to anything?"

"It is doubtless therefore truer to say, as the good friend of us all, Posidonius, argued in the fifth book of his *On the Nature of the Gods*, that Epicurus does not really believe in the gods at all, and that he said what he did about the immortal gods only for the sake of deprecating popular odium. Indeed he could not have been so senseless as really to imagine god to be like a feeble human being, but resembling him only in outline and surface, not in solid substance, and possessing all man's limbs but entirely incapable of using them, an emaciated and transparent being, showing no kindness or beneficence to anybody, p121 caring for nothing and doing nothing at all. In the first place, a being of this nature is an absolute impossibility, and Epicurus was aware of this, and so actually abolishes the gods, although professedly retaining them."

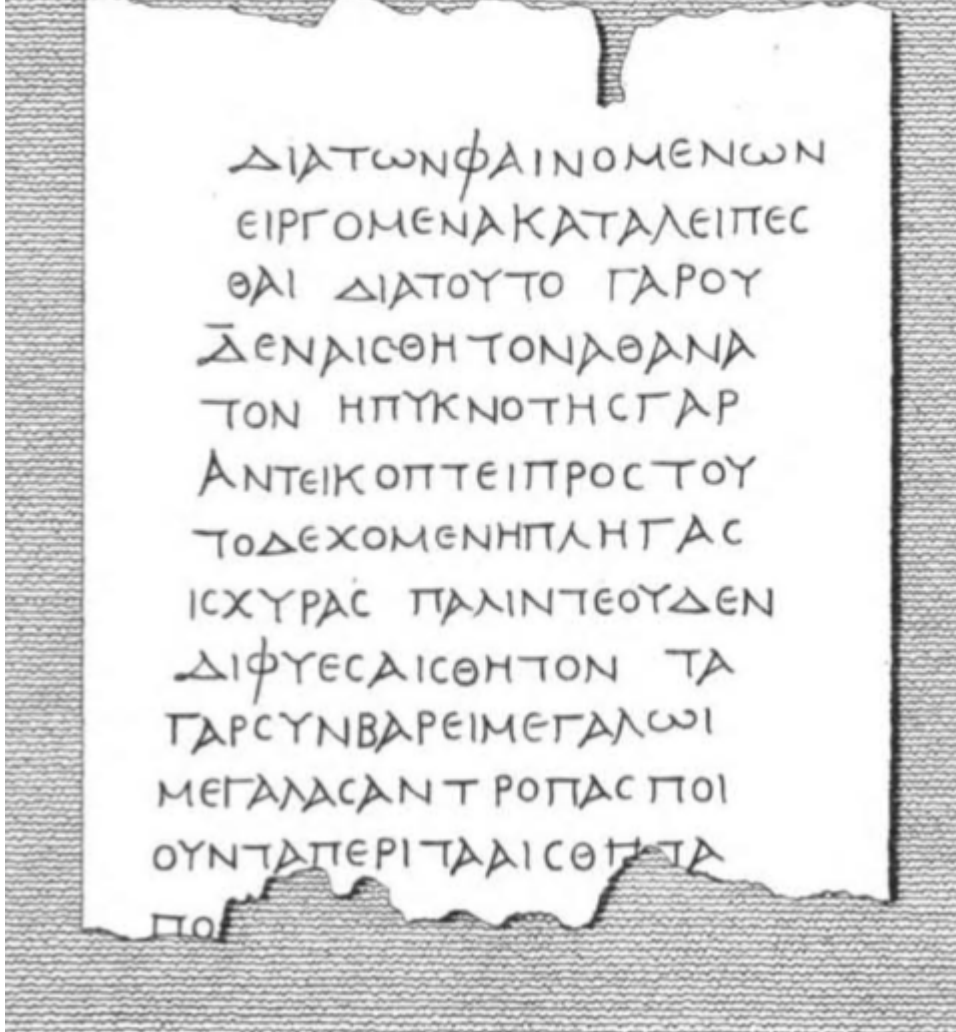
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### **Post by "Don" of November 25, 2023 at 12:53 PM**

From PHerc 1005, sentence in question:

... πάλιν τε οὐδέν

\*διφυῆς\* αἰσθητόν. ...



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**Post by “Don” of November 26, 2023 at 12:00 AM**

πάλιν τε οὐδὲν διφυῆς αἰσθητόν.

I come back to my hang-up of sticking to what's in the manuscript itself if at all possible.

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=difue%5Cs&la=greek&can=difue%5Cs0&prior=kai&d=Perseus>

The sketch and etching from the early 1800s give διφυῆς as the reading in the manuscript. So what could it mean? As [Bryan](#) says (and I can certainly see) there is a definite attraction of "correcting" the manuscript to διαφανές from διφυῆς. But ... that's one additional letter and the

change of another. And there just aren't enough manuscripts to do textual criticism.

There's no explicit verb, so that definitely means a copula is needed (ie, a form of "to be"). But where to put it? αἰσθητόν is accusative, so that would make sense as the predicate.

τε can be generally disregarded as "so..." or a weak "and...".

πάλιν οὐδὲν διφυῆς αἰσθητόν would literally be something like... What?

διφυῆς is the neuter plural of διφυῆ with the additional point that it can refer to Dionysus's dual male/female nature...

Diphῴis - (Diphues; Gr. Διφῴης, ΔΙΦΥΗΣ) name of Diῴnyos, of two natures. Orph.H.30.2.-  
Lexicon entry: διφῴης, ἑς; neut. pl. διφυῆ, also διφυᾶ:—of double nature or form.

So the word has the general meaning "of two natures." But also generally, twofold, double. Using [Bryan](#)'s masterful, original translation as a starting point:

22. We should not exclude the things excluded from sight - because nothing perceptible is immortal. The density (of visible things) opposes this, receiving strong blows. Once more, in no way, (πάλιν τε οὐδὲν) is that which has two natures perceptible. Since that which produces large counterforces with great weight for what is perceptible...

Granted, I'm grasping at straws here. What would the "two natures" be? Mortal and immortal? What is the "once more" or "and again" referring back to? My only objective in this exercise is to \*try\* to figure out a way to justify the existing textual evidence.

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## Post by "Bryan" of November 26, 2023 at 1:58 AM

Thank you for talking this out with me. This is the only instance where I broke from the provided Greek text. I really tried to make διφυῆς work!

If we accept that it is οὐδὲν αἰσθητόν then we have greatly reduced our options. Lucretius does talk about eidola with double natures (centaurs) not corresponding to external reality, but I do not think that fits this context, because the gods exist but the centaurs do not.

(5.1240) But there were no centaurs. And animals  
with a double nature, a dual body  
assembled from limbs of different beings,

so that the powers in this and that part

could be sufficiently alike—such creatures could not exist at any time.

But we need something that exists but is not visible by ἡ ἐπιβολή τῶν αἰσθήσεων (a focus of the senses) but is visible by ἡ ἐπιβολή τῆ διανοία (a focus with the mind)... which seems like another sign pointing to διαφανές.

Another argument is that it could be standing for that which has μακαριότητα and ἀφθαρσίαν, which is a technically true statement, and fits the above demand of only being visible by the mind...

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### Post by “Joshua” of November 26, 2023 at 2:03 AM

"What would the "two natures" be?"

You know, Lucretius uses almost that exact phrase;

Sed neque Centauri fuerunt nec tempore in ullo

esse queunt duplici natura et corpore bino

ex alienigenis membris compacta, potestas

hinc illinc partis ut sat par esse potissit.

id licet hinc quamvis hebeti cognoscere corde.

But Centaurs ne'er have been, nor can there be

Creatures of twofold stock and double frame,

Compact of members alien in kind,

Yet formed with equal function, equal force

In every bodily part- a fact thou mayst,

However dull thy wits, well learn from this:

There are interesting parallels here; in the above passage from book 5 Lucretius is concerned with the question of tracing the living thing back to its proper seed. In a separate passage in book 4, the poet uses the Centaur to make a different point;

nam certe ex vivo Centauri non fit imago,

nulla fuit quoniam talis natura animata;  
verum ubi equi atque hominis casu convenit imago,  
haerescit facile extemplo, quod diximus ante,  
propter subtilem naturam et tenuia texta.  
cetera de genere hoc eadem ratione creantur.  
quae cum mobiliter summa levitate feruntur,  
ut prius ostendi, facile uno commovet ictu  
quae libet una animum nobis subtilis imago;  
tenuis enim mens est et mire mobilis ipsa.


For soothly from no living Centaur is  
That phantom gendered, since no breed of beast  
Like him was ever; but, when images  
Of horse and man by chance have come together,  
They easily cohere, as aforesaid,  
At once, through subtle nature and fabric thin.  
In the same fashion others of this ilk  
Created are. And when they're quickly borne  
In their exceeding lightness, easily  
(As earlier I showed) one subtle image,  
Compounded, moves by its one blow the mind,  
Itself so subtle and so strangely quick.

In the first passage, Centaurs are declared not to exist because no such disparate seeds as those which produce men and horses could conceivably commingle in the way necessary to produce a man-horse. In the second passage he is giving an explanation of how the legend came to be in the first place; it was not seeds of men and horses that mingled and produced the centaur, but *images* of men and horses that mingled and produced the *illusion* of the existence of the centaur. These, the same images which we depend upon for knowledge of the gods?

Edit; I see Bryan and I crossposted with reference to the two passages on centaurs.

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## Post by “Don” of November 26, 2023 at 7:44 AM

[Bryan](#) & [Joshua](#) , thanks for engaging in this exercise!! 

With both your ideas in mind (pun intended?), I'm wondering if the "two natures" being mentioned "again" refer back to column 21:

21. Greater density and lesser density areas differ to the extent that the [greater density] is composed of more atoms, the [lesser density] of fewer atoms. As a consequence of this, that which is denser and capable of generating sensation, produces it – and conversely, that which is less dense and does not produce sensation, cannot set it into motion.

You can't have something that has both lesser and greater density? Only something with enough density is perceptible? This \*could\* possibly maybe lead to a sentence like "Once more, in no way (πάλιν τε οὐδὲν) is that which has two natures perceptible by the senses."

PS. Because, according to the Epicureans, the gods are perceptible, just perceptible by the mind. Using diaphanous there would imply to me that the gods are not perceptible.

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## Post by “Bryan” of November 26, 2023 at 5:38 PM

On one hand we have outlined the likely possibilities, and should probably suspend judgment.

But just for fun:

### [Quote from Don](#)

You can't have something that has both lesser and greater density?

I agree that "something simultaneously having both greater and lesser density within a defined space" is an example of something that is neither visible to the senses nor the mind (being a paradox of superposition, it is not perceptible to the mind, it is inconceivable).

Beyond paradoxes, everything we talk about will have to be perceptible - if not by the senses (perceptible) then at least by the mind (conceivable). Then we always have to reason how well

the reception, ἡ λήψις, corresponds to the actual external reality, so that we do not have a generally false stereotype, ἡ ὑπόληψις, but instead a generally true stereotype, ἡ πρόληψις.

In this case we are looking for something specifically that is not perceptible "by the 5 senses" as the text says (οὐδὲν αἰσθητόν) but is perceptible by the mind. Although translucent things may not be visible by a focus of the senses (ἡ ἐπιβολή τῶν αἰσθήσεων) they must be visible by a focus with the mind (ἡ ἐπιβολή τῆς διανοίας) - because we can get a mental image of "a translucent object" whereas we cannot of "something simultaneously having both greater and lesser density within a defined space" - which is equivalent to imagining two atoms at the same point at the same time.

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### **Post by “Pacatus” of November 26, 2023 at 6:06 PM**

[Bryan](#)

I don't have any background here, but I thought that in a superposition the ultimate state is indeterminate (metaphorically “both and neither”) until the function collapses?

Outside the idea of superposition (which I am in no way dismissing - except perhaps with regards to ancient philosophy) it seems that there is not a paradox but a logical contradiction - i.e. in violation of the law of noncontradiction:  $\sim(A \ \& \ \sim A)$ , in the same state at the same time. (Unless, of course, one is just talking about a mixture of, say, atoms of greater and lesser density ...)

Take this whole post as a question ...

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### **Post by “Bryan” of November 26, 2023 at 6:18 PM**

Yes, you are correct. Modern physics mostly allows for superposition, but Epicureanism, of course, never does. My analysis is from the Epicurean perspective (to the best of my ability). Thank you for your comment!

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### **Post by “Pacatus” of November 26, 2023 at 6:51 PM**

[Bryan](#)

Thank you for indulging me. My understanding would be that, once the function collapses, the superpositional state will become either A or  $\sim A$  (Schrödinger's cat is either alive or not). And, in a many worlds' interpretation, it might become A in one (logical) world and  $\sim A$  in another.

Just for my own (idle) edification, is that generally correct?

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## Post by "Don" of November 26, 2023 at 11:36 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

On one hand we have outlined the likely possibilities, and should probably suspend judgment.

But just for fun:

My sentiments exactly 😊 ...

[Quote from Bryan](#)

In this case we are looking for something specifically that is not perceptible "by the 5 senses" as the text says (οὐδὲν αἰσθητόν) but is perceptible by the mind.

I'm still not entirely sure/convicted of the syntax of that sentence, whether:

πάλιν τε οὐδὲν διφυῆς αἰσθητόν.

or

πάλιν τε οὐδὲν διαφανές αἰσθητόν.

I'm going to talk some of this out in real time, so I hope you all will indulge me.

διφυῆς and διαφανές are both neuter nominative/accusative singular adjectives.

διφυῆς is the "two natures; of double nature or form, generally, twofold, double"

διαφανές is translucent, transparent; but can also be metaphorically "manifest, distinct, distinctly seen, conspicuous"

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, διαφαν-ής](#)

But we know adjectives can be used as substantives so one/both of these could be "that which is X"

αἰσθητόν "sensible, perceptible; able to be perceived by the senses" can also be nominative/accusative singular. Same here: Either an adjective or "a sensible/perceptible thing."

To get back to [Bryan](#) 's comment above:

#### [Quote from Bryan](#)

In this case we are looking for something specifically that is not perceptible "by the 5 senses" as the text says (οὐδὲν αἰσθητόν) but is perceptible by the mind. Although translucent things may not be visible by a focus of the senses (ἡ ἐπιβολή τῶν αἰσθήσεων) they must be visible by a focus with the mind (ἡ ἐπιβολή τῆ διανοίᾳ) - because we can get a mental image of "a translucent object" whereas we cannot of "something simultaneously having both greater and lesser density within a defined space" - which is equivalent to imagining two atoms at the same point at the same time.

Why does the topic of the sentence have to be "perceptible by the mind"? Is the import of the sentence talking about things that are being ruled out as being imperceptible by \*all\* the senses (physical and mental)? Saying in effect, the gods cannot exist in this "two-natured" state, so Demetrius is ruling it out?

That pesky οὐδὲν "nothing" in there seems to be saying that "Once again, nothing (which is) X (διφυῆς/διαφανές) is able to be perceived by the senses (5 physical senses + the mind)" or to look at adverbially, "Once again, in no way is "an X-thing" (διφυῆς/διαφανές) able to be perceived by the senses (5 physical senses + the mind)."

And that pesky "once again" seems to be referring back to something previously discussed in the text. But what??

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### **Post by "Bryan" of November 27, 2023 at 5:23 PM**

#### [Quote from Pacatus](#)

Once the function collapses, the superpositional state will become either A or ~A

Yes, their "collapse" occurs when their math tries to support reality!

(As we know, we have infinite worlds but they cannot be in the same place at the same time.)

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### **Post by “Eikadistes” of December 29, 2024 at 11:57 AM**

[Quote from Joshua](#)

On poems:

<https://archive.org/details/lapoes...age/92/mode/2up>

Greek text starts on page 94ish. (Borrow for 1 hour)

Great find, [Joshua](#)! In my continued effort in amassing texts, I transcribed the Italian and ran it through Google Translate. I published the results at <https://twentiers.com/on-poems/>.

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### **Post by “Eikadistes” of January 5, 2025 at 11:43 AM**

[Bryan](#) I'm tagging you in another post, so heads-up.