

Discussion on Exercising Caution When Studying Fragments

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 31, 2025 at 9:42 AM

I have been wondering lately about text fragments, and especially Philodemus material, and that it is important to stress the fragmentary nature of that material.

I happened to find this question on r/Classics "Are fragmented Greek texts worth your time?" and found this to be a fun and important hint about how to deal with the fragments 😊



Easy-Food7670 · 1y ago

Absolutely. The best part about fragmentary texts is filling in the gaps, which really allows you to exercise your imagination and creativity.

My favourite is Philodemus'...



But the question is this: How much of interpretation of fragmentary texts is dependent on the translator's imagination, such that we cannot trust certain parts of Philodemus due to so many missing words and sentences. We need to draw a line when it comes to those parts which are potentially misleading due to the "creativity" of the translator.

Post by "Martin" of March 31, 2025 at 1:28 PM

Another big issue with fragments, especially from Philodemus, is whether a particular fragment expresses Philodemus' own view or that of an opponent.

Post by “Cassius” of March 31, 2025 at 1:37 PM

In terms of the creativity of translators, you can pick any passage from Lucretius and compare the various translations, and the variation in details is shocking -- even where the texts are very reliable and there's no questions about lost words or whole phrases.

So as I see it this is a problem where it's important to keep all these issues in mind, but there's no "solution" other than build from the ground up with a basic understanding of the fundamentals, and then consider any translations in the context of what we are confident is true. That way we can separate out what is likely a good translation from one that's got so much discretionary flourish as to mean totally different things.

And to think how many people over the years have gotten wrapped up in controversies over every detail of the King James and other translations of the Bible .

[Lucretius Side-by-Side](#)