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**Cultural Thefts and Social Contests in Ennius' *Annales* and Cato the Censor's *Origines***

According to the testimony of Pompeius (Pomp. *Ad Donatum GL V* 208, 13 ff= Cato, *Orig.* 1, 1 in Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi, 2001), Cato the Censor's *Origines* began as following: *si ques homines sunt quos delectat populi Romani gesta describere*. Luca Cardinali (Cardinali, *SCO* 1988) has argued that *homines* is a gloss that originally served the purpose of explaining the rare and archaic form of *ques*. As it turns out, the removal of the gloss reveals a line framed within a hexameter, a metrical pattern that will characterize the opening of later historiographic works (see Sallust, *Iugurtha* 5; Livy, 1.1, and Tacitus, *Annales* 1.1). In second-century Rome, however, Cato's stylistic choice points to the dynamic contest that took place around and over the production and circulation of Ennius' *Annales* among the Roman elite. This paper explores the configuration of this contest by focusing on the intense negotiations that underlie Ennius' importation of the hexameter from Greece and Cato's metrical gesturing towards Ennius' epic poem.

In the *Annales*, Ennius actualizes the importation of the Greek-made hexameter through a number of rhetorical devices that hinge on the figure of the Muses. He invokes the Greek deities and their beating feet (*Ann.* 1 Sk.), proclaims the superiority of his Musaic attempt over the rustic verses of his predecessors, Livius Andronicus and Naevius (206-210 Sk.), and negotiates a transition from the Camenae to the Musae (*Ann.* 487 [*sed. incert.*] Sk.). As scholars have long been pointing out, these devices must be read against the backdrop of Ennius' participation in Fulvius Nobilior's Aetolian campaign (Cic. *TD* 1.3) and the general's dedication of Muse-statues hauled off from Ambracia in a new shrine (Cic. *Arch.* 27, Eumen. *Paneg. Lat.* 9.7.3, Serv. *ad Aen.* 1.8). Whereas critics often read the partnership Ennius-Nobilior in purely literary or strictly political terms, I suggest that we are dealing with the most visible instance of poetic collusion in elite practices of actual conquest and cultural dispossession. According to this view, the hexameter is a cultural form that belongs to the colonized Greeks but that Ennius commodifies to move upwards by producing an epic that targets the elite's demand in representations of their own achievements.

Cato's adoption of the hexameter at the beginning of the *Origines* demonstrates the interest that the elite had in the cultural capital of the colonized and the function that the poets fulfilled in facilitating a change of ownership from colonized to colonizers. In fact, through imitation and display Cato stakes out his claim of ownership over the Greek hexameter that Ennius had made available through his epic. On the other hand, Cato takes a precise position in relation to the place that epic should (not) occupy. In a fragment closely following the opening line (preserved in Cic. *TD* 4.3 = Cato, *Orig.* 1.4 in Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi 2001), Cato conjures up the ancestors sitting at a banquet in the act of singing the praises and manly deeds of the best among them. This image instantiates an authoritative paradigm that, as we learn from the *carmen de moribus* (preserved in Gellius, *NA* 11.2.5), excludes the participation of poets from convivial occasions and denies honor to their activities. Through this paradigm, I propose, Cato

aims to disavow the social legitimacy of poets as mediators in intra-elite relations and to devalue their works as means for proclaiming elite excellence before the elite themselves. At the same time, the reference in this very paradigm to the banquet as a poet-free place allows us to nominate the elite *convivia* as the likely setting in which Ennius' *Annales* was originally performed and circulated.