

Palaeographic Instruction for the Ischia Manuscript (MS 408). **Dr. Gerard Cheshire.**

The process of palaeography is far more complex and time-consuming than the process of translation, as it requires additional intuition, instruction, involvement and intelligence in order to find the right words, rather than a simple substitution of words. This is one of the reasons why the writing system and language of the Ischia Manuscript took a while to fathom, as the document is unique in the complexity of its palaeographic requirements. This naturally perplexes those who expect or desire effortless translation, but logic dictates that all simple and easy possibilities must already have been eliminated by the experiments of many others over the decades. This paper provides instruction to elucidate and educate the novice about the palaeographic process needed for success with reading the Ischia manuscript.

The language of the Ischia Manuscript is a multilingual hybrid of Iberian Romance, Latin, Greek and Arabic, due to the historical and geographical context in which it evolved. As if that weren't already complex enough, the writing system adds further layers of complexity. Firstly, the writing system has no punctuation marks, uppercase letters, double consonants or rules of grammar, often conjoining the words of set phrases. Secondly, the writing system uses frequent abbreviations for Latin phrases that were familiar at the time. Thirdly, the writing system is phonetic and enclitic, meaning that words are spelled as they were pronounced, but silent letters and junctural letters are omitted. Fourthly, the manuscript alphabet is a mix of familiar and unique symbols, with some letters having two or more symbols depending on context and pronunciation. Finally, there are various diphthongs and combined letter forms.

Added to these layers of complexity, there is the matter of sourcing the words and their variant spellings, as well as differentiating between their various definitions due to historical linguistic divergence and convergence. Therefore, it is also necessary to cross-reference with visual information in the manuscript in order to verify the intended meaning of the text. In turn, this enables the entry of words into a lexicon, so that text without accompanying visual material can then be understood. All-in-all then, the palaeographic challenge is not inconsiderable, but it is surprisingly straightforward once the rules have become imprinted in the mind and become innate with practise. Besides, the difficult bit - identifying the language and solving the writing system - has already been done for you.

The best way to teach the palaeographic process for the Ischia Manuscript is to demonstrate by example. Thus far, the only page palaeographically processed word-for-word is Plant Page No. 1 (Portfolio 2, Left), which shows an illustration of Iberian Nightshade (*Atropa baetica*). The text describes its lethal effect when eaten, but also describes its uses, as a beautifying agent for the eyes and as an abortifacient, for terminating unwanted pregnancies. The cross-reference of these three pieces of information, which are well documented in contemporaneous books and manuscripts, has enabled the identification and etymology of each word on the page and therefore initiated the composition of a lexicon, which will progressively make the palaeographic process easier. There are two papers that deal with the Iberian Nightshade page: Plant Series No. 1. Manuscript MS 408 (<https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/004797>) and Reintroducing a vanished Romance language (<https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/005613>).

There follows a new example, using the same applied technique, so that other scholars can familiarize themselves with the palaeographic process and understand the way in which visual information and research become integral to a successful outcome. Even with instruction, the

palaeographic process is necessarily protracted and requires a good deal of self-education, intuition and patience to master. The demonstration example is the first line of the Plant Page No. 11 (Portfolio 7, Left). In this example, each word is dealt with individually, so that the entire palaeographic process is made as clear as possible for the uninitiated.

Figure 1 shows the entire page, whilst Figure 3 shows only the first line to be palaeographized. The species of plant is the Small-Flowered Lupin (*Lupinus micranthus*), which has characteristic radially symmetrical palmate leaves and relatively small and hairy inflorescence cones, with blue flowers that emerge in sequence from the bottom upwards, so that the cones initially appear blue around the edges and green at their centres. Photographs are also shown in Figures 2. As with other lupin species, the seeds of *Lupinus micranthus* have been eaten as a staple foodstuff in Iberia since time immemorial.



Fig. 1. Plant Page No. 11. (Portfolio 7, Left). Identified as Small-flowered Lupin (*Lupinus micranthus*).



Fig. 2. Photographs of Small-flowered Lupin (*Lupinus micranthus*), showing the distinctive radially symmetrical palmate leaves, and the small hairy green-centred blue inflorescence cones.

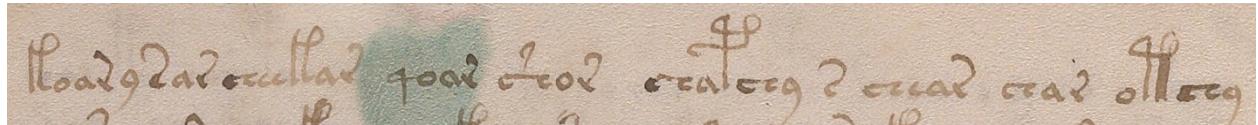


Fig. 3. The first line of text from Plant Page No. 11. (Portfolio 7, Left).

The first part of the process is to convert the Ischia manuscript symbols into modern Italics, by using the symbol key, provided at the end of the paper. Figure 4 shows the first line written in Ischia manuscript font, above, with the corresponding Italic letters beneath. Then it becomes a matter of identifying the etymology and definitions of the words and phrases that the sentence comprises.



Fig 4. The example line, shown in manuscript font, above, and Italics beneath.

No. 1. *lo'as. seedpods*

The word *loas* is an enclitic spelling of *lotas*, which describes the lupin seedpods filled with seeds. The word *lotas* survives in Portuguese, to mean *filled up, packed full, crowded in*, just as the seeds are in the seedpod. The word relates to λωτός (*lōtós*), which is Greek for an elongated plant food, and derives from the Hebrew לֹט (*lot*), which means a protective shell, casing or pod.

No. 2. *a. of*

The word *a* means *with* or *of* and survives in Portuguese and Castilian.

No. 3. *tas. rattle*

The word *tas*, or *tac*, is an onomatopoeic term to describe a high-pitched tapping sound, or rattling noise: *tas-tas-tas, tac-tac-tac*. It relates to the Greek word τάχος (*táχos*) (swift or sharp sound) and the words *tas* and *tac* survive in Castilian, with *tas* meaning a small anvil due to the sound it emits.

No. 4. *éèlas. it is they*

This is the phrase *é èlas*.

The word *é* means *it is* or *is* and survives in Portuguese and Galician.

The word *èlas* means *they* and survives in Galician and Portuguese.

No. 5. *doas. seeds*

This is the plural of *doa* which means a bead, or bead-like, so *doas* means lupin *seeds*. The words *doa* and *doas* survive in Galician.

No. 6. *æos. here bones*

This is the phrase *æ os*.

The word *æ* is the archaic form of *ai* or *alí* which means *there* or *here* in Galician

The word *os* is an abbreviation of *óso* or *ossos*, meaning *bones* in Galician and Portuguese. The word *os* survives in Valencian.

No. 7. *éapéa. it's of foot of*

This is the phrase *é a pé a*.

The word *é*: See Word No 4.

The word *a* means *of* in Portuguese.

The word *pé* means foot in Galician and Valencian.

The word *a* means *of* in Portuguese.

No. 8. *t. end*

This is a common Latin abbreviation of *terminus*, which means the *end* or *tip* of something. In this case it refers to the toes, at the end of the foot.

No. 9. *éeas. it's and in*

This is the phrase *é e as*.

The word *é*: See Word No 4.

The word *e* means *and* in Portuguese.

The word *as* means *at* or *in* in Portuguese.

No. 10. *oméa. the sock*

This is the phrase *o méa*.

The word *o* means *the* in Portuguese.

The *méa* is the archaic spelling of *meia*, which means *sock* (half-stocking) in Portuguese.

In conclusion then, the entire sentence reads '*lotas a tas é èlas æ os é a pé a terminus é e as o meia*'. The literal wording is **seedpods of rattle, it is they seeds, here bones it's of foot of end it is and in the sock**.

In modern phrasing this might be expressed: English: **seedpods rattle with the seeds, as if bones of the toes inside a sock**. Portuguese: **as vagens chocalham com as sementes, como se os ossos dos dedos dos pés dentro de uma meia**. Galician: **cápsulas das sementes estertor, coma se ósos dos dedos dos pés dentro dun calcetín**. Valencian: **ecàpsulas fer sonar de les llavors, com si fossin ossos dels dits dels peus dins d'un mitjó**. Castilian: **las vainas traquetean de las semillas, como si los huesos de los dedos de los pies dentro de un calcetín**.

Thus, the sentence first describes the characteristic rattling noise of lupin seedpods and then uses the metaphor of bones in the foot covered by a sock. Those who know their botany will concur that lupin seedpods are indeed similar in shape to human toes and that they are covered in silvery silky down, making them resemble furry or woolly socks, with the seeds rattling inside as if the bones of the toes. We can be confident therefore, that this palaeographic interpretation of the sentence is entirely correct. See Figure 5.

In the absence of a name for the plant, the manuscript author employed their imagination to describe the edible seeds of the plant by using a whimsical comparison with the bones of human toes. It is interesting to note that the manuscript author uses the phrase ‘bones of the end of the foot’ to mean toes, whilst modern Castilian, Galician, Portuguese and Valencia all use the phrase ‘fingers of the foot’. So, none of the Iberian Romance languages uses an equivalent word for ‘toes’.



Fig. 5. Photographs of the seedpods of *Lupinus micranthus* in various stages of maturity, showing the similarity with human toes in woolly socks. Bottom-left shows the seedpods when desiccated, so that the seeds rattle.

We can see that the language is predominantly Galician-Portuguese: the Medieval form of Iberian Romance from the north of the peninsula, where the Crown of Aragon had its seat. Since the 15th century, Castilian (Spanish) and Valencian (Catalan) have become dominant in the central and eastern parts of the peninsula, with Portuguese along the west coast and Galician in the north-west.

Incidentally, the surviving modern Aragonese language has far less in common with the manuscript language than modern Galician and Portuguese, even though the provenance of the manuscript lies with the Crown of Aragon. For example, the modern Aragonese for the lupin seedpod is *legumbre*, whilst the manuscript word is *lotas* (Portuguese); the modern Aragonese word for *foot* is *piet*, whilst the manuscript word is *pé* (Galician); the modern Aragonese for *bone* is *güeso*, whilst the manuscript word is *os/óso/ossos* (Valencian, Galician, Portuguese); the modern Aragonese for *sock* is *peazo*, whilst the manuscript word is *meia* (Portuguese). This demonstrates that ‘Old Aragonese’ was essentially Galician-Portuguese.

Conclusion.

The palaeographic process for the Ischia Manuscript should be reasonably easy to learn. One of the fundamentals to all palaeography is to experiment by trial and error, but by employing basic ground rules relevant to the document in question. Here, for example, there is an algorithmic sequence of likelihood in terms of language: Iberian Romance (Galician, Portuguese, Valencian, Castilian) – Latin – Greek – Arabic. Also, cross-reference with visual and historical information will enable the assembly of meaningful text by the application of logic. Finally, avoid using your imagination to invent solutions, as the truth is invariably rather mundane and prosaic, but that isn’t to say that it dull or boring from the historical perspective. Any new knowledge is interesting to the appropriate scholar.

Other papers to download.

Linguistic Missing Links: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/003737>

Linguistically Dating and Locating MS408: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/003808>

Consonants and Vowels, Castles and Volcanoes: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/004381>

Plant Series. No. 1. *Atropa baetica*: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/004797>

Plant Series. No. 2. *Serratula erucifolia*: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/004845>

Plant Series. No. 3. *Nymphaea alba*: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/004864>

Plant Series. No. 4. *Euphorbia myrsinites*: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/004880>

Plant Series. No. 5. *Hesperocodon hederaceus*: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/004917>

Plant Series. No. 6. *Andromeda polifolia*: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/004971>

Plant Series. No. 7. *Campanula rapunculus*: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/005069>

Plant Series. No. 8. *Paris quadrifolia*: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/005139>

Plant Series. No. 9. *Erodium malacoides*: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/005269>

Plant Series. No. 10. *Crepis vesicaria*: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/005270>

Reintroducing a vanished Romance language: <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/005613>