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SENECA’S MEDEA IN EGYPT (663–704)


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This is a page from a vellum codex of Seneca, *Medea*. It contains continuous 41 verses (21 on the front and 20 on the back), according to the modern arrangement of the lines. The front has 23 and the back 22 lines. This page has been assembled from three fragments (3.9 x 7.4 cm, 7.5 x 3.7 cm, 7.5 x 4.2 cm); one fragment (about 4 x 7.5 cm.) is missing from the page. Together with other fragments, the pieces from the *Medea* were recycled in the binding of a Coptic vellum ms. (inv. 4972), purchased in 1928. The other texts are: inv. 4969 (Coptic), 4969 (Latin), 4970-71, two Coptic magic charms of the right size to have been used as end papers of the binding, and the remains of the leather binding itself, inv. 4972. The dimensions of the binding are 12 x 18.5. Two sets of holes for binding cords are visible on the fragment, 1.5 cm from the top, and another 9.6 cm from the top. The Seneca folio was cut into four oblong pieces roughly of equal size (three extant, as said) and was then folded. There are two sets of holes on either side of the fold, giving the impression that the folio was reused as a stay, protecting the leaves of the new codex from being damaged by the binding cord. Such stays were commonly used in papyri, for example, in the binding of the codices of Didymos the Blind (e.g. Didyme l'Aveugle, *Sur la Genèse*, ed. P. Nautin [Paris 1976], 12) and Nag Hammadi (J. Robinson et al. *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices, Introduction* [Leiden 1984], 79 and plate 2). In the binding of the vellum Coptic codex, the cords that connected the quires to the spine are still visible in two places. At the top, the cord (still attached) was stitched through the spine in two places, 2.8 cm. apart. Lower down, the cord was also stitched through the spine twice, leaving holes of 3 cm. apart. This distance corresponds exactly to the interval separating the two sets of binding holes that are visible on all three pieces of our Seneca fragment.

The size of a full page of the Michigan Seneca was c. 12 x 18 cm with 22-24 lines. This size fits exactly the dimensions of the leather binding, 12 x 18.5 cm, whereas most of the other 35 fr. from the same inv. are too large. A codex of Seneca’s dramas in this format would have occupied about 214 ff. (428 pp.). E.G. Turner (*The Typology of the Early Codex*, [Univ. of Pennsylvania 1977] 29) lists 10 examples of parchment pages of this size, most of the IV-V AD, among them an Isocrates, *P. Ant. II*, 83 of the IVth century. The typological date for the codex format is consistent with the paleographical date of IV AD that we propose (see “Date and Paleography”, below). The Coptic codex in the binding of which the Seneca fragment was used must have contained more than 135 pp., since inv. 4969 fr. 21.3 has the pagination 134-135. All fr. that obviously match the dimensions of the binding (4969 fr. 20-22) are from the New Testament (fr. 20 Luke 21.36 - 22.10, fr. 21.1: 2 Cor. 1.9-19; fr. 21.2: 2 Cor. 1.19-2.8; fr.21.3: 2 Cor. 3.5-17, and fr. 25: 2 Tim. 1.11-2.2).

Of the fragments from the same binding that have already been published, one is significant: inv. 4969.25 (Coptic), 2 Timothy 1.11-15, and 1.16 - 2.2 (R. Stewart, *Studia Papyrologica* 21 [1982] 7-10). It is dated by its editor to the 10th cent. AD. The re-use of ms. after a considerable life-span has parallels: cf. E.A. Lowe, *Codices Antiquiores* III n. 306, a V-VI AD *Aeneid* with a Greek translation that was re-used in the early 12. cent. AD for a Christian work in Arabic.

The color of the vellum is light yellow on the hair side and darker on the flesh side. The writing is in black ink (m1), there is a rubric in bright red, and the corrections are entered in a darker brown-red ink (m2). The continuity from one side to the other establishes the hair side as recto, and the flesh side as verso.

This new text fragment of Seneca’s *Medea* (663-704)\(^1\) deserves close scrutiny. It is the first fragment of Seneca found in Egypt. It has at least one archetypal error (666), but also confirms an emendation of an archetypal mistake (N. Heinsius’s *effundit* for *effudit* in line 677). The main corrector adopted this same archetypal error (*effudit*). There is also another passage that most editors regard as corrupt in the archetype (680). Here, the new text sides with the manuscript branch E (*conprecans*, 680),\(^2\) and this reading now needs reconsideration. In general, the new text is related to the archetype, but has preserved one or possibly two correct readings that are corrupt in the archetype.\(^3\) In addition, the Michigan fragment provides new evidence that Seneca’s tragedies were read in the East in the fourth century.

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\(^{2}\) For another significant connection with the E branch see below, "Rubrics". For an early date of the split of the manuscript tradition (before the date of the new parchment) see n. 11. The extant text section of the new fragment is too short for a definition of its place in the manuscript tradition. There is, however, a conjunctive error that connects the new text with A (see below, "Errors and Corrections").

\(^{3}\) For further discussion see below ("Errors and Corrections") and the commentary on these lines.
Date and Paleography. The script can be identified as older (eastern) half-uncial usually dated to III-V AD\(^4\) The closest comparable script is the Epitome of Livy (CLA II 208 = P. Oxy. IV 668 + PSI XII. 1201) which has been dated to the third century for two external reasons. On the back of the roll there is a copy of the Letter to the Hebrews in Greek, dated to the early fourth century.\(^5\) In addition, the Epitome of Livy was patched with pieces of discarded documents on papyri, which Grenfell and Hunt dated to the third rather than the fourth century.

The shape of e, g, l, s, t, y clearly distinguishes this script from the later half-uncial which started spreading at the end of the 5th century. b, d, f, r, m are also distinctly half-uncial and the a which has its left shaft coming down below the line and the bows of p and q which are small and high above the base line are the same as on the script of the Epitome of Livy. a, which has a small loop rather than a sharp angle as does the Epitome of Livy and the majority of the witnesses to the older half-uncial,\(^6\) is an exception and so is the u, which in the Epitome is formed of two strokes while in this script it is cup-shaped. For a parallel of an a with a rounded loop see CLA X 1537 (IV-V AD), and VIII 1042 (early IV AD), and for the cup-shaped u see CLA X 1577 (IV AD); and Suppl. 1677 (III-IV AD), 1720 (IV AD).

A fourth century date for the Michigan Seneca is consonant with our previous considerations about the dimensions of the codex.

Latin in Late Antique Egypt. Only a small number of Latin authors were read in Egypt at any time, but in the fourth century AD, there seems to have been a growing interest in learning Latin among Greek speakers in Egypt. This interest is probably attributable to the expanded use of Latin in law courts in the East during and after the reign of Diocletian.\(^7\) The most important texts in the curriculum, to judge from the extant literary papyri, were Vergil and Cicero, both of whom were read with the aid of facing translations in Greek.\(^8\) Texts concerning Roman Law are by far the most common non-documentary texts found in Egypt, frequently with Greek translations or annotations,\(^9\) but literary authors were also read in Egypt: Sallust, Terence, Aesop, Juvenal, Livy, Lucan (Pack-Mertens, 2917-2952). The small range of Latin literature found in Egypt has in part contributed to a reasonable scepticism as to whether Greek speakers in the East read authors like Seneca at all in the fourth century.\(^10\) The marginalia of the new parchment to be discussed below indicate now that in the fourth century at least some Greek-speaking people in Egypt did try to understand Seneca’s Latin verse.

A direct evidence of an individual reader of Seneca comes in the person of Claudius Claudianus, a native speaker of Greek from Alexandria who came to Rome before 395 and wrote Latin poetry. He makes frequent references to Seneca’s tragedies in his Fescenninus in honor of Honorius.\(^11\) An indirect


\(^{6}\) CLA I 57: II 247; VIII 1033; X 1577; X 227 (p. 38); Suppl. 1677; 208 (p. 8).


\(^{8}\) The following papyri of Cicero and Vergil have Greek translations, cited here by Pack-Mertens number, as given in *Miscellània Papirologica Ramon Rocca-Puig* (Barcelona 1987), 819-204.


\(^{9}\) Pack2 2953 - 2953, almost as many fragments as all Latin literary papyri combined.

\(^{10}\) R. Tarrant, commenting on whether the echoes of Seneca evident in Quintus Smyrnaeus are attributable to direct or indirect contact by the author: “Knowledge of Seneca’s tragedies by a fourth-century Greek, however, remain hard to credit" (Seneca, *Agamemnon* [Cambridge 1976] 22).

\(^{11}\) In fact, Claudianus’ *Fescenninus* (398 AD) contains enough conjunctive errors with the E branch of Seneca’s manuscript tradition to allow O. Zwielein to date the splitting of the manuscript tradition to the end of the fourth century (Prolegomena [n. 1 above], 34). If Zwielein is right, then the Michigan fragment has originated after the formation of the archetype (III/IV AD) in the period of its splitting into branches e and a.
evidence of familiarity with Seneca's moral writings in Christian circles is the spurious \textit{Correspondence of Seneca and Paul} (ed. B. Palagi [Florence 1978]) which originated in a fourth century school of rhetoric and according to Jerome was read by many (\textit{De uiris illustribus} 12).

**Punctuation.** The fragment uses two marks of punctuation, a high point (\textit{distinctio}) and middle point (\textit{media distinctio}), which, according to the grammarians, were meant to indicate how to phrase the text when reading aloud.\textsuperscript{12} The punctuation indicates that the vellum fragment belonged to a \textit{codex distinctus}.\textsuperscript{13} Three of these marks are entered by the scribe's hand (700, 702 and 703), the rest are in the dark brown ink used by the corrector, \textit{m}_2 (675, 677, 678, 684, 701), but in 677 & 678 the scribe also left space between the letters. There are two high stops (\textit{distinctiones}) in our text: in 675 after \textit{monstrum}, where O. Zwierlein (OCT) has a full stop, and after \textit{apta} in 697, where there is no sentence end, but a metrical and a logical pause between two antithetical cola marked with a comma in OCT.\textsuperscript{14} Middle stops (\textit{mediae distinctiones}) occur in 677 after \textit{effundit}, in 678 after \textit{timuit}, in 684 marking verse-end, in 700 after \textit{gemina[1]}, in 702 after \textit{serpens}, in 703 between \textit{peruigil} and \textit{Colchis}. The punctuation of the fragment seems to conform to contemporary practices (e.g. the use of \textit{media distinctio} before \textit{et} in 16 and 42, cf. H.R. Pontes [n. 16 below] 108). No Latin manuscript embodies fully the system of punctuation described by the grammarians.\textsuperscript{15} Examples of manuscripts which use at least two marks of punctuation (like the Michigan Seneca) are Terence, \textit{Andria}, \textit{P. Oxy.} XXIV 2401 of the IV AD (middle and low points) and Juvenal, \textit{JEA}, XXI (1935) 199-209 of the V AD (middle and low points); Vaticanus Palatinus Lat. 1631 (P) of Vergil, IV/V AD (high and middle points); Vaticanus Lat. 3225 (F) of Vergil (IV AD) and Codex Mediceus, V AD (CLA iii, 296) contain all three marks of punctuation often accompanied by space.\textsuperscript{16}

**Rubrics.** A rubric after line 669 announces a change of speaker in capitals: NUT[RIX]. O. Zwierlein (\textit{Prolegomena}, [n. 1 above] 27 & 250 ff.) notes that the rubrics were well preserved in the E tradition and go back as far as the III AD (see comm. to line 8 [670] below). The rubric on our fragment is written in a different ink than the dark brown-red of the corrections and the style is also different. The red of the rubric is considerably faded.

**Marginalia.** Written by more than one hand, the following marginalia are visible on the fragment:

1) In the margin on the hair side (recto) next to line 6 (668) there are traces of a word in Greek letters of which only four are clearly legible: \textit{[b]hv} and \textit{x} in the following line (see comm. to 6). Traces of a different word are scribbled over and are in part obscuring the underlying traces of the Latin rubric NUT[RIX] written by \textit{m}_3. These traces could be read as \textit{νοτρ[η]}\textit{πι}. The spelling of Latin words with Greek letters was often practiced in textbooks and glossaries from this period (see comm. to line 8 [670]).

2) At the bottom of the flesh side (verso) the same hand spelled in large Greek letters over \textit{serpens} the word \textit{δραχω} and below \textit{serpens}, \textit{καπε}. Examples of Latin texts with Greek marginalia include Sallust (Pack-Mertens 2932 IV AD), Terence (2934 IV AD) and Juvenal (2925, ca. 500 AD).


\textsuperscript{13} The phrase is first attested in the IV AD commentary on Donatus by Servius: "When a codex is emended by \textit{distinctio, media distinctio} and \textit{subdistinctio} [i.e. by graded pauses] the codex is said to be \textit{distinctus}." (H. Keil, \textit{Gram. Lat.} [Lipsiae 1855-1880] IV, 484). Cf. M.B. Parkes [1992] 13 & 119. A manuscript that applies punctuation is called \textit{codex emendatus distinctione} or \textit{codex distinctus} (Sergii \textit{De accentibus}, H. Keil, \textit{Gram. Lat.} IV, 482; cf. E.O. Wingo [1972] 23).

\textsuperscript{14} E.G. Turner, \textit{Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World}, BICS Suppl. 46 [1987] 9, writes that high stops are very common in Greek literary texts and are often made to do duty for both the modern comma and the full stop. As E.M. Thompson (\textit{Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography} [Oxford 1912] 69) states, "the punctuation of the Latin manuscripts followed in some respects the systems of the Greeks."


3) On the bottom of the hair side (recto) there are traces of letters that seem to have been written more carefully in a different hand (m₄).

4) In the margin on top of the flesh side (verso) there is a sign (a circle with some letter or number inside) which may be pagination.

The hands of the marginalia are very informal and inexperienced, the letters are those of the Greek alphabet and a little larger than the script on the page.

**Errors and Corrections.** Careful corrections in dark brown-red ink are made by a hand (m₂) different from the one that wrote the main text. The corrections are entered by crossing the letter or word out and putting a dot above it. Among the corrections entered by m₂, *effu[n]dit* in 677 is an archetypal error (Zwierlein, OCT) which appears in all manuscripts.¹⁷ The scribe entered the correct form, *effundit*, but the corrector replaced it with the archetypal error *effudit*, which makes little grammatical sense due to the present tense of *promit* in the following line (N. Heinsius, cf. comm. to 16 [677] below). The occurrence of an archetypal error in the fragment corroborates the findings of O. Zwierlein about the archetype being flawed as early as the time of its formation in the third-fourth century (*Prolegomena*, [n. 1 above] 52 ff). In another case, our parchment joins an archetypal error (see above, and n. on line 4 [666]).

A conjunctive error links the Michigan parchment to the A branches of the manuscript tradition. In line 687, *jeron* must be the end of *exterit* or *exerit*, erroneous variants attested in the P and T branches respectively of the A tradition (see comm. to 28 [687]). A connection with the E tradition remains plausible, but uncertain (see above, "Rubrics"). In 680 the Michigan Seneca reads *compre[ca]ns*, attested in E. Textual critics tend to consider this reading an error and the archetype here corrupt. However, we shall advance some considerations for the plausibility of *comprecans* (see comm. to 20 [680] below). Hence we do not regard this as a conjunctive error with E (see also n. 2).

Two unique errors, not attested in any of the manuscripts of the two main branches, are corrected by m₂. These are: *manibus*, corrected to *maius* in 674 and in *in ferris* corrected to *desertis* in 685.

Colometry is carefully adhered to and the lyric song of the chorus (663-69) is indented. This careful colometry reflects the effort of late antique philology, as the frequent citations of Seneca in fourth century metrical treatises show (O. Zwierlein, *Prolegomena* [n. 1 above] 27). In 669 the correction by m₂ may be governed by colometry (see comm. to 7 [669]; cf. to 18 [678]). The only deviation from correct colometry, left uncorrected by m₂, is in line 25.

The scribe's spelling shows the usual phonetic confusion between *d/t* (677, 699, 675) and *m/n* (681) in final or quasi-final position (see comm. *ad locc*). The corrector (m₂) consistently corrects these spellings, except in 691 *quot tellus* and in the etymological spellings *inpendes* (663) and *comprecans* (680). Assimilation and dissimilation of consonants in compound verbs is a standard orthographic deviation in Seneca's manuscripts (O. Zwierlein, *Prolegomena* [n. 1 above] 258).

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**Diplomatic text** | **Reconstructed text** | Plate XIII
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**Hair side (Recto)**
uxorinp[| 663 | uxor inp[entes animam marito]
1 | ipsequiq[| 675 | ipse qui p[raedam spoliumque iussit]
aureum[| 665 | aureum [prima reuhei carina]
ustusaç[| 668 | ustus ac[censo Pelias aeno]
arista[| 685 | arsit a[ngustas uagus inter undas.]
θηιν | iamsatis[| 663 | iam satis [diui, mare uindicasticis:]
parciteusso [| 680 | parcite iusso.
| 670 | NUTHIRIX
| 670 | p]auet animus, h[orret: magna pernicies adest.]

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Illegible marginalia (m3 and m4)

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**Flesh side (Verso)**

24 [ ca. 14 ] tracta[t]
[ ca. 11 ]ibus
[ ca. 22 ] [a] in infern[is]
[ ca. 21 ] mmensum
28 [ ca. 21 ] eri[et]quaer[ti]
[ ca. 18 ] mc[eaud]otost[us]
[ ca. 19 ] usag[r]estisp[i]
[ ca. 19 ] asuntinquad[tm]
32 [ ca. 19 ] telle[scre]
[ ca. 20 ]  iamtem[ps]
[ ]
36 [ i]ndatanguis[cuis]simm]
[ ]nsas[  
[ ]minorquesentiu[n]
[ ]ppagisaptat i]
[ ]quetandem] lol[i]
40 [ i]que[t] data[ ]sita[t] cantu
[ ]reasus[msi]ma[i] typhon
[ ]drae et omnis[redeatherculea]
[ ]serpent caederepera[ns]
44 [ i]quereleception[i]gur[i]
[ ]primotcantibus[ser][pens]

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**Hair Side (Verso)**

1 [663] uxorin[endes: a standard etymological spelling which the corrector did not change. See above, "Errors and Corrections].
4 [666]: R. Peiper (Lipsiae 1867 & 1902) deleted this line on metrical grounds for it disrupts the 9-line Sapphic strophe sequence of the choral ode. O. Zwierlein (OCT) considers the line spurious because the strophical break up of the chorals songs in Seneca’s tragedies was developed to perfection in the Medea where from 577ff. one sees a system of 11 syllable lines ending with an adonean (O. Zwierlein, Prolegomena [see n. 1] 238). Although the line disrupts this symmetrical
sequence, based on imitations of Seneca in Hosiodus Geta, O. Zwierlein (Prolegomena 50-52) assumes its presence in the archetype ω. The fragment corroborates Zwierlein's conjecture. For another archetypal error in this fragment, see above introduction and comm. to line 16 [677].

6 (668): In the left margin next to this line one can clearly read ἤην, followed by λα in the following line. If, as seems likely, these letters form part of a gloss on NUTRIX, it could be supplemented as τιήντας[λα]. The verb is common in Koine (as a doublet of γραμμάτος θρόφοι e.g. in wet-nurse contracts CPG I 3.2, 23.17, 24.4, 28.10, 33.10, 34.4, 37.5). τιήντας would be less likely. The Doric form would be hard to explain, and NUTRIX is usually glossed by the more common τρόφος. But τρόφος, τιήντας are several times found in Hesychius (α 4325, glossing οὐχίν; c 170, glossing κάντρα; also as a verb, α 8002, glossing ἀδαλλέω).

7 (669) parcite iusso: the adonean is squeezed in by the corrector between line 6 and the rubric. The original scribe either omitted the two words or wrote them at the end of the previous line (6). In the latter case, the corrector presumably crossed them out, when he entered them as a separate line in observance of correct colometry. For an opposite situation see comm. to 18 (678).

8 (670): The choral part is followed by a rubric indicating change of speaker, i.e. NUTRIX. The rubric is considerably faded and its red is different from the corrector's dark brown. The fact that the rubrics have been consistently transmitted in the E tradition and the fact that introductions of speakers in Hosiodus Geta's imitation of Seneca's Medea are of the type we find in E, leads O. Zwierlein (Prolegomena [see n. 1], 250-1) to trace the rubrics back to the III AD. The presence of a rubric in our fragment corroborates this conclusion.

vooπρ[ς]: The letters are large and crude, the ρ and ο cover the rubric NUT the red of which is faded. In our transcript, the representation of the overlining writing was technically not viable. For Latin words written in Greeks letters, see J. Kramer (ed.), Glossaria Bilingua in Papyris et membranis Reperta (Bonn 1983) 12 (P. Mich. 2458,II/III AD), 13 (P. Lond. II 481, IV A.D), 15 (P. Berol. 10582, V/VI AD); M.R.M. Hasitza, Neue Texte und Dokumentation zum Koptisch-Unterricht, (Wien 1990) index, 335-37. We thank Ann Ellis Hanson for these references.

13 (674) ma[n]s: manus corrected from manibus by m2. The reading of the scribe, manibus, is not defensible, whether it is a form of manibus his, “with these hands” which makes no sense, or manibus his “to these spirits of the dead” which would introduce an anapest at a point in the line where Seneca avoids anapests.

14 (675) u[d]: The graphic substitution of <d> for <t> probably represents a phonetic spelling, as the position indicates (vocalization of a voiceless stop at word-end where the next word begins with a vowel). Monosyllabic words were particularly prone to this (cf. J.N.Adams, The Vulgar Latin of the Letters of Claudius Claudianus: P. Mich. VIII, 467-72 [Manchester 1977] 26ff; V. Väänänen, Introduction au Latin Vulgaire [Paris 1981] 69). This is also one of the regular orthographic deviations in the manuscripts of Seneca’s tragedies, listed by O. Zwierlein, Prolegomena (n. 1 above) 258.

monstrum: The position of the high stop, entered in the corrector's dark brown, coincides with the full stop in O. Zwierlein's OCT. Cf. line 697 and above, Punctuation in Introduction.

16 (677) effundit: Cf. also comm. on line 42 (701).

qui[d]: the spelling can be explained as assimilation of a voiced consonant to a following voiceless stop.

17 (678): There is a high stop (distinction) after timuit written in the dark brown ink of the corrector in the little space left by the original scribe. Space and punctuation facilitate the grasp of the syntactical structure by placing a distinction between the verb of the main clause and the verb in the relative clause: totas opes effundit, et quidquid diu / etiam ipsa timuit, proemit (677-8, thus punctuated in the edition by the Academy of Paris [L. Annaei Senecae Pars Tertia sive Tragica, Studiosa Professorum Societatis, 1832]). For a similar marking of subordinate/parenthetic clauses in the Medicus manuscript of Vergilius (V AD), cf. H.R. Pontes [diss. Cincinnati 1995] 11-118. Cf. also comm. on line 42 (701).

proemit: the form is merely an etymological spelling of proemit (so E, proemit A).

18 (678) explicat: Since the scribe seems to have run out of space (as in 684), he wrote the final word explicat in the next line but indented it. The corrector apparently wanted to keep the verse together: he deleted the explicat and probably squeezed it in at, or above, the end of line 17.

19 (679) turba[m]: The line is not extant, but a letter ‘m’ is visible. This appears to be a correction of presumed haplography turba malorum to turbam malorum.

20 (680) comp[licans]: The crucial letters that distinguish this verb from A’s complicans and Buecheler's conjecture comparans (Zwierlein, OCT; F.-R. Chaumartin [1996]) are clearly legible. Thus the parchment's reading agrees with E’s complices (for the absence of assimilation see above, “Errors and Corrections”).
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complicans, “roll together” seems to jar with explicit 678 (C.D.N. Costa, [Oxford 1980]). The reading of E and of our parchment is also altered similarly for “of the assembled ingredients of her witches' brew, the central figure of her rites, but it is less natural than to say she supplicates these” (C.D.N. Costa [Oxford 1980]). O. Zwierlein (OCT) adopts Bücheler’s comparans as an emendation that resolves most of the difficulties (O. Zwierlein, Würz. Jahrb. 2 [1976] 205 ff.). He refers to the fact that the left hand is used in the preparation of awkward sacrifices. To his evidence we may add Suppl. Mag. II.78.6 ἀντι ὄρχεις ἐπ’ … (e.g. ὄρχεις, ἐπ’ ἁρπαῖοι) and an instruction in Alexander of Tralles, Therap. II 583, saying that the eradication of the henbane (Hyoscyamus niger) for pharmaceutical use should be done with the left hand (see Th. Hopfner, Griechisch-Ägyptischer Offenbarungsauber I. 485). Since the sentence refers to the use of the left hand, comparans seems to fit the context better, and comparans in 680 is out of place.

The presence of the reading comparans in our 4th century manuscript, however, calls for a reconsideration of the case. Gronovius printed comparans and explained laeva manu as Medea touching the altar (sacrum) with a left hand during prayer (Paris 1832). There is, indeed a mention of an altar in Medea’s speech (orae, 785 [above], caespite, 797), but this hardly leads to a satisfying explanation of the phrase. The textual problem is compounded by the fact that the meaning of sacrum is deliberately left vague in 680 (as in Val. Flaccus, to the standard introduction au Latin Vulgaire quascumque…). It is the presence of these powers that make her action a beginning of her magical action, Medea may be praying for (rather than “supplicating” [see above]) an effective rite with the eradication of the henbane (Hyoscyamus niger) for pharmaceutical use should be done with the left hand (see Th. Hopfner, Griechisch-Ägyptischer Offenbarungsauber I. 485). Since the sentence refers to the use of the left hand, comparans seems to fit the context better, and comparans in 680 is out of place.

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Seneca describes Medea’s magic rite by implanting noticeable echoes between the nurses’ report and Medea’s verbal performance of it. E.g. in 737 the nurse reports: addit venenis verba and in 833 Medea prays: adde venenis stimulos, Hecate. Similarly, comparans is part of another set of echoes. As the general mention of comparans in the speech of the nurse is taken up for specific detail with the use of uoco: pestes vocat etc. (681) and then summed up in 705 through postquam evocavit etc. in the same way, in Medea’s speech comprecor (740) is referred to through nunc mea uocata sacris, uocat (750). In short, comparans in 680 seems to be part of a tendency to creat verbal echoes and to prepare the audience through the nurse’s speech for the first word that Medea will utter upon entering the stage, i.e. comprecor (740).

The evil sacrifice of magic has no power without the magical words (comprecatio). It is accompanied by prayer for the effectiveness of the poison (cf. addit venenis urbera non illis minus metuentia, 736-7). The prayer for the effectiveness of the concoction is more strongly emphasized than the preparation itself: after the ingredients are together, Medea prepares an offering to Hecate including shedding her own blood (771ff) in order to make her brew work (adesse sacris tempus est Phoebae, tuis, 770). Only after she receives a sign from Hecate, does Medea proclaim the product of her evil magic, the poisoned dress of Creusa, ready for delivery (840 ff). Her comprecor has been successful. Comparans, although more straightforward, covers only part of the action that results in Medea’s evil gift. What made this gift effective is both the triste sacrum, i.e. the sacred action or the brew itself that provided the poison, and the long comprecor for the effectiveness of its application (740ff).

There remains the seemingly awkward collocation of having Medea praying with the left hand (laeva comparans sacrum manu). The Romans prayed by extending both hands or the right hand towards the deity. Nothing is known about praying with “left hand”. But, daring as it was, it is hardly unthinkable that a poet engaged Medea’s left hand in sinister prayers in analogy to the magician’s use of the left hand in the preparation of magical sacrifices and in collecting especially effective plants (see above). If so, then it should have been Seneca rather than a later hand that wrote triste laeva comparans sacrum manu.

22 (682) lyrí: The traces are faded, but one can still clearly see that my has corrected the scribe’s unattested Lybyca to the standard Libyae by crossing out the “c” and writing an “e” above and a little to the right from the “a”.  

Flesh Side (Verso)

25 (684) lybii: The verse-end is marked with a media distinctio. When the scribe saw that he was running out of space, he wrote the last two words in the next line without indentation (with indentation in 678). The corrector did not correct this arrangement (as he did it in 678).

26 (685) in infernis: instead of desertis is unattested. It is metrically possible, but makes little sense in the context.
28 (687) exterit: this ending suggests two possibilities for the restoration of the lacuna. P (i.e. Parisinus Lat. 8260 [saec. XIII] has exterit and T (Parisinus Lat. 8031 [saec. XV]) has exerit. P and T are branches of the A tradition within which, in fact, P is considered to be the purest witness. exterit and exerit are metrically impossible in Seneca, and exterit linguam (the snake rubbing or wearing out a tongue) carries in addition semantic difficulties. The parchment indicates that the mistake is old, possibly a copying error due to the identical ending of the following verb quaerit. The correct form, recorded in the E tradition, is exertat. If Zwierlein's date for the split of the archetype into hyparchtypes e and a (the predecessors of the E and the A tradition respectively), i.e. IV/V AD is correct, this can be considered a conjunctive error linking the fragment to the A tradition.

32 (691) quø† † ellus: a typical case of sandhi, in this case left uncorrected by m2. See for parallels V. Väinännen (above, comm. on 21 [681]), 69. Cf. 675 where a similar spelling error is corrected by m2.

36 (695) imm[e]nas: An error for immensos, again left uncorrected by m2.

38 (697) apta [: The high stop (distinctio) separates two antithetical cola (maior Pelasgis apta, Sidoniiis minor) and coincides with the comma in O. Zwierlein’s OCT.

39 (698) Ofiec[hus: for this transliteration of the Greek Ὄφιοξο!, cf. C.D. Buck, Comparative Grammar of Greek and Latin (Univ. of Chicago 1969) 119: “The significant transcription of f by Latin f, instead of ph, is not found till the first AD, and is not usual till the IVth cent. AD.” This is also a standard orthographical deviation in the manuscripts of Seneca’s tragedies (O. Zwierlein, Prolegomena [see n. 2] 258).

40 (699) a_´_cantu[s: There are traces of deletion on the right side of t which indicates that m2 corrected the error. For confusion in the spelling of d and t in final position see V. Väinännen (above, comm. on 21 [681]), 69. See also 14 (675), 16 (677), and 32 (691) and the comm. ad locc.

41 (700) gemina[t]: typhon: The mss. read Python (R), as in Zwierlein’s OCT, or Phytos (EA). The metathesis of the consonants (p and t) as well as the ditography are common copying errors. Typhon instead of Python makes no sense in the context. The error is left uncorrected by m2. The media distinctio is entered in the dark brown ink of the corrector, perhaps marking the two identical letters as belonging to two different words, even though he correctly eliminates the first t.

42 (701) Hydra{e}. et: Instead of Hydra et, another case of ditography, as in the previous line, but this time left uncorrected by m2. The distinctio (high stop) in the dark brown ink of the corrector, squeezed in between the letters, distinguishes parallel phrases marked by et - et, and stands where the Paris 1832 edition (full reference in comm. on line 17 [678] above) places a comma. Cf. the same phrasing marked in an identical way in the Oxyrhynchite Terence, P. Oxy. XXIV 2401 (IV AD): et timent . et tamen res eos premit (Ter. Andria 632). Cf. also comm. to 16 (677).

43 (702) serpens: The media distinctio marks off the participial colon in apposition to serpens. It corresponds to commas in the Paris 1832, Leo (Berlin 1878), and the Loeb (F.J. Miller [London 1927]). For the habit of the scribes to mark present participial constructions in Vergil, Vaticanus lat. 3225 (IV AD) and in the Mediceus (V AD), cf. H.R. Pontes [diss.1995] 116.

44 (703) peruigil: The media distinctio, entered in the dark ink of the scribe, is accompanied by space left by the original scribe. The pause after peruigil marks an apposition to the subject and distinguishes it from the ablative absolute: tu quoque ..., peruigil, ...

45 (704) self:δροκω covers the traces of serpens and seems to be meant to replace it. Presumably a Greek speaker wants to replace serpens with a word more familiar to him. Δρόκων is often used in Hesychius as a gloss (e.g. d 492, d 605). It remains open to interpretation whether this is a Greek translation with the ending of δρόκων dropped, or a Greek transcription of the Latin word draco, as in the case of voutρης [cf. comm. to 8 [670]]. The writing is very informal and belongs to the same hand that wrote the marginalia in line 6 (see comm. above).

κατ:- The sense of this marginalia written below the line, is unclear.
P. Mich. inv. # 4969. fr. 36 flesh side (left) and hair side (right)