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Some Elucidations of Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis*

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Reference is made to the commentaries of L. Friedlaender (2nd edition, Leipzig 1906), A. Maiuri (Naples 1945), and Martin S. Smith (Oxford 1975).

27.3 matellam: it needs to be made clear that a *matella* was for use by a *man* (like a hospital "bottle"). See *TLL* s.v.; Daremberg—Saglio s.v. *amis* with fig. 257; and my note on Martial I. 37 (*A Commentary on Book I of the Epigrams of Martial* [London 1980]). Hence its use at dinner-parties, whereas the *lasanum* or chamber-pot would only be used in private (cf. 41. 9). (The obnoxious Cynic at Luc. *Symp.* 35 presumably urinated on the floor.)

30.3 si bene memini: an interesting touch of narrative realism (the only one of its kind?). For the colloquial use of the phrase see J. B. Hofmann, *Lateinische Umgangssprache*³ (Heidelberg 1951), pp. 107, 198.

30.3-4 et duae tabulae . . . notabantur: a calendar painted on the walls of a portico has recently been discovered below S. Maria Maggiore in Rome. Giving information about rural activities, dates of games, elections, etc., it dates from the 4th century A.D. See F. Magi, *Il Calendario Dipinto sotto S. Maria Maggiore* (Vatican City 1972). Magi—who claims that the building was a market—states that Trimalchio's calendar "non ha assolutamente nulla a che fare col nostro," but J. Reynolds (*Journal of Roman Studies* 66 [1976], pp. 247-

48) argues that it might have been a luxurious private house, which would make the comparison significant.

31.2 vinum dominicum: Hadas' explanation is on the right lines (*American Journal of Philology* 50 [1929], p. 379): he cites an Aramaic proverb, "The wine is the master's, the thanks the butler's." Zielinski (*Philologus* 64 [1905], p. 20) had already argued from Ar. *Eq.* 1205 for the existence of a similar Greek proverb. There is surely no reference to the *inaequalis cena*, as some editors suggest. Buecheler pointed out that the words *vinum . . . est* form a senarius, which also hints at a proverbial origin.

34.4 vinum: the idea of washing the hands in undiluted wine is intentionally absurd.

37.10 in rutae folium conciet: Friedlaender's explanation is the only one that makes sense—namely, that *rutae folium* was proverbial for a confined space (compare "I'll beat you into a cocked hat"). Hadas (p. 380) compares a rabbinic phrase "a leaf of myrtle." It is worth pointing out that a rue leaf is in fact extremely small (which is why Martial chooses it at XI. 18. 4).

38.16 conturbare: it is important to emphasize that this means, not "to go bankrupt," but "to go fraudulently bankrupt": see Fordyce's note on Catullus 5. 11.

45.8 matella: the fact that this was for use by men (see above on 27. 3) gives the insult extra point. (At Plaut. *Pers.* 533 *matula* is addressed to a *leno*.)

47.10 oenococtos: does the joke depend on the *amount* of wine needed to cook a calf (as compared with *coq au vin*—74. 4)?

57.3 sed in molli carne vermes nascuntur: the best sense that can be extracted from these words (*pace* F. R. D. Goodyear, *Proceedings of the African Classical Association* 14 [1978], p. 54) seems to be that they apply to Ascylos, who is disparagingly referred to as *mollis*: just as, when meat is hung so that it will become tender, maggots tend to breed in it, so Ascylos' "tender flesh" breeds worms.

57.4 regis filius: cf. Cic. *Lael.* 70: *ut in fabulis, qui aliquamdiu propter ignoracionem stirpis et generis in famulatu fuerunt, cum cogniti sunt et aut deorum aut regum filii inventi, retinent tamen caritatem in pastores, quos patres multos annos esse duxerunt.* This suggests that the phrase may have been almost proverbial. The case of Pallas, which editors compare, is less striking in that he claimed only to be of royal descent.

57.4 ipse me dedi in servitutum: see now J. Ramin and P. Veyne, "Droit romain et société: les hommes libres qui passent pour esclaves et l'esclavage volontaire," *Historia* 30 (1981), pp. 472-97. They discuss this passage at p. 497, and (rightly) take it perfectly seriously.

57.8 vasus fictilis: for the use of *vas* or *vasculum* to mean "testicle," see J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London 1982), pp. 42-43. He points out that "the formulaic phrase *lorum in aqua* is used in reference to impotence at Petron. 134. 9 (cf. Mart. 7. 58. 3f., 10. 55. 5), and the speaker may have identified the referent (*pars pro toto*) with a *mentula languida* after inadvertently making an identification with a *mentula rigida* in *vasus fictilis*." This is highly implausible. Perhaps the idea is that Ascyrtos is a *matella* (see above on 27. 3 and 45. 8): cf. Mart. XIV. 119 *Matella fictilis*. This would be an appropriate insult for a man taken to be a pathic, and would go well with the second insult *lorus in aqua*.

58.4 terrae tuber: there must surely be a play on *terrae filius*.

58.8 patrem tuum: this is odd, as addressed to a boy taken to be a slave. Is it a lapse of memory on the part of Petronius?

58.8 exi: the answer to each riddle is quite simply the penis.

58.10 anulos buxeos: some editors assume that Hermeros is addressing Ascyrtos, whereas he is actually addressing Giton. Hence this passage is irrelevant for the interpretation of 57. 4, and there is no need to assume that this is "a gold ring" (Smith), which is hardly the meaning of *anulos buxeos*. (Friedlaender, on 57. 4, commented: "als solchen [i.e. *equus Romanus*] erkennt er ihn an den goldnen Ringen, die er 58 verächtlich *anulos buxeos* nennt.") Exactly what is the significance of the box-wood rings is less easy to say.

63.2 asinus in tegulis: in 1920 "Le Boeuf sur le Toit" was used as the title of a ballet by Darius Milhaud, who claimed to have taken it from a Brazilian song. Presumably both it and the Latin phrase are intended to suggest something altogether unexpected and alarming. W. Ehlers (in the Tusculum edition, Munich 1965) compares the saying "Elefant im Porzellanladen" (our "bull in a china shop"), but the alarm would be all the greater if the creature were on the roof over one's head.

64.1 credimus: is this to be taken literally, so revealing Encolpius' credulity (after all, he could mistake a painted dog for a real one), or is he being sarcastic?

64.3 quadrigae: Plocamus' metaphor has a distinguished ancestry, going back to Ennius' description of himself as a retired racehorse (fr. 374-75 V). Compare Juv. 1. 20 (of Lucilius). Could *podagricus* also be a reminiscence of Ennius (*numquam poëtor nisi si podager*—fr. 64 V)?

64.9 Margaritam: this was the name of a Roman dog whose tombstone is in the British Museum (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* VI. 19896 = *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 1175). For the comparison of a dog with jewels (pearls?), cf. Mart. I. 109. 4 *Issa est carior Indicis lapillis*.

64.13 sedebant: this is a joke (as also at 68. 4), since slaves usually stood at their masters' feet (cf. e.g. 58. 1 *Giton, qui ad pedes stabat*). The eccentricity makes it unlikely to be an interpolation, *pace* J. P. Sullivan, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 22 (1976), p. 100. See also J. Marquardt, *Das Privatleben der Römer*² (Leipzig 1886), pp. 148, 175, with A. Mau's comments (which Friedlaender misunderstood). It hardly needs to be added that for slaves to recline along with the guests, as at 70. 10 ff., was normally unthinkable.

65.10 mortuum: is this to be taken literally, as a joke?

66.5 bene me admonet: this remark follows directly from the previous one—i.e. *Scintilla* is jealous of the *vernula*.

68.8 recutitus est et stertit: the joke is, of course, how does *Habinnas* know? He would have regarded the first point as a disadvantage, since the Romans considered circumcision disfiguring (cf. e.g. *Celsus* VII. 25. 1). (This had some effect on their attitude towards Jews.)

68.8 trecentis denariis (= 1200 sesterces): the point (as Smith suggests) is that *Habinnas* is proud of having acquired such a treasure for so reasonable a price. So A. H. M. Jones, *Economic History Review*, 2nd series 9 (1956), p. 193: "Petronius speaks of 300 denarii as a bargain price for a sharp-witted Jewish boy." For comparable prices, see R. Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge 1974), p. 349. The price of 100,000 sesterces, mentioned by Martial at I. 58. 1 and XI. 70. 1, and quoted by Smith, is intended to be exceptionally high (in the second passage it is described as *luxuria*).

70.13 sponsione: the humor is increased by the fact that the cook, as a slave, could not (strictly speaking) possess any money.

71.2 insulam: the word here means "apartment-house," not "block of apartment-houses." See *TLL* VII. 1. 2038. 53 ff.

71.8 praeponam . . . unum ex libertis: cf. *Inscript. Lat. Select.* 8342 *curatores substitutam.*

71.9 naves: Friedlaender compared the tomb of C. Munatius Faustus at Pompeii, on one side of which is a (symbolic?) relief showing a ship lowering its sails (E. la Rocca and others, *Guida archeologica di Pompei* [Verona 1976], p. 334). To this and his other examples may be added some from Ostia: see R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*² (Oxford 1973), plates 26b; 28a; 34a.

71.9 anulis aureis: these surely cannot be real gold rings, which, if put on tomb-statues, would be stolen. Gilding seems more probable.

71.10 triclinia: Friedlaender aptly cited *CIL* XIV. 375, one of the Ostian inscriptions to a P. Lucilius Gamala, where l. 17 should read *epulum trichilinis CCXVII colonis dedit.*

71.10 sibi suaviter facientem: usually taken to mean "having a good time," or (*OLD*) "enjoying themselves." The phrase has, however, an erotic sense (more like the time-honored salutation "Want a good time, dearie?"). Compare a graffito found on the painted plasterwork of a tomb at Catania, which reads, according to A. Sogliano (quoted by P. Orsi, *Notizie degli Scavi* [1918], pp. 59-60), XVII K SEPTEMBR FERIDIUS CERERIS DOMINAE S(ervus) HIC SIBI SVABITER FEC(it) E(o)RVM TRES ADVLESCENTES QVORVM NOMINA LEGE ONESIMVS ET L. VALERIVS CASIANVS ET FILVMENVS VNVS CVM MVLIERAE EA TAVRVS MVLTI ANNIS HABE FACIANT CONIVXIMVS. (See also *L'Année Épigraphique* [1919], no. 57.) Sogliano explains that Feridius, a slave in a temple of Ceres, abused three young men, two of them slaves and one free, and that another man called Taurus lay with a woman. It seems possible, however, that the writer intended SVABITER FECERVNT (the line breaks after FECE), although there appears from Orsi's photograph to be no doubt about the M. Perhaps the first line gives the writer's identity, and is syntactically separate from the rest. This reading would imply a more cooperative effort by the cast, and go better with CONIVXIMVS. Sogliano compared also *CIL* IV. 3442 *facitis vobis suaviter ego canto* (on a painting—illustrated in J. Ward-Perkins and A. Claridge, *Pompeii AD 79* [London 1976], no. 260—which shows a banquet with one man on his own and two couples embracing). So Trimalchio wants the people to be shown, not just enjoying themselves, but enjoying each other.

71.11 et unam licet fractam: Buecheler printed *urnam*, a conjecture drawn from Jacob Gronovius' MS annotations. The idea of a boy

weeping over a broken urn has struck several commentators as appropriately symbolic, but it is in fact both inaccurate and anachronistic. Both weeping children and (intact) urns appear on Greek grave-reliefs, though apparently not together. The concept seems a neoclassical one, although the urn so often wept over on neoclassical monuments is naturally intact, since it is supposed to contain the ashes of the deceased. The Alexandrian lamp showing an Eros mourning over a broken vase, cited by W. C. McDermott (*Classical Weekly* 37 [1943-44], pp. 170-71), is best ignored. Incidentally, it seems unlikely that Gronovius had in mind the symbolism envisaged by later commentators. It may furthermore be emphasized that, however inclined towards morbid sentimentality Trimalchio may be, it is not reflected in his tomb. The slave is surely weeping because he has spilt good wine. (The line of Propertius cited by Smith [IV. 5. 75 *sit tumulus lenae curto vetus amphora collo*] is—as he suggests—irrelevant: it refers to the use of broken-off necks of amphorae over paupers' graves, to serve as funnels for libations [as at Isola Sacra: Meiggs, pp. 463-64].)

71.11 horologium: the idea can be paralleled from an actual inscription, *CIL* VI. 10237, on a tombstone from the Via Labicana: *T(iti) Coccei Gaa et Patiens quaest(ores tertium) mensam quadratam in trichil(a), abacum cum basi, horologium, labrum cum fulmentis marmor(eis), putiale, crustas supra parietem itineris medi cum tegulis, columellam sub horologia Tiburtina, protectum ante porticum, trutinam et pondera d(e) d(ecurionum) s(ententia) posuerunt* A poem explains that the point of all this expense is *ne deserta vacent ignotis devia busta*. A similar idea must have inspired the erection of the tomb with a handsome and comfortable seat outside the Porta Marina at Ostia (*Scavi di Ostia: III, Le Necropoli* [Roma 1955], pl. 33).

73.2 balneum intravimus: it seems worth asking whether the text of this *locus vexatus* is really so corrupt. Trimalchio has apparently bought up a next-door bakery and converted it into a bath. The building might well have been the usual type of Roman shop, on a long narrow plot, and perhaps with a barrel vault. In other words, it would have looked like a typical barrel-vaulted reservoir, and might well have resonated when Trimalchio sang. (There is no reason to assume, as Smith does, that the reference is to the "main . . . reservoir": the Romans had plenty of small cisterns as well as big ones.) The epithet *frigidariae* is perhaps explicable by contrast with the hot water which the bath actually contains.

Some argue that one would expect Trimalchio to have a huge

bath, but in fact it was a remarkable extravagance for a private citizen to have a bath-house at all, especially at his town house. Even Trimalchio also uses the public baths (27-28: J. P. Sullivan, *Classical Quarterly* 20 [1970], p. 189, is mistaken in saying, on 73. 2, "the heroes have been in this *balneum* before [28. 1]").

73.5 solium: presumably this is the same bath in which Trimalchio first stood, then sat, and round whose *labrum* (§4) the other guests were running.

75.4 arcisellium: whatever this may be, it surely cannot be, as some suppose, a litter, for how could the boy possibly own this ultimate status symbol (see Juv. 3. 239 ff. with J. E. B. Mayor's notes)?

75.10 celerius barbatus: the reason why the boy wanted his beard to grow was that the celebration of his *barbatoria* (73. 6), and cutting off of his long hair, if he was a *puer capillatus*, were signs of adulthood, when he might cease to be his master's plaything, and turn to active sex himself. Cf. Mart. XII. 18. 24-25 *dispensat pueris rogatque longos levis ponere vilicus capillos*. See also my note on Mart. I. 31.

76.4 hoc iussisse: surely not, as J. Delz (*Gnomon* 34 [1962], p. 683) finds, at all incomprehensible. Trimalchio means that what happened was so remarkable that you might well think that, so far from being the last thing he could have wanted, it was just what he had ordered. Cf. *factum, non fabula*.

77.4 cenationem: Smith objects that this is "neither grandiose nor eccentric," but upstairs dining-rooms cannot have been common. In grand houses special ones might be built for summer use, for the coolness (in hot countries people like to dine on the tops of their houses). Vitruvius (VI. 4. 1-2) speaks of four dining-rooms, one for each season. Saloni's *lavationem* is absurd. If *cellationem* could mean "a row of rooms" (as Heinsius claimed) it might be right: a rich man might conceivably boast that his *domus* had spare bedrooms upstairs. But the word occurs nowhere else in Latin.

77.5 Scaurus: Maiuri's suggestion that this is intended for A. Umbricius Scaurus is attractive. His status is indicated by the fact that the *decuriones* voted that an equestrian statue of him should be set up in the forum at Pompeii.

78.6 libitinarii: presumably Iulius Proculus (38. 15-16), even though he seems by now to have given up his profession.