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Two fragments of the Elder Cato¹⁾

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A) Paul. Fest. p. 519.11 L.: *vecticularia vita dicitur eorum qui vectibus parietes alienos perfodiunt furandi gratia. Cato [Orat. 246 Malc.² = p. 73. 10 Jordan]: ‘vecticulariam vitam vivere, repente largiter habere, repente nihil.’*

No doubt some burglars use crowbars in the exercise of their profession, but to equate ‘the life of a crowbar’ with ‘the life of a burglar’ baffles all understanding. Even if the phrase could mean

¹⁾ The following editions of Aulus Gellius are referred to by the name of the editor only: Rolfe (Loeb, 1927–28), Marshall (OCT, 1988).

'life with a crowbar', i.e. the life of someone who uses crowbars,²⁾ it is impossible to believe that this could designate the life of a burglar in particular, because many other people also use *vectes* (the word occurs eight times, in various senses, in Cato's own work on agriculture). Moreover it is far from clear that burglars are a very good example of people who pass quickly from great abundance to destitution.

The explanation given by Festus, like many other ancient attempts at etymology, is nothing more than far-fetched guesswork. And I think that it is guesswork based on a false text, because I believe that Cato wrote not *vecticulariam* but *vectaculariam vitam vivere*, 'to live the life of a cart', one moment full, the next empty. Such a comparison is very much in Cato's manner; cf. *Carmen de moribus*, fragm. 3 (p. 83.5 Jordan, preserved by Gellius 11. 2. 6), *nam vita humana prope uti ferrum est: si exerceas, conteritur; si non exerceas, tamen robigo interficit*.

In extant literature the noun *vectaculum* first occurs in Gellius 20. 1. 28 and 30; in the former passage it has been corrupted in all our manuscripts to *vectabulum*, but in the latter the true form *vectaculum* has been faithfully preserved.³⁾ It is, however, quite possible that Gellius found the word in early Latin (Cato himself uses the frequentative verbs *vectare* and *vectitare*).⁴⁾ In later Latin it appears twice in Tertullian (see the dictionaries). Till⁵⁾ illustrates 'Catos große Vorliebe für die Adjektivbildungen auf *-arius*' by listing about 40 examples.

B) *Carmen de moribus*, fragm. 1 (p. 82.10 Jordan): *avaritiam omnia vitia habere putabant: sumptuosus, cupidus, elegans, vitiosus, inritus qui habebatur, is laudabatur*.

This passage is quoted by Gellius (11. 2. 2) to illustrate the use of *elegans* in the pejorative sense of 'a fop' (*qui nimis lecto amoenoque cultu victuque esset*).

This is the earliest occurrence in Latin of the proverb about the love of money being the root of all evil; see Otto, *Die Sprichwörter . . . der Römer* (Leipzig, 1890), p. 51. If *habere* is sound it must

²⁾ 'Das Brecheisen führend, diebisch', R. Till, *Die Sprache Catos*, Philologus Supp. Bd. 28.2 (Leipzig, 1935), p. 78.

³⁾ Marshall is the first editor to read *vectaculum*, instead of *vectabulum*, in both passages.

⁴⁾ The former at *Agr.* 10. 1, the latter at *Orat.* 116 Malc.² = p. 59. 1 Jordan.

⁵⁾ *Op. cit.* pp. 53 and 78.

mean *in se habere*, 'include' (Rolfe). I submit that it is a corruption (partly caused by the following *habebatur*) of *alere*, which is frequently used with *vitia* as its object, e.g. Velleius 2. 82. 4 and 102. 3; Seneca, *Dial.* 3. 1. 5 and 4. 20. 2; cf. Nepos 19. 1. 4.

Some have assumed that the five adjectives are examples of *omnia vitia*; hence such emendations as Baehrens's *is audiebat avarus* (still deemed worthy of mention in Marshall's apparatus) and L. Mueller's *is <avarus> laudabatur*. This is quite wrong: to say that an extravagant man was called (or was praised as being) *avarus* is like saying that black was called white. The meaning must be that, in comparison with the *avarus*, the *sumptuosus*, etc., used to be commended; so Madvig⁶): 'quaedam, quae ab aliis fere vitiosa habebantur, laudabantur, quod contraria saltem avaritiae erant'. Therefore each of these five adjectives must have some sense of 'extravagance' which can contrast with 'hoarding money'; *sumptuosus* and *elegans* (in its pejorative sense) are clearly appropriate, but doubts arise about the other three:

1. *cupidus*, if sound, more probably refers to sexual lust, another form of dissipation, than to ambition (Rolfe). But Gronovius's *cuppes*, 'gluttonous', although found elsewhere in literature only in Plautus, *Trin.* 240, is so appropriate that it deserves to be right.
2. *vitiosus*. As Madvig pointed out, this general word is quite out of place in a list of specific vices. It was excellently emended long ago (by Meursius) to *vinosus*; this completes the natural trio 'food, dress, drink'.
3. *inritus* 'prorsus nihil est', says Madvig, incontrovertibly; it cannot mean a 'good-for-nothing' (Rolfe). The available replacements are *inquinatus*, *incitus*, *invidus*; none of these has any element of contrast with *avaritia*. Such a contrast would be provided by *in<pro>vidus* (for the omission of *pro* in this word see *TLL* VII, 1. 699. 54), in the sense of 'inprovidus futuri'; the miser justifies himself by maintaining that he is being like the ant, which is *haud ignara ac non incauta futuri* (Horace, *Sat.* 1. 1. 35).

⁶) *Adversaria critica* II (Hauniae, 1873), p. 601.