

CALPURNIUS SICULUS AND THE *MUNUS NERONIS*

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In a recent number of this *Journal*,¹ Edward Champlin called in question the dating of the *Eclogues* of Calpurnius Siculus, traditionally placed in the early years of Nero's reign.² The purpose of this paper is to argue that the Neronian date fits the references in the poems much better than does Champlin's date in the reign of Severus Alexander, and that there is no valid reason for doubting it.

Some of the purely negative arguments may be dealt with briefly. When in 4. 87 Calpurnius uses the phrase 'facundo comitatus Apolline Caesar', there is no need to take this as referring to the divine *comes* who becomes part of imperial propaganda in the third century (C., p. 96). Already in *Nat. Deor.* 2. 165-6 Cicero mentions Homer's attachment of various gods to great men as 'discriminum et periculorum comites'; and in *Rep.* 2. 44, 'Fortuna comitata est' Tarquin. For more specific activities, Propertius (4. 3. 16) makes Arethusa regret that she married 'non comitante deo'; and this is brought into the realm of poetical composition in Prop. 3. 2. 13 and Ovid, *Tr.* 4. 1. 20, where the gods act as *comites* to the writers. This is precisely the context of Calpurnius' words, where Apollo's *facundia* is set beside the kingliness of Jupiter, as in *Ecl. Eins.* 1. 29-33, and provides poetic inspiration, just as Apollo does, *ibid.* 38, amplified in the following lines (39-42) with reference to Nero's poem on the Sack of Troy, and again in *Apocol.* 4, where there is a suggestion of Nero's identification with the god ('ille mihi similis voltu similisque decore, nec cantu nec voce minor').³ Nero was to exploit this idea much more as the reign proceeded, but Apollo's patronage of the poet-emperor was too firmly established at the beginning of the reign for any doubts to be raised.

In 4. 38-49, where the shepherd expresses gratitude for being saved from exile in Baetica, 'trucibus obnoxia Mauris', there is no call to suspect impropriety on the part of a Neronian poet (C., p. 97). Whatever the actual circumstances underlying the reference, exile from Rome to southern Spain would be as disastrous for a member of fashionable literary circles in the capital as was Tomi for Ovid or Corsica for Seneca. Although the Moors, despite troubles under Caligula, had not attacked Spain for a hundred years, the area was still at risk (which is all that *obnoxia* implies)⁴; and even if Seneca is to be seen in Calpurnius' Meliboeus, this criticism of his *patria* is entirely in line with his own disparaging lumping together in *Apocol.* 3 of Spaniards with Greeks, Gauls and Britons. Even Martial, who actually retired to end his life in his native Spain (a course which Seneca appears never to have contemplated), has no illusions about the lack of culture after a generation of *latinitas*.⁵ And if Meliboeus is not Seneca, but Piso or some other patron,⁶ such a description of a distant province is entirely natural for an inhabitant of the capital.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF ACCESSION

In more general terms, Champlin (p. 98) characterizes the description of the perilous state from which the new emperor is to rescue the empire as inappropriate to Nero's reign and entirely relevant to Alexander's. The language of 1. 48-51, in particular, causes Champlin to insist, 'at the time of writing there has recently been a civil war', as there had indeed been when Caracalla and Macrinus in turn had been defeated. Calpurnius' words in 1. 49-50 would fit well enough here: 'et modo (Bellona) quae toto civilia distulit orbe secum bella geret'. The wars of succession in A.D. 217-18, such as they were, appear to have been limited to a small area of the eastern provinces, so that on any reckoning

¹ 'The Life and Times of Calpurnius Siculus', *JRS* LXVIII (1978), 95-110.

² Most succinctly by A. Momigliano in *CQ* xxviii (1944), 97-9. Other discussions by F. Skutsch in *RE* III, 1401-6; C. H. Keene in his edition (1887, repr. 1969), 2-14; R. Verdière in his edition of Calpurnius and related works (1954), 15-21, 23-42. Champlin's suggestion was put forward by H. Kraffert, *Beiträge zur Kritik und Erklärung* (1883),

151, which I have not been able to see.

³ cf. *Ecl. Eins.* 2. 38, 'tuus iam regnat Apollo'.

⁴ As in Ovid, *Pont.* 1. 8. 73, 'nullique obnoxia bello'.

⁵ As in the prefatory epistle to book 12, written from Bilbilis.

⁶ cf. Keene, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 12-13, Verdière, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 49-51.

Calpurnius' words are conventionally extravagant. But, together with references to the selling of meaningless consulates and to the downfall of law, all this accords well with the task facing Alexander after the murder of Elagabalus.

On the other hand, the whole topic is all too characteristic of imperial panegyric. The passage in Calpurnius on which Champlin lays such weight is essentially paralleled by *Ecl. Eins.* 2. 33–5, with the words 'est procul a nobis infelix gloria Sullae' and the reference to the triple conflict of 88–82 B.C., with a welcome to peace now restored to the countryside (24–32, 36–9)—a passage which seems unassailably attached to the early years of Nero's reign.⁷ In the same tradition, Pliny in the *Panegyric* seems compelled to refer to the fact that Trajan has succeeded without civil war or armed might (5. 1). It is hard to tell whether there were in fact as many abuses under Claudius for his successor to put right as Alexander found on his accession; but Messalina is alleged to have traded in offices, and the freedmen were accused of all sorts of corrupt practices, with or without Claudius' knowledge (so especially in Suet., *Cl.* 29), including the destruction of thirty five senators and 300 equestrians, a charge occurring similarly in *Apocol.* 14. Such charges were certainly being made shortly after Claudius' death, and are entirely appropriate in Calpurnius' panegyric. As Pliny frankly admits: 'meminerint sic maxime laudari incolumem imperatorem si priores secus meriti reprehendantur' (*Paneg.* 53. 6). Material of this sort will fit almost any emperor just replaced by a hostile successor. It still appears inept for a third-century Calpurnius to refer (1. 79) to the portent of the new reign as 'sine vulnere', when Rome at least was well aware that Elagabalus and his mother Soaemias were violently murdered and their bodies dragged through the streets.⁸ Perhaps even matters of such public knowledge could be glossed over by the most determined panegyrist.

One very difficult passage in the first *Eclogue* (84–8) would be easier to attach to a particular historical situation if one could be sure what it means, or indeed how it is to be translated. Here *ipse deus* (the emperor or Jupiter?—evidently a deliberate ambiguity in any case) takes the burden of the empire on his own strong shoulders so that the passing of power may occasion no disorder:

nec prius ex meritis defunctos Roma penates
censeat occasus nisi cum respexerit ortus.

As they stand, the lines are almost impossible to construe, and it is not surprising that the text has been suspected by almost all editors. It seems without parallel in Latin poetry, for a start, that *ortus* has to be taken as nominative singular while *occasus* is accusative plural, or vice versa. An improvement could be made by reading one word or the other as accusative singular; but even then the rising sun will not find it easy to look back at the sunset, and the setting sun (presumably the deceased emperor) is highly unsuitable as subject of the closing words of the whole prophecy.⁹ Champlin (p. 104 f.), who is not apparently concerned with this problem, takes the *penates* literally, as a reference to Elagabalus' assault on the shrine of Vesta and his attempt to overthrow the most venerable of Roman cults in favour of his eponymous Syrian deity. He paraphrases lines 87–8, 'Rome will realize her ancestral deities to be safe after what was only an insane interlude'. He does not venture upon a close translation; and I suspect that a rendering along his lines will produce almost exactly the opposite of what he requires: 'Only when the new reign can

⁷ cf. the commonplace in Tac., *Ann.* 13. 4. 1, 'neque iuventam armis civilibus neque domesticis imbutam'. The more specific reference to the achievement of peace in Calp. 4. 146 (evidently written some time later than 1), 'coeptamque, pater, ne desere pacem', will fit in well with the success of Corbulo in Armenia in A.D. 58 (Tac., *Ann.* 13. 41). In the same year also occurred the revival of the apparently dead *figus Ruminalis* in the *comitium* (ibid. 58), which M. Haupt, *de carminibus Calpurnii et Nemesiani* (1854), 23 (followed by Keene, 4) took as explaining Calp. 4. 111, 'stupefacta regerminat arbos'. The phrase is basically commonplace, but *stupefacta* is puzzling without some topical reference. The apparent bad omen of the tree's withering may

have required some such ingenious explanation as that it collapsed with excitement at the emperor's prowess. Verdière, 250, n. 423, is unhappy about the date, which would not tally with his own choice of 55 for the fourth *Eclogue*. He chooses to question the accuracy of Tacitus' report.

⁸ Dio 80. 20. 2, Herodian 5. 8. 8, SHA, *Elag.* 17. 1, with emphasis on the public display of the bodies.

⁹ There must be some connection with the language of Tiberius to Macro in *Ann.* 6. 46. 4, 'occidentem ab eo deseri, orientem spectari'; but the picture is still curious, and contributes little or nothing to the sense of the whole passage. See Verdière, 239–40, for a variety of suggested interpretations, none convincing.

look back on the old will Rome realise that her ancestral deities are dead as they deserve'. Duff's Loeb translation, referring to Claudius' deification, makes as much sense as any; although the use of *penates* for *divos* or *divom* can only with great difficulty be explained by the tendency to keep the image of a deified emperor among the imperial Lares, as Hadrian kept a statue of Augustus.¹⁰ Champlin is certainly right in pointing out 'the poet is not fully in control of his material'; and the lines cannot safely be exploited to provide evidence of any sort.

None of the points discussed so far can claim to be decisive either way. The remaining indications of the date of the poems appear as distinctively Neronian as they ever did.

THE COMET (I. 77-83)

We know from the Chinese that a comet was visible in A.D. 54 for thirty one days, from approximately 9 June to 9 July.¹¹ Claudius died on 13 October, after an awkward interval which did not prevent contemporaries from accepting the comet as a portent of his death.¹² For Calpurnius, the comet has already been visible, at the time when the message was inscribed on the beech-tree, for twenty days. At the time when it is read (I. 1-2), the sun is still at its full heat and the grapes are already in the press; moreover, by the end of the poem (94) the new emperor has ascended the throne, giving a clear indication of October, very much as Seneca does in *Apocol.* 2. 1, with his reference to the picking of the grapes. Calpurnius' purpose is clear. The comet which foretold the death of Claudius must be made to refer likewise to the succession of Nero, and the poet could hardly have made a neater job of blurring the discrepancy of dates between July and October. It is idle to look, as Champlin does, for conflicts between Seneca and Calpurnius, or to be concerned about the state of the weather on Nero's accession (p. 97).¹³ The poem simply lacks a clear 'dramatic date', with a careful confusion of the relative dates of the carving of the inscription, its reading by shepherds as they shelter from the heat (lines 6-7), and the point at which the new Augustus (although the succession is not made explicit) ascends the throne. Such poetical playing with dates is entirely plausible.

Much less credible is an explanation in the manner suggested by Champlin (p. 103), on the basis of a passage of the *Augustan History's* life of Severus Alexander (13. 5): 'fertur die prima natalis toto die apud Arcam Caesaream (his birthplace, in Syria) stella primae magnitudinis visa, et sol circa domum patris eius fulgido ambitu coronatus.' This was a star, not a comet; it appeared on the day of his birth, or the day after it, not shortly before his accession, nor every year;¹⁴ it was seen *toto die*, and not for a minimum of twenty nights, as specified by Calpurnius and confirmed by the Chinese astronomers; and it was seen at Arca and evidently nowhere else, accompanied by a striking phenomenon affecting the sun, which a third-century poet would have been bound to introduce while referring to the sun and Apollo.

THE IULI (I. 45)

This reference to the youth 'maternis causam qui vicit Iulis', has generally been taken as the clearest of all the Neronian references, describing the young prince's speech on behalf of the people of Ilium in A.D. 53, mentioned by both Tacitus and Suetonius,¹⁵ with an obvious anticipation of his subsequent poem on the Sack of Troy. But there could be more point to it than that. Nero, the son of a Domitius and adopted son of a Claudius, could still claim descent from Augustus, and so from Julius Caesar, on his mother's side. A compliment to Agrippina may have been intended in passing; what was more important, especially after Britannicus, with no claims to Julian blood, had persisted in greeting Nero

¹⁰ Suet., *Aug.* 7. 1. It can hardly be significant that Severus Alexander is stated to have kept *divi* among his Lares (SHA, *Alex.* 29. 2).

¹¹ So, most conveniently, R. S. Rogers in *TAPA* LXXXIV (1953), 240.

¹² e.g. Pliny, *NH* 2. 92; Suet., *Cl.* 46.

¹³ J. P. Postgate, *CR* XVI (1902), 38-40, effectively dealt with all these problems.

¹⁴ If the mosaic calendar from Thysdrus quoted by Champlin (103-4) can be held to indicate Alexander's birthday on 1 October, this supposed star may well be represented; but that is not a comet lasting for three or four weeks.

¹⁵ *Ann.* 12. 58. 1, with the note, 'Iuliae stirpis auctorem Aeneam'; Suet., *Nero* 7. 2.

as Domitius after his adoption,¹⁶ was to establish that Nero was the linear representative of the imperial line. The word *Iulis* must be to some extent ambiguous, suggesting both *Iul(i)is*¹⁷ and 'Iulus and his people', as it does in Val. Flaccus, *Arg.* 1. 9. Moreover, the phrase *causam vicit* is particularly appropriate to a successful speech, as in Ovid, *Her.* 16. 76, Apuleius, *Flor.* 18. 24;¹⁸ although Cicero (*Deiot.* 23) has 'causam illam victam esse' of the defeat of Pompey's cause, in much the same transferred sense that Champlin would see here. He makes the phrase refer to the move whereby Julia Maesa (Caracalla's maternal aunt) and her daughter Julia Mamaea (sister of Julia Soaemias and thus Elagabalus' aunt) transferred the imperial power from Elagabalus to Mamaea's own son Alexander. On Champlin's reckoning (pp. 99-100), Calpurnius' *Iulis* will refer to this 'Julian Faction'. The weakness of this theory lies primarily in the purely fortuitous coincidence of the possession of the *nomen* Julia by all these ladies: Maesa and her sister Domna as daughters of Julius Bassianus, Mamaea and Soaemias as daughters of the totally unrelated Julius Avitus Alexianus. Unless the name Julius could be attached to a particularly distinguished family, it must be meaningless at a period when Julii were little less widespread than Aurelii. No matter how much of a matriarchy the empire was at this time, no-one could have identified the ruling faction either as *Iuliae* or as *Iul(i)i*, the latter of which, especially in its shortened form, must even in the third century have suggested the Trojan *gens* of the Caesars.¹⁹ Moreover, the triumph of two *Iuliae* in a contest involving the murder of their close relative, Julia Soaemias, would imply an uncomfortably restricted application of the word *maternis*, to mother and grandmother with the exclusion of maternal aunt. This would be no card for a supporter of Alexander to play in the dynastic game. The interpretation of *causam vicit* as 'prevailed in a contest for power', if it can be valid, makes much more sense in connection with Nero, for whom Julian blood in the proper sense was still an essential asset; but the primary reference of the phrase must still be to the speech for the contemporary Ilians. The subtlety may seem too neat for Calpurnius; but he can well have taken over the idea from some other panegyrist of the same period.

THE GAMES

Most decisive for a Neronian date is the account in Calp. 7. 23-84 of the rustic's reaction to a great show in the amphitheatre. Despite Champlin's arguments for a third-century show in the Colosseum (p. 107, with n. 51) not otherwise attested, the building is introduced with the words 'trabibus spectacula textis surgere' (23-4), clearly indicating a structure primarily of wood and in no way suiting the stone Colosseum, no matter what restorations Champlin supposes Alexander to have carried out.²⁰ Nero's amphitheatre is regularly identified by its wooden construction, being evidently unique in Rome for such a feature. Suetonius (*Nero* 12. 1) calls it 'amphitheatro ligneo regione Martii campi intra anni spatium fabricato'; Tacitus (*Ann.* 13. 31. 1), under the year A.D. 57, refers disparagingly to annalists who spread themselves in praise of 'fundamentis et trabibus' with which Nero constructed 'molem amphitheatri apud campum Martis'; while the elder Pliny, evidently the annalist here criticized by Tacitus, records in *NH* 16. 200 a vast pine-trunk displayed by Tiberius which 'duravit ad Neronis principis amphitheatrum'. Calpurnius' use of the word *trabibus* as a major element in the countryman's amazement clearly derives from phraseology in use at the time; and the Neronian connection is strikingly confirmed by fourth-century material cited appositely by Carlo Pascal.²¹ In his

¹⁶ *Ann.* 12. 41. 6; *Nero* 7. 1.

¹⁷ For the contracted form in Silver Latin verse, cf. *supplicis* in Sen., *Med.* 1015, *denaris* in Mart. 1. 117. 17.

¹⁸ Cited by Champlin, 100, n. 26. In the former passage, the presence of the word *iudex* in the previous line makes clear how the contest is visualized; and it is notorious that Paris was swayed primarily by the goddesses' speeches rather than by their actual beauty.

¹⁹ Alexander himself was of course not a Julian in any sense. His father was a Gessius, and he adopted the dynastic name of Aurelius.

²⁰ References in SHA appear somewhat inconsis-

tent. In *Elag.* 17. 8, the Colosseum is referred to as restored by that emperor; in *Alex.* 24. 3, funds are devoted to its restoration, along with the theatre, circus and stadium, which would appear to have needed only routine repairs; in *Max. Balb.* 1. 4, the Colosseum seems still to need attention in A.D. 238. Even if Alexander's contribution was limited to the upper gallery, such a structure would require nothing like the great timbers which made Nero's amphitheatre so famous. On the whole question, see Keene, 197-203.

²¹ *Nerone nella storia aneddotica e nella leggenda* (1923), 220-33.

account of the legend of Simon Magus, first directly traceable in Arnobius early in the fourth century, he shows the origins of the story in the fatal fall of a performer representing Icarus in this very *munus* in the wooden amphitheatre (Suet., *Nero* 12. 2), continuing with Dio Chrys. 21. 9, on a man kept in Nero's palace for a long time on the strength of a promise to fly, and with the flying Greek in Juvenal 3. 78–80, where the immediately preceding use of the word *magus* seems to have provided yet another element. The fullest accounts of Simon's conflict with the apostles are *Passio Apostolorum Petri et Pauli*,²² where Nero erects a 'turris lignea . . . in monte Capitolino' for Simon's demonstration; and the *Passio Sanctorum Apostolorum Petri et Pauli*,²³ where Simon has Nero build him a 'turrim excelsam . . . ex lignis et trabibus magnis . . . in campo Martio'. This linking of Nero's building with both Capitol and Campus Martius ties in well with Calpurnius' words (line 24), 'Tarpeium prope despectantia culmen', suggesting something close enough for the relationship of height to be appreciated. In such a panegyric, *prope despectantia* cannot mean anything so modest (however true) as 'nearly overtopping' (and the distance between Colosseum and Capitol, which Champlin would see in the reference, would make such a comparison meaningless), but 'looking down from close at hand'. The foundations of Nero's amphitheatre, which did not survive the Fire of A.D. 64, have never been traced; but he is likely to have used the same site chosen by Caligula for his abortive amphitheatre 'iuxta Saeptra',²⁴ in the south-eastern corner of the Campus. Finally, the new building was brand new at the date when Calpurnius evidently described it: by Alexander's reign, the Colosseum was so familiar a sight in Rome, and games had been celebrated in it for so long, that even a pastoral poet would not choose it as a proper object for rustic wonder. The whole account of the building, fitting Nero's amphitheatre so well, is extraordinarily inept if applied to the Colosseum in the third century.

In addition, we know a great deal about the *munus* celebrated by Nero to inaugurate his new building. Suetonius, in the *divisio* which opens his list of Nero's *spectacula* (*Nero* 11. 1), mentions a *gladiatorium munus*; and the long paragraph which describes each of these entertainments in turn ends (12. 1) with an extensive section introduced by the keyword *munere* and then subdivided into sentences giving the main elements in the show, with the general note that it took place in the wooden amphitheatre and that nobody was killed. These elements are: (1) senators and equestrians fighting in the arena and acting as 'confectores ferarum et varia harenae ministeria'; (2) a *naumachia*, in sea-water with sea-creatures swimming in it; (3) a series of *pyrrhicae*, including the story of Pasiphae and the bull, enacted with striking verisimilitude, and that of Icarus, which led to the performer's fall to his death, splashing with his blood the emperor as he sat 'toto podio adaperto' (a point to which I shall return).²⁵ Tacitus, selecting events carefully to illustrate his picture of the emperor's increasing disgrace,²⁶ says nothing of the whole occasion. However, it appears recognisably in Xiphilinus' drastic epitomization of this part of Dio (61. 9. 5), preceded by an event firmly dateable to A.D. 56 and followed by a garbled account of Suillius' attack on Seneca in A.D. 58.²⁷ He gives no specification of date or place, but mentions the sudden filling of the arena with sea-water, containing fishes and sea-creatures, a naval battle between Persians and Athenians, and the draining of the arena for gladiatorial fights between individuals and groups. Finally Pliny (*NH* 38. 45) records a further detail of 'gladiatorium munus Neronis principis' (to which we shall return), confirming Suetonius' statement that there was only one imperial *munus* in the reign.

No one source gives a complete account of the whole festival, which has to be pieced together from the details in our extant authorities. The details given by Calpurnius belong unmistakably to the same occasion; although he concentrates on the greatest novelty,²⁸

²² *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, ed. Lipsius and Bonnet (1891, repr. 1959), 230.

²³ *ibid.* 163, with Greek version in exactly the same terms, 162.

²⁴ Suet., *Cal.* 21.

²⁵ Notorious though this disaster was (as indicated by Pascal), it is not surprising that Calpurnius says nothing of it, as not altogether auspicious, especially in what was supposed to be a bloodless *munus* ('neminem occidit', as Suetonius says).

²⁶ Thus he specifically states (*Ann.* 15. 37. 1) that

he will relate only a single example of the emperor's luxurious banquets, 'ne saepius eadem prodigantia narranda sit'.

²⁷ So Tac., *Ann.* 13. 42. 2–4.

²⁸ His emphasis on unprecedented features of the games (as aristocratic performers were not, nor sea-fights) underlines the necessity for the building itself to be no less a novelty, as Nero's undoubtedly was. After the opening of the Colosseum in A.D. 80, all these things became commonplace.

the flooding of the arena and the appearance of sea-creatures (7. 69–91). He does what none of the others does, in listing some of the animals, both in the *venatio* on land (in which Suetonius' aristocratic *confectores* took part) and in the flooded arena, where he lists seals, bears and hippopotamuses. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of any of these appearing in a Roman show under Nero, as Jennison attempted to do.²⁹ J. M. C. Toynbee, in a much more systematic study,³⁰ is worried only about the polar bears, which she sees in lines 65–6, 'aequoreos . . . cum certantibus ursis . . . vitulos'. If polar bears had not indeed reached Rome in Nero's time (there is no evidence that they did under Alexander Severus either), these need be no more than ordinary Asian or African bears, taught to swim under compulsion, just as Titus, a few years later, had horses, bulls and other animals swimming in the arena at the opening of the Colosseum³¹—a festival which repeated much of the pattern of the Neronian *munus*, probably on a larger scale. Without evidence of a more positive nature, the swimming bears, remarkable though they were, must be accepted as quite plausible in A.D. 57.

Still in connection with the same festival, Champlin (p. 96) discusses one highly complex passage, with a view to establishing a third-century date. The lines which illustrate the rustic's amazement after the simplicity of his normal surroundings are as follows (47–56):

Balteus en gemmis, en illita porticus auro
certatim radiant; nec non, ubi finis arenae
proxima marmoreo praebet spectacula muro,
sternitur adiunctis ebur admirabile truncis,
et coit in rotulum, tereti qui lubricus axe
impositos subita vertigine falleret ungues
excuteretque feras. auro quoque torta refulgent
retia, quae totis in arenam dentibus exstant,
dentibus aequatis. et erat, mihi crede, Lycota,
si qua fides, nostro dens longior omnis aratro.

Champlin's account of the central section of this is as follows: 'in the same eclogue (at VII. 50–3) there seems to be a reference to an elaborate windlass affair in the arena which should be the *cochleae*, not in fact attested before the later fourth century'. This claim (which would not in fact go far to support an early third-century date for the poem) seems to be based on a series of misunderstandings. In the first place, the idea of a windlass is Champlin's own, supported neither by the function of the apparatus described by Calpurnius nor by Chastagnol,³² from whom he derives his interpretation of the passage. The passage is admittedly puzzling, and would make complete sense only to those who had witnessed it in operation. But it is clear enough that Calpurnius is describing the means used to prevent animals in the arena from climbing or leaping up the surrounding wall into the spectators' seats—the converse of the fences used today to keep football supporters out of the playing area. The *rotulus* is some sort of cylinder, perhaps itself of ivory, but certainly smooth and slippery, set up horizontally to protect the podium, so as to prevent the claws of fierce beasts from obtaining a purchase and to send them tumbling back into the arena. This appears in Verdière's translation,³³ and in that of Vallet, quoted in Chastagnol's own note. Either above or below this *rotulus* are nets supported on a series of vertical elephants' tusks all round the arena. If the *trunci* are the same as the *dentes*, with the *rotulus* fastened between the tops of each pair of tusks, the device sounds convincing enough, although Calpurnius has expressed himself awkwardly. In any case, *rotulus* and *retia* share the function of protecting the spectators.

Confusion has been imported into the interpretation of the passage by Chastagnol (loc. cit.), who refers to the device here mentioned as *cochleae* and claims to find it illustrated in a contorniate of Valentinian III and in two ivory diptychs, of Areobindus and Anastasius in the early sixth century. This view is derived in turn from E. Saglio, in Daremberg-

²⁹ *Animals for show and pleasure in ancient Rome* (1937), 188–9.

³⁰ *Animals in Roman life and art* (1975), 93–4, with 134, 145, 148–9, 200, 205.

³¹ Dio 66, 25. 2.

³² *Bonner HA Colloquium* 1972/4, 82, with n. 15.

³³ 206, n. 591, 'un tambour tournant autour d'un axe horizontal'.

Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités* (1887) I. 2, 1265–6, s.v. *cochlea*. Among the many other meanings of this word (including Archimedean water-screws, screws in wine-presses and the like, part of the winding-mechanism of a catapult, and spiral staircases), Saglio considers an unique usage in Varro (*RR* 3. 5. 3), who, giving specifications for an aviary, says that it ought to have a low and narrow doorway, ‘et potissimum eius generis quod cocliam appellat, ut solet esse in cavea in qua tauri pugnare solent’. The explanation of this is far from obvious, and hardly helped by a passage in Procopius,³⁴ in which the valiant Mundus, slipping out of the palace in Constantinople at the time of the Nika riot, makes use of the door called κοχλίας on account of τῆς καθόδου κυκλωτεροῦς οὔσης. Pollack’s interpretation³⁵ is based on a false reading of the text, where the genuine καθόδου makes it clear that the reference is to the normal meaning of ‘spiral staircase’. Saglio, however, is probably right in taking Varro’s *coclia* as some sort of revolving door, well suited for access without allowing the birds to escape; and such a device may have existed in enclosures for bull-fighting, to serve the same purpose as the barriers guarding the exits in a Spanish bull-ring. As the Loeb editor remarks, ad loc.: ‘The word is used only here’. What Saglio has done is to transfer the word to a very different device shown in the three late representations reproduced by Chastagnol.³⁶ Valentinian’s contorniate shows what he describes as a ‘tourniquet à cloisons’—four panels (or perhaps frames of metal bars) attached to a central axis which pivots vertically on a bearing fixed in the ground, like a modern revolving door removed from its surrounding frame. On one side a man is evidently protecting himself from a bear³⁷ which rears itself up against the other side. Similar objects appear in the two diptychs in a clearly-recognisable arena, with a lion and perhaps a tiger as the beasts involved. There seems to be a description of these things in Cassiodorus (*Var.* 5. 4. 2), of *bestiarii* who, ‘tribus, ut ita dixerim, dispositis ostiolis, . . . in patenti area (arena?) cancellosis se postibus occultentes’, miraculously escape death as they flit about among the lions’ claws and teeth. His words support the suggestion that the device resembled some sort of door, presumably a revolving one; they do not support Saglio’s use of Varro’s word *cochlea*.

But whatever the device was called, it has nothing whatever to do with Calpurnius’ *rotulus*. This is not free-standing and vertical in the arena, but horizontal, erected on a fixed support of elephants’ tusks, and intended to keep the animals out of the audience, not as a hazardous device for momentarily protecting *bestiarii* from animals charging them in the open. Nor is it made of bars (*cancellus*) but of some smooth substance, to prevent the claws from taking hold of it.

But no less significant for the identification of Calpurnius’ festival is the connection between the *rotulus* and *auro torta retia* (53–4), evidently sharing the purpose of keeping the beasts inside the arena. Pliny (*NH* 37. 45) knew of an equestrian still living when he wrote, who had been sent by one Julianus, in charge of Nero’s *gladiatorum munus*, to bring a store of amber from the north of Europe (an expedition from which he may well have brought back the arctic hares described by Calpurnius, together with the elk in lines 58–9, if not the polar bears which are questionably mentioned, *ibid.* 65); of which he obtained such a supply that it was used for the knots of the ‘*retia coercendis feris podium protegentia*’, as well as the weapons, undertakers’ equipment (*libitina*)³⁸ and ‘*totus apparatus in variatione pompae singulorum dierum*’. Calpurnius’ language does not allow us to determine whether he is referring to this amber when he says *gemmis* and *auro*, or whether

³⁴ *de Bell. Pers.* I. 24. 43.

³⁵ *RE* IV. 156, reading τῆς ἰδέας καθόδου and taking the adjective as describing the actual door. He also states that it was in the Hippodrome itself, evidently to fit in with the passage of Varro.

³⁶ *Le Sénat romain sous le règne d’Odoacre* (1966), plates xxxiii. 2, xxxiv–v. Examples of the same medallion, some bearing the legend REPARATIO MUNERIS FELICITER and dated on the authority of A. Alföldi (p. 22) to A.D. 425–9, are given by Alföldi himself, in *Die Kontorniat-Medaillons* (1976), I, 22, no. 77 (pl. 26. 10) and 139, no. 412 (pl. 173. 12, 174. 1–2); and there is a striking variant (p. 74, no. 222 = pl. 89. 7), showing the same ‘Drehgestell’ flanked by man and beast, plus a further man holding

a lance and a curved amphitheatre-podium with five spectators sitting above it. None of these can be earlier than Theodosius, and none of the motifs appears to be traceable in any earlier artefact.

³⁷ Not clearly identifiable, but evidently the same as the bear in the adjoining contorniate in plate xxxiii in Chastagnol, where the creature is directly attacking an armed man with no apparatus to hide behind: cf. Alföldi, pl. 26. 1–6, with 10.

³⁸ All this expensive equipment will have been particularly suitable for the senators and equestrians, who were not engaged in serious fighting, and whose functions included *varia harenae ministeria*, such as Pliny’s *libitina*.

the amber replaced these more conventional extravagances on different days of the festival. There is certainly a very close correspondence, between the amber knotting the protective nets in Pliny and the 'auro torta retia' of Calpurnius. Moreover, there appears to be no other reference to the use of nets of this sort at any other *venatio*, particularly in the Colosseum, where the podium was in itself 'about 4 metres above the arena'.³⁹ It is almost as if Nero, constructing his amphitheatre in haste on the foundations previously laid by Caligula (as suggested above), found that he had cut down the masonry to a dangerously low level and adopted this novel and, as it turned out, short-lived expedient to ensure the safety of himself and other important personages seated right on the podium. If this is so, the *rotulus* and nets may simply never have been required again for protection in the major amphitheatres. That the idea remained familiar on a smaller scale is shown by a simile in Ammianus' account of the siege of Amida (19. 6. 4), where the Gallic garrison are anxious to sally out and attack the besiegers: 'utque dentatae in caveis bestiae taetro paedore (of carrion, as the Loeb and Budé translators agree) acerbius efferatae evadendi spe repagulis versabilibus inliduntur, ita gladiis portas caedebant'. Although the simile does not fit the historical situation particularly aptly, the picture is clear of beasts in cages thwarted in their attempts to escape (evidently over the top, unlike the Gauls) by revolving bars, perhaps with spikes on them like those found on many walls and railings in Oxford and Cambridge colleges.

If the combination of nets and *rotulus* was indeed a Neronian innovation, in use only from the opening of the amphitheatre in 57 to its destruction in the Great Fire of 64,⁴⁰ one further correspondence is to be noted between Suetonius and Calpurnius. At the end of the account of Nero's *munus* (*Nero* 12. 2), we are told that the emperor watched 'parvis primum foraminibus, deinde podio adaptato'. This would fit in well with an initial uncertainty about the efficacy of the nets on the first day, followed by the removal of the structure of the imperial box in which Nero had, contrary to his normal extrovert tendency, been concealing himself for safety. This will then add point to the rustic's satisfaction in *Calp.* 7. 82-4 that, although obliged to sit so far back (26-7, 79-80),

utcumque tamen conspeximus ipsum
longius ac, nisi me visus decepit, in uno
et Martis vultus⁴¹ et Apollinis esse putatur.

Had the emperor been so regularly visible in the amphitheatre as his successors were to be in the open podium of the Colosseum, this remark would have much less significance. As it is, the lines make a very neat ending to the fictitious rustic's panegyric in the guise of narrative. The whole description of the games in the amphitheatre contains so many features corresponding exactly to elements which we know made a strong impression on those who witnessed the Neronian games that there should never have been any doubt that Calpurnius was in Rome during the first few years of Nero's reign.

³⁹ Platner-Ashby, *Topography*, 9, echoing Platner's earlier statement in *Topography and monuments of ancient Rome* (1911), 332, and mentioning a fence a little way in front of the podium. For Lugli, the podium is only three metres high (*Rome antica: il centro monumentale* (1946), 328, 331) and the fence serves to prevent the beasts from catching hold with their claws of the metal bars which protect the spectators. The archaeological evidence for much of this detail is obscure, but accounts seem to agree in describing the lofty podium of the Colosseum, with its outworks, as safeguarding the spectators, with no mention of any sort of nets. There is no attempt to represent nets on coins or contorniates. However, E. R. Gebhard, *Studies in the Antiquities of Stobi II* (1975), 43-63, examines the evidence for protective nets erected in theatres adapted for *venationes*, perhaps not before the second century after Christ. Certainly traces of holes for posts and rings for guy-ropes are clear at Stobi (pp. 50-53). At Philippi Gebhard calculates that a net provided a

total height of 3.70 m., 'optimum height for protection against large cats'—she estimates the height of the podium in the Colosseum as 3.60 m. In general, it is far from clear how many of the demi-amphitheatres (e.g. Verulamium) were ever used for wild beast fights, rather than cock-fighting, the baiting of chained animals, gladiators, or fencing-displays between soldiers.

⁴⁰ There is no reference to the amphitheatre in the later years of the reign; and the wooden structure made it an easy victim to the great fire, which also destroyed 'Taurus' stone amphitheatre (Dio 62. 18. 2). Pliny's reference is clearly to a structure no longer in existence.

⁴¹ The association of Nero with Mars seems without parallel. If this poem was written early in 58, it will be explained by the fact that Corbulo was just opening his first real campaign against Parthia (*Tac., Ann.* 13. 34. 2, 'eius anni principio'), for which Nero was to claim all the credit (*ibid.* 41. 4).

If Calpurnius was to be removed from the early years of Nero's reign, Champlin has probably chosen, in the reign of Alexander Severus, the only other period for which any sort of case might be made. That he has failed to do so demonstrates that the traditional dating is more secure than may have been supposed.

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