

## XXV. Time and Place in the *Satyricon*

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### I

The present article is an attempt to settle three minor questions on the fringe of the so-called Petronian Question: these are, the locality of the *Cena Trimalchionis*, the time of the year, and the year of action in those parts of the *Satyricon* which we possess.

For the last few decades these points have been treated somewhat half-heartedly by scholars, usually as isolated sections of an introduction or commentary. But this is unsatisfactory, not only because the present state of opinion on the subject is vague and unconvincing, but also because a positive answer has considerable relevance to the whole question of Petronius' literary technique of realism; a subject on which there is as yet no full and satisfactory treatment.<sup>1</sup>

It will appear that Petronius consistently portrays the site of the *Cena* as Puteoli, and that, the *Cena* takes place at a recognizable time of year; also, that the date of action is not deliberately set back in time before the date of composition, 64–65 A.D.<sup>2</sup>

It should first be observed that Petronius does not always provide plentiful realistic details, but varies the quantity and frequency of these according to the subject-matter. For example: in the *Cena*, he is obviously at pains to provide a vivid picture of the town and its inhabitants, whereas in the Croton episode the adventures are concerned rather with *captatio* and with complex amorous intrigues; accordingly, all that Petronius tells us about Croton is that it has a plane grove, a laurel grove, and that the streets are paved with rough stones!

In general therefore, Petronius employs varying degrees of realism, depending on the subject-matter; and we have to beware

<sup>1</sup> On Petronius' realism, cf. P. Thomas, *Rev. d' instruction publique en Belge* 36 (1893) 1 ff.; E. Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Bern 1946) 31–40; R. Oroz, *Anales de filología clásica* 6 (1953–54) 85 ff. Compare the introductions of Bücheler (Berlin 1862), Friedländer (Leipzig 1906) and Paratore (Florence 1933).

<sup>2</sup> For the date of composition, cf. K. F. C. Rose, *CQ* 12, n.s., (1962) 166 ff.

especially of exaggeration when Petronius is satirizing as well as simply depicting. As illustration of this, we may compare the realistic conversation and description of Trimalchio's friends with the exaggerated vulgarity of Trimalchio himself; and it is not hard to find other instances in the *Satyricon*.

## II

The first question is the locality of the *Cena*. It should be noted at the outset that, in all other known adventures in the *Satyricon*, Petronius seems to have given the name of the town where each takes place: Massilia, Croton, and so on. It is therefore probable that Petronius *did* at some point give the name of the town where the *Cena* takes place, and that the fragmentary state of the MSS. is responsible for the problem. This can remain probable until it can be shown that the plentiful details of the town *cannot* be compatible with any particular town in the first century A.D.

The fact that the name is absent from our MSS. seems to have impressed many scholars, but they seem to have reasoned as follows: "Petronius did not give the name of any particular town because the *Satyricon* is fragmentary."<sup>3</sup>

A large number of possibilities has been suggested, after many attempts, more or less thorough, to consider all the features of the town described by Petronius. It is obviously by the sea (81.1, 90.2) and in Campania: there are references to Capua (62.1), Cumae (48.8, 53.2) and Baiae (53.10, 104.2). But most suggestions are erratic, and some are quite impossible;<sup>4</sup> briefly, the three for which respectable argument has been adduced are Naples, Cumae and Puteoli. Cumae was Mommsen's idea, and it has since been supported as much by his authority as by his arguments.<sup>5</sup> Naples has the oldest "pedigree", dating from

<sup>3</sup> For example, Burman's editions (Amsterdam 1709, 1743) pages 370 and 480 respectively; E. Lommatsch in *Lexicon Petronianum* (Leipzig 1898) page iii, note 2; E. T. Sage's commentary (New York 1929); and other prominent Petronian scholars such as Bücheler, Paratore and Marmorale.

<sup>4</sup> Capua: Heinze, Goes and Bosch in Burman's editions (first edition, pages 106, 210, 324; second edition, pages 144, 283, 425); Tarracina-Anxur: R. Fisch, *Terracina-Anxur u. Kaiser Galba* (Berlin 1898); Herculaneum: G. Seguino, *Memorie lette nell'Accademia Ercolanese* (1860) 20 ff.; Minturnae: A. K. Lake, *AJP* 62 (1941) 496, and so on.

<sup>5</sup> T. Mommsen, *Hermes* 13 (1878) 106 ff.

1583.<sup>6</sup> Puteoli was first suggested by Ignarra (who preferred Naples), and first argued by Iannelli.<sup>7</sup>

The only point in favor of Naples is that Encolpius (81.3) describes the town as a *Graeca urbs*. But it is abundantly clear that the town is Latin as regards institutions and character, though there are foreign elements and people in it. Therefore it is clear that Encolpius means what Juvenal meant when he said of Rome:

non possum ferre, Quirites,  
Graecam urbem.

(3.60–61)

Mommsen's chief argument in favor of Cumae was that in 65.4 the chief magistrate is referred to as *praetor*; this would eliminate other candidates. But elsewhere in the *Cena* the magistrates are referred to as *aediles* (44.3, 53.9), and *praetor* is sometimes found in a non-technical sense.<sup>8</sup> Otherwise there is nothing which indicates Cumae rather than Puteoli.

The traditional objection to Puteoli, and virtually the only objection, is the *Graeca urbs* passage dealt with above. All details, which may be briefly considered, square with Puteoli, so far as we can tell.

There is no point in listing all details, since things like the *forum*, *popinae*, *insulae*, old women selling vegetables and what not, square with almost any Italian town. But the Campanian city is not a small one, since Encolpius loses his way twice (6.3, 79.2); there is a harbor where large ships such as Lichas' can dock (99.5, 101.9); further, it appears from 76.5 that Trimalchio had been living in the town during his trading career and had built large trading ships there. The garrulous Hermeros (38) tells us that there is prosperity in the town, and the grouses of Ganymede are clearly those of a stock character; it is relevant to note the way in which Echion rebukes him (44.1–3, 16; 45.4).

As noted above, the town is administered by *aediles*; further, it has the status of a *colonia* (44.12, 57.9, 76.10)—this eliminates

<sup>6</sup> J. Dousa (van der Does), *Praecidanea* (1583) 1.2.8 (in Burman's editions), followed by many others.

<sup>7</sup> N. Ignarra, *De palaestra Neapolitana* (Naples 1770) 184; C. Iannelli, *In Perottinum codicem* (Naples 1811) diss. tertia; firmly followed, with arguments, by H. W. Haley, Friedländer, Sgobbo and Maiuri.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Horace, *Sat.* 1.5.34; cf. E. Klebs, *Philologus* Supp. 6 (1893) 673 ff.; *CIL* x, pages 182–84.

Naples at once—and this title is given only by the local inhabitants.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the town has an amphitheatre, where gladiatorial contests are being put on by the candidates for office (45.4–6). Therefore the proof is relatively simple: the town is too busy and important to be Cumae, and Naples was not a *colonia* until Antonine times.

There are some other points and arguments which, for various reasons, are likely to introduce error or confusion into the subject. The existence of a *pinacotheca* in a temple portico, full of priceless art treasures, is perhaps surprising, but the passage (83.1 ff.) is highly stylized: Petronius probably makes Encolpius mistake copies for originals. Trimalchio's bets on the chariot races (70.13) seem to refer to races in Rome. The *basilica* to which Hermeros refers (57.9) as having been built some forty years previously may, or may not, be the *basilica Augusta Anniana* at Puteoli; the *crypta* where Quartilla held her sacred (!) rites (16.3) need have nothing to do with the *crypta Neapolitana* (cf. Frag. 18); Beloch thought that Niceros has taken the road to Capua lined with tombs—as the Capua–Puteoli road is—but the road to Capua was taken not by Niceros but by his master (62.1, 4).<sup>10</sup> Cesareo thought that Tryphaena's vision at Baiae (104.2) took place shortly before the voyage, hence that the town must be very close to Baiae; but this cannot be firmly established.<sup>11</sup>

There being no objection to Puteoli as the site of the *Cena*, and fatal objections to other “candidates,” it is pertinent to wonder why so many scholars have compromised by suggesting that the town is a *specie di Cosmopoli*, dream city, generalized Campanian town or what not.<sup>12</sup> The answer seems to lie chiefly in undue adherence to the authority and unsound arguments of previous scholars, in addition to the supposedly important fact that the name of the town does not occur in the fragmentary MSS. of the *Satyricon*.

<sup>9</sup> Compare 8.2, 10.5, 11.1, 81.3. The *vigiles* in 78.7 might be those instituted at Puteoli by Claudius (Suetonius, *Divus Claudius* 25.6), as suggested by L. Friedländer, *Index Lectionum Acad. Albert.* 4 (1860) 3–4; see also N. Terzaghi, *Anales de filologia clásica* 4 (1947–49) 123.

<sup>10</sup> K. J. Beloch, *Campanien*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin 1890) 450–51.

<sup>11</sup> G. A. Cesareo, *Il romanzo satirico di Petronio Arbitro*<sup>3</sup> (Florence 1950) viii–ix.

<sup>12</sup> The most prominent exponents of this view are E. V. Marmorale, *La questione Petroniana* (Bari 1948), and E. Paratore, in his Commentary (Florence 1933), 1.184, 209.

## III

The next point to discuss is the time of year in the *Satyricon*. Much attention has been paid to the *Cena*, but none at all to the subsequent adventures. The *Cena* question has been quite well treated by Marmorale except for one major argument,<sup>13</sup> but it is necessary to discuss the various points in order to clear up some traditional errors.

In the bulletin on Trimalchio's estates, the guests at the *Cena* hear the events of July 26 (53.2). Obviously, the bulletin is for recent events, and thus August appears to be the date of the *Cena*.

Hermeros rhetorically asks Giton, who he thinks is a slave, *rogo, mensis December est?* (58.2). From this, it can only be concluded that the *Cena* does not take place at the time of the *Saturnalia*. Trimalchio's announcement (30.3) that he *foras cenat* only in the last two days of the year is probably a boastful allusion to his own abundant hospitality, rather than to an actual engagement pending.

To confirm the time of year as summer, there are plentiful indications that the weather is warm, and perspiration is often mentioned (6.4, 8.1, 23.5, 79.5, and compare 47.1, 67.5, 72.5). A possible exception to this is Dama, who exclaims (41.10–11) *et mundum frigus habuimus*—but this does not directly imply winter time. By contrast, Seleucus talks of cold baths (42.1–2), which does not favor winter time. Ganymedes' grumbles (44.2) about *siccitas*, ruined crops and a year-long food-shortage all square very well with the late summer. This is confirmed, finally, by the fact that Lichas' ship puts to sea not long after the *Cena* (99.4–5), and this would be impossible after September; and it is perhaps not without significance that he runs into a violent tempest.

Marmorale, using part of the above arguments, also concluded late summer, but then adduced a new argument to show that Petronius deliberately confuses the time of year. This argument is simply that various foods are served at the *Cena* which are not all available or in season at any one time of the year. But surely this is an instance of Petronius' satirical exaggeration; and in any case the Romans were not unacquainted with the means of preserving various foods, as we know from Apicius.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Marmorale (above, note 12), 111 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Apicius 1.7, 9, 11, 12, 14; compare Seneca, *Ep.* 122.8.

The *Cena*, therefore, seems to have taken place in August, and the sea voyage not long after. The adventures in chapters 1–26 date within three days before the *Cena*, which takes place on the *tertius dies* after Encolpius meets Agamemnon (26.7).

For the rest of the *Satyricon*, there are fewer indications of the time of year. But perspiration recurs in 116.1 and 134.2, and moreover in 124.1 it appears that the intrigue at Croton continued *magno tempore*; though this passage may be an interpolation, it is obvious that the “heroes” must have spent some time in Croton by the time they have exhausted the resources of the *captatores* (141.1). Hence it is possible that Petronius makes his heroes lay up in Croton for the winter, and thus that in chapter 141 the spring has arrived and a ship is expected from Africa; it would not perhaps be expected during the winter months.

There seems, then, to be no valid objection to concluding that the adventures in the *Satyricon* are set at the times of year argued above, and this is significant in view of the large number of realistic allusions to climate and weather at various points.

#### IV

The third question for examination is the year of action. It is not possible to maintain that Petronius puts the date of action precisely contemporary with the composition and recitation of the *Satyricon*, though various topical allusions indicate that there is some relation between the adventures and the events of his day. But it is possible to discount the widely-accepted view that Petronius deliberately sets the action back in time.<sup>15</sup> This view is so tenuous that a brief discussion will be sufficient.

The arguments are as follows. Trimalchio has an *agnomen* Maecenatianus (71.12), and therefore it is deduced that he was a slave of Maecenas, who died in 8 B.C. Therefore the *Cena* cannot possibly be as late as the 60's A.D. But Trimalchio has no such *agnomen*, as is apparent from the inscription in 30.2. Thus the name Maecenatianus is merely a boastful and false claim which is made only on Trimalchio's tomb.

The reference to *vinum Opimianum* (34.6) is likewise no indication of the date of action, since Trimalchio ignorantly qualifies

<sup>15</sup> Suggested dates vary significantly from Augustus (H. W. Haley, *HSCP* 2 [1891] 1 ff.) to early Nero (Friedländer, above, note 1).

the date with the rider *annorum centum*—giving a date 21 B.C., which is absurd.

There is a remarkable consensus of opinion that the Scaurus mentioned in 77.5 is Mamercus Aemilius Scaurus, who died in 34 A.D. But many other Scauri are known, and it is a happy suggestion that Trimalchio means Umbricius Scaurus, the maker of Pompeian *garum*.<sup>16</sup>

The story of unbreakable glass (51) refers to an event of Tiberius' reign,<sup>17</sup> but this does not preclude Trimalchio from giving a garbled version of it during Nero's reign.

In fact, there are only two apparent anachronisms in the *Satyricon* if it is *not* set back in time. The first is the use of the word *Sextiles* (53.2). Maiuri says this usage survived in the provinces in the first century A.D., but he cites no evidence. More probably, it is an instance of the conservatism of accountants, of which Cicero quotes a striking example.<sup>18</sup> The other is simply that Eumolpus criticizes vices of Imperial times in the *Bellum civile* (1–60), while describing the fall of the Republic!

There is, then, no reason to suppose that Petronius sets the action back in time. Internal allusions, such as the mention of Petraites with a fighting career behind him (52.3, 71.6),<sup>19</sup> the probable reference to Lucan's death in chapter 118, and so on, show positively that the date of action is Neronian, and roughly contemporary with the date of composition, 64–65 A.D.

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It can therefore be concluded with a fair amount of confidence that the location of the *Cena*, and the year and months of action, are consistently and realistically portrayed by Petronius. The relative frequency of these indications, of course, depends upon the subject-matter; that is, at times "atmosphere" is an important aspect of Petronius' comedy or satire, whereas at other times

<sup>16</sup> First suggested by Friedländer (above, note 8), followed by Maiuri in his commentary (Naples 1945), and by H. C. Schnur, *The Age of Petronius Arbiter* (New York 1957) 24–28.

<sup>17</sup> Dio 57.21.7, Pliny, *HN* 36.195.

<sup>18</sup> Cicero, *Orat.* 158. The only possible example of *Sextilis* in Neronian times which I have found is *CIL* iv.3133 (Pompeii). Note that July is given its imperial name in 38.10 (a public notice).

<sup>19</sup> On Petraites, cf. H. T. Rowell, *TAPA* 89 (1958) 14 ff.

his intentions do not require these details to such an extent. This is parallel to his technique of realism in general throughout what we possess of the *Satyricon*, and discussion of Petronius' realism should perhaps take the subject-matter of this article into account.