

### PERSIUS' *CIRRATI* AND THE SCHOOLING OF SLAVES \*

The *cirrati* mentioned in Persius' first satire (29) have been taken for freeborn schoolboys. They should be identified rather as slave pages. Such *seruuli* would be trained to recite popular poetry by the *ludi magister*, and might thereafter serve their masters as *cantores*.

«at pulchrum est digito monstrari et dicier 'hic est'.  
ten cirratorum centum dictata fuisse  
pro nihilo pendes?» ecce inter pocula quaerunt  
Romulidae satori quid dia poemata narrent.  
hic aliquis, cui circum umeros hyacinthina laena est,  
rancidulum quiddam balba de nare locutus  
Phyllidas, Hypsipylas, uatum et plorabile siquid,  
eliquat ac tenero subplantat uerba palato.  
adsensere uiri: nunc non cinis ille poetae  
felix? non leuior cippus nunc inprimit ossa?  
laudent conuiuiae: nunc non e manibus illis,  
nunc non e tumulo fortunataque fauilla  
nascentur uiolae? «rides» ait «et nimis uncis  
naribus indulges. an erit qui uelle recuset  
os populi meruisse et cedro digna locutus  
linquere nec scombros metuentia carmina nec tus?

(Persius, I 28-43)

In lines 29-30 Persius evidently recalls Horace, *Sat.* I 10, 74-75: *an tua demens/uilibus in ludis dictari carmina malis?* It will be remembered that Horace, who pretends that he would not have his *Epistles* adopted even by *grammatici* at Rome<sup>1</sup>, sees their use by a *ludi magister* on the periphery of the Roman world as the ultimate disgrace (*Epist.* I 20, 17-

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<sup>1</sup> See Booth, «Horace *Epistles* I 19, 35-49», *LCM* 4, 9, 1979, pp. 195-196.

18)<sup>2</sup>. So *uilibus in ludis* surely refers to the despised *ludi litterarii*, as Porphyryon realized (ed. Holder, p. 285): *ludis litterariis dicit, in quibus carmina uulgata pueris adhuc rudibus dictari solent*. Indeed *dictari* evokes the exercise of chanting verses back to a teacher<sup>3</sup>; such rote-learning, a far cry from the *praelectio* of the *grammaticus*, was regularly associated with the *ludi magister*<sup>4</sup>. In turn, Persius' *cirrati* may be identified as pupils of the *ludi magister* learning by rote (*dictata fuisse*).

The use of a poet's works in the schools guaranteed him some measure of posthumous fame<sup>5</sup>. So, while line 28 refers to present recognition, the subsequent question introduces the subject of future repute. This interpretation, obvious in itself, is confirmed by the resumption of these two considerations in lines 40-43. The epitaphic sentiments in lines 36-40 will not then signal any metaphorical death, as has been thought<sup>6</sup>. In the recitation-scene Persius represents as actually dead the poet cast in lines 28-30. This scene, therefore, should demonstrate the vanity of the glory prescribed in these lines; more specifically, in the Horatian tradition, adoption of a poet's work as a school-text should be represented as a dishonour. The effeminate reciter may then be identified as a former *cirratus*; as his party-piece he proffers popular poetry learned as a schoolboy, and the poet's works survive on his lisping lips to the applause of tasteless symposiasts<sup>7</sup>. Such glory, avers

<sup>2</sup> For this interpretation see Booth, «Allusion to the *Circulator* by Persius and Horace?», *G&R* 27, 1980, p. 169, n. 10. For the reputation of the *ludi magister* see H. I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*, Paris 1977, p. 223; Booth, «Some Suspect Schoolmasters», *Florilegium* 3, 1981, pp. 1-20.

<sup>3</sup> For this exercise see S. F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome*, London 1977, p. 177. He would refer Persius' *dictata fuisse* to the writing of dictation, but the context assures that the emphasis is on memorization; cf. *ad loc.* J. Conington, *The Satires of A. Persius Flaccus* (ed. H. Nettleship, Oxford, 1892); G. Némethy, *A. Persii Flacci satirae*, Budapest 1903; F. Ramorino, *Le Satire di A. Persio Flacco*, Turin 1920; R. A. Harvey, *A Commentary on Persius*, Leiden 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Varro, *Ling.* VI 61; Horace, *Epist.* I 1, 54-56; I 18, 12-14. Horace's use of *dictare* at *Epist.* II 1, 69-71 is presumably responsible for the identification of the *grammaticus* Orbilius (cf. Suet., *Gram.* 9) as a *ludi magister* in Pseudo-Acron (ed. Keller) II 284. If Suetonius (*Gram.* 16) reports that Q. Caecilius Epirota, who opened his school several years after Horace's publication of the *Satires*, was the first teaching *grammaticus* to lecture on contemporary poets, and this report is correct, then the schools at *Sat.* I 10, 74-75 must be *ludi litterarii*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Martial, I 35, 1-3; Statius, *Theb.* XII 815; Suetonius, *Vita Lucani ad fin.*; Quintilian, X 1, 85-100; Tacitus, *Dial.* 20, 5. A scholiast at Persius I 29-30 reports that Nero ordered his poems circulated in the schools.

<sup>6</sup> See D. Korzeniewski, «Die erste Satire des Persius» in Korzeniewski ed., *Die römische Satire*, Darmstadt 1970, pp. 400-401; cf. J. C. Bramble, *Persius and the Programmatic Satire*, Cambridge 1974, pp. 100, 105.

<sup>7</sup> Némethy (above, n. 3) is clearly wrong to mark a distinct break after the question in lines 29-30, identifying the recited material thus: «dives quidam et nobilis versus amatorios poetae cuiusdam inepti recitat ad oblectandos convivas».



Persius, should make the poet turn in his grave; and, of course, it ought to have been no more attractive during his lifetime. So the question in lines 29-30 does not go unanswered, and the recitation-scene is introduced without abruptness<sup>8</sup>.

It has been suggested that the reciter is one of the guests<sup>9</sup>. In days of yore guests at banquets allegedly chanted poems in praise of Roman heroes (Cicero, *Tusc.* I 3; *Brut.* 75; cf. perhaps Varro *apud* Non. Marc. *assa uoce*). So it may be tempting to see here described a degeneration of that practice. But, by the first century, after-dinner recitation had long been the task of slaves<sup>10</sup>. However much Persius' symposiasts lack in couth, they clearly possess substance and standing. It is unlikely, therefore, that one of them would recite the works of someone else for the entertainment of equals. A poet of some standing could of course read to a salon of friends (cf. Horace, *Sat.* I 4, 73-78), and dilettanti could compose and recite at a symposium (cf. Horace, *Epist.* II 1, 109-110; Persius, I 51-53). It might then be thought that one of the guests recites some compilation of his own wherein he has plagiarized trash once learned as a schoolboy; line 34 does suggest a medley<sup>11</sup>. Thus Persius would pillory survival which brought anonymity to the original author, and would pride himself on his work's being beyond such jaundiced appreciation and imitation. But this interpretation stumbles on two obstacles. First, it is difficult not to see in lines 31-32 a call for such entertainment as a slave *cantor* supplied. Second, it is improbable that members of the party described by Persius would have attended the lowly *ludus litterarius*, which was frequented by children from poorer families and by *seruuli*<sup>12</sup>. So the obvious interpretation should not be eschewed: the after-dinner recitation is provided by a slave *cantor* called to entertain the symposiasts. And once the reciter is so identified, then the *cirrati* may be recognized as slave pages being trained as *cantores*<sup>13</sup>. Hence the requisite link between their education

<sup>8</sup> Not that abruptness could not be explained away; cf. Bramble (above, n. 6), p. 100; F. Villeneuve, *Les satires de Perse*, Paris 1918; N. Scivoletto, *Auli Persi Flacci satirae*, Florence 1961, *ad loc.* But the sequence of thought demonstrated in the text assures that a direct connexion exists; cf. Harvey (above, n. 3) *ad loc.*

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Némethy (above, n. 7) and Villeneuve (above, n. 8) on *inter pocula*.

<sup>10</sup> As indeed Villeneuve (above, n. 8) recognizes; cf. Marquardt-Mau, *Das Privatleben der Römer*, Leipzig 1886, p. 151.

<sup>11</sup> For the use of anthologies by the *ludi magister* see Marrou (above, n. 2), pp. 233-234. The pet of Habinnas (*Satyricon* 68, 45), a mockery of a trained reciter, mixes Atellans into the *Aeneid*.

<sup>12</sup> See Booth, «The Schooling of Slaves in First-Century Rome», *TAPA* 109, 1979, pp. 11-19; «Elementary and Secondary Education in Antiquity», *Florilegium* 1, 1979, pp. 1-14.

<sup>13</sup> The identification of the reciter as one of the guests has been prompted by

and the recitation-scene, and a truly sordid survival pictured for a poet's work.

The present explanation is not novel. A scholiast glosses *cirrati*: *sunt scholastici uel catamiti; cirri enim dicuntur capilli et illi crines habent in honorem Veneris, quos statuto tempore praemetebant*. To the latter identification Scivoletto objects: «Uno scolio del cod. A interpreta *cirrati* = *cynaedi*: spiegazione non accettabile, perchè qui chiaramente il poeta lo usa in senso affettuoso, così come faranno altri autori»<sup>14</sup>. He mentions Jerome and may think too of Martianus Capella. At *Nupt. Merc. et Phil.* II 326 the latter seems to use *cirrati* of the freeborn pupils of the *grammaticus*. Jerome may describe freeborn students as *cirrati* at *In Ruf.* I 17 (cf. *In Esaiam* 12 Prol.) and at *Epist.* 50, 4, where there is an echo of both Persius and Cicero, *QFr.* III 1, 11. But even if Jerome and Capella, with Persius in mind, do apply *cirratus* to the freeborn, this does not disprove that Persius' *cirrati* are *seruuli*. The scholiast's gloss indicates that already in antiquity they were being identified either as freeborn students or catamites. Persius, it will be remembered, was studied in the schools (cf. Jerome, *In Ruf.* I 16), where students will have been exposed to both these interpretations. Scivoletto's objection, therefore, lacks cogency. And if the context already commends that Persius' *cirrati* be identified as catamites, further confirmation is at hand.

Slave pages are often described by terms related to their grooming<sup>15</sup>. *Crispus* was applied to such boys with curls (cf. Seneca, *Epist.* 95, 24; note too Martial, V 61). Hermeros, who upbraids Giton as a spoiled pet slave, dubs him *cepa cirrata* (*Satyricon* 58, 2)<sup>16</sup>; Giton was *crispus* (97, 2). There is no difficulty in identifying Martial's *matutini cirrata*

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the presumption, misguided in view of the clientele of the *ludi magister*, that the *cirrati* are freeborn boys from upper-class families; cf. Conington (above, n. 3): «the descriptive epithet [*cirratorum*] naturally points to boys of the better classes»; I. van Wageningen, *Auli Persi Flacci saturae*, Groningen 1911, II, p. 12: «*cirrati* sunt pueri familiarum nobilium»; other commentators identify the *cirrati* as freeborn schoolboys without reference to their family background; cf. Némethy (above, n. 3); Villeneuve (above, n. 8); Ramorino (above, n. 3); Scivoletto (above, n. 8); Harvey (above, n. 3); D. Bo, *A. Persi Flacci saturarum liber*, Turin 1969; J. R. Jenkinson, *Persius: the Satires*, Warminster 1980.

<sup>14</sup> (Above, n. 8). Bramble (above, n. 6), p. 100, remarks that «the curly hair of line 29, *cirratorum*, points again to effeminacy». The interpretation offered in the text takes the *cirrati* for both students and catamites.

<sup>15</sup> For *capillatus* so used cf. *Satyricon* 27, 1; 29, 3; 34, 4; 57, 9; 63, 3; 70, 8; Martial, II 57, 5; III 58, 31; X 62, 2, on which see TAPA (above, n. 12). For *comatus* cf. Martial, I 72, 8; X 83, 3. For *crinitus* cf. Seneca, *Epist.* 119, 14; Martial, XII 49, 1.

<sup>16</sup> For the reading and sense, see Booth, «Notes on *Satyricon* 57», *CW* 75, 1982, pp. 242-243.



*caterua magistri* (IX 29, 7) as *seruuli* rather than freeborn boys<sup>17</sup>. So *cirratus*, like its synonym *crispus* (cf. *Corp. Gloss. Lat.* V, pp. 623, 2; 653, 40), could surely describe curly-haired slave pages. Now such boys were employed as *cantores*. An epitaph (CIL X 4041) describes one Bebryx, a *delicium domini*, as *formosum cantu*, and Statius (*Siluae* II 1, 117-119) lauds the skill with which a favourite would recite the works of Homer<sup>18</sup>. Such *seruuli* might be bought already trained; their accomplishments would surely exceed those of the pretty boy whom Horace pictures on sale (*Epist.* II 2, 9): *quin etiam canet indoctum sed dulce bibenti*. Some were trained in their households; favourites who recited their master's creations (Martial, VII 29; *Satyricon* 41, 6; cf. Pliny, *Epist.* VIII 1, 2) can scarcely have acquired their repertoires elsewhere. Others will have learned *foris*, but not *circum circulatores* like Habinas' pet (*Satyricon* 68, 4-9), who in performance and looks parodies presumably the polish normally expected from such boys. Where Martial describes such pupils (*capillati*) of a *ludi magister* as *delicatae... chorus mensae* (X 62, 3), reference to training in recitation may now be detected fairly.

The tale about Calvisius Sabinus (Séneca, *Epist.* 27, 6) shows how costly might be the special training of slave reciters, and the contest involving the rhetor Antonius Iulianus (Gell., *NA* XIX 9) how accomplished such slaves could be. But the *cirrata caterua* trained by the *ludi magister* would receive a cheap and undistinguished training in trite material. Persius' *centum cirratorum* should then be recognized as slave pages at school<sup>19</sup>. These boys were exploited sexually and a *cantor cirratus* was likely to develop into an effeminate *uocalis exoletus* (for the expression cf. *HA Seu. Alex.* 34, 2) such as the reciter described by Persius<sup>20</sup>. He retains in later life the popular poetry and pathic

<sup>17</sup> If the *capillati* at X 62, 2 are *seruuli* (TAPA [above, n. 12]), so too may be these boys.

<sup>18</sup> At his wholesome dinner-party Juvenal (XI 147-182) may envisage freeborn boys of peasant stock reciting the *Iliad* and *Aeneid*, but clearly he swims against the tide. From his words may be inferred that at banquets in his day trained pages recited popular, as opposed to classical, poetry.

<sup>19</sup> The figure *centum* may be chosen simply for alliteration; cf. J. H. Brouwers, «Alliteration, anaphore et chiasme chez Perse», *Mnemosyne* 26, 1973, p. 252. Again, as a poet claimed the need of a hundred tongues to produce properly (cf. V 1-2), so he may need this number of *cantores* that his works may survive. It is possible, however, the *centum* limits the poet's fame: his work is not on the lips of everyone (cf. Martial, I 1; V 16, 3; VI 60; XI 3) but, having merited adoption by some tasteless *ludi magister*, enjoys some paltry measure of sordid popularity, present and future, which would delight only the misguided.

<sup>20</sup> For the sexual undertone of the passage under study see Bramble (above, n. 6), pp. 100-105.

practices in which he was versed as a boy. The poet in his lifetime should take no joy in his work's being taught *uilibus in ludis*, for its future survival would be so tainted as its present popularity. If it is felt unduly awkward that the interlocutor should commend such sordid fame, the question in lines 29-30 may be attributed to Persius, as G. L. Hendrickson suggested<sup>21</sup>. But it is always possible that poets athirst for recognition were not so fastidious as a Horace or Persius.

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<sup>21</sup> «The First Satire of Persius», *CP* 23, 1928, p. 105.