

THE SLAVES' CHORUS IN PETRONIUS

The Greek refrain *μάδεια περιμάδεια* at *Satyricon* 52, 10 has been much suspected and much emended by editors. I offer a new textual solution, one that is palaeographically close, suitable to the narrative, and supportable by parallels in other Greek and Roman writers.

Atque ipse erectis supra frontem manibus Syrum histrionem exhibebat concinente tota familia: *μάδεια περιμάδεια* (*Sat.* 52, 10).

At first blush, the Greek refrain seems untranslatable. And indeed, it is quite possible that Petronius made up some gibberish here, to enhance his picture of Trimalchio's ludicrous appearance.

That is the easy and dismissive explanation. Curative work upon the text is more congenial to most. Emendations and conjectures abound, as a glance at the editions and commentaries of Burmann, Bücheler, Friedländer, Müller and Smith disclose. Perhaps the two most ingenious and popular efforts are *μά Δία perite μά Δία*, and *μάλ' ἔια πάριθι, μάλ' ἔια*. A third possibility is to read *Μήδεια Περιμήδεια*, adducing Theocritus II 16 as the basis.

Any or none these could be right. What has been consistently overlooked is the fact that the refrain is quite explicable with a minimum of alteration.

For there is an adjective *μαδαῖος*. It can be found in the Lexicon, which correctly gives the anonymous poem *De herbis* 83 as a source¹.

There is also an epithet *περιμάδαρα*, occurring twice² in the Hippocratic corpus. In the Galenic version, however, there is a variant, namely *περιμάδεια*.

¹ Text in F. S. Lehrs, *Poetae Bucolici et Didactici*, Paris 1851.

² *Aph.* 6, 4, which recurs as *Epid.* 6, 8, 2.

Both μαδαῖος and περιμάδαρα / περιμάδεα are applied to τὰ ἔλκη, in the sense of «bald» or «exposed». Now, as readers of the *Satyricon* well know, Trimalchio was glabrous of dome; indeed, the detail is obtruded in his first appearance in the narrative. It would be quite in character to have him whirling away in the middle of the dining room, oblivious to a disrespectful chanting from his slaves.

Furthermore, the cognate epithet μαδαρός is mockingly used of bald heads by Cicero, *Ad Att.* 14, 2, 2, also by the author of *AP XI 434*³.

Read, therefore, μαδαῖε περιμάδεε (or περιμάδαρε), translating as «Baldy! Baldy!»

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³ The Cicero passage was unnoticed by *LSJ* until the Supplement; *AP XI 434* is ascribed to Lucian.