Hyperboreus 29: 2 (2023) 241–264
DOI: 10.25990/hyperboreus.bcge-vy33

Denis Keyer

TRIMALCHIO'S SUPERSTITIONS: TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS OR THEIR DISTORTION? I*

1. Introduction

In the *Cena Trimalchionis*, freedmen and their host, Trimalchio, are depicted with great attention to their social and psychological features, and the description of the feast gives ample detail on aspects of everyday life (Petronius' so-called "realism"). Not surprisingly, this text has attracted not only specialists on the social[1] or everyday history of imperial Rome, but also those studying ancient folklore and superstitions. Special studies on superstitions in Petronius evolved from short, compact surveys[2] at the beginning of the last century to more extensive works[3] towards its end. Apart from that, the evidence for superstitions in the *Satyricon* have been the subject of many articles,[4] and studies on superstitions in antiquity, relatively rare overall, often refer to the passages from the *Cena*.[5]

This paper focuses not on fairytale folklore motifs of the *Cena*, but rather on "impetrative" or "prohibitive"[6] superstitions (i.e., common superstitious customs calling for or avoiding certain actions), as well as

* I am grateful to Prof. J. von Ungern-Sternberg and Dr. Petra Schierl for the possibility to read a guest paper based on this study at the *Forschungskolloquium Latinistik* of the Univ. of Basel on 17 March 2023 and to the audience for a friendly and fruitful discussion.

[1] Bodel 1984 (cf. idem 1999); Andreau 2012; Eigler–Lämmle 2017 (with literature).

[2] Stemplinger 1928; Rini 1929 gives many parallels to folktales of the *Cena* from different regions of Italy.

[3] Pinna 1978; Grondona 1980.

[4] Schmeling–Stuckey 1977 (index, s.v. *superstitions*); Vannini 2007 (passim).

[5] For a bibliography on ancient superstitions, see McCartney 1947; ample material is provided in Deonna–Renard 1961 and recently Lelli 2014. Useful surveys are found in Stemplinger 1922; 1948 and Riess 1894, 29–93 (*RE* s.v. "Aberglaube"); 1939, 350–378 ("Omen").

[6] The terminology of Wolters 1935.

"mantic" ones (i.e., established belief in certain omens). Scholars generally take references to these superstitions in the *Satyricon* as direct evidence that reflects common notions of the time. Their study is therefore aimed either at searching for parallels to the passages from the *Satyricon* in European folklore and in superstitious beliefs of the New Age, which were collected and catalogued in detail in the 19th and 20th centuries, or at tracing the origins of superstitious and religious beliefs by analyzing similar rites and customs in different cultures.

H. Petersmann's close examination of the subject leads to a conclusion that runs counter to most researchers, who take superstitions in the *Cena* as direct evidence for the common practice. According to him, Trimalchio's religious beliefs are grotesque and not traditionally Roman, while his superstitions show poor knowledge of traditional customs. Petersmann brackets Trimalchio's (alleged) misinterpretation of superstition with his lack of elementary school knowledge and grotesque distortion of mythology and history:[7]

> Our author, however, obviously mocks at these people not only by making them perform such practices [i.e., kissing the table – DK] and trust in their effectiveness, but with regard to the uneducated freedmen, also by exposing their complete unfamiliarity with the right customs. Thus, in most cases, Trimalchio and his illiterate companions surpass ordinary superstition by behaving in an exaggerated and silly manner. But what can one expect of these people who are totally ignorant of even the most common facts of mythology!

This conclusion met partly with cautious sympathy.[8] Still, the very idea of "unorthodox" in this case may seem surprising. Religious practices that deviate from canonical models of religious cults due to unfamiliarity with the right customs, especially when it comes to ethnic minorities, are easy to conceive. As for "unorthodox" superstitions – however shaky the line between superstition and religion may be – their deviations from common practice are more likely to be taken for some peculiar individual beliefs than for errors or ignorance, and they can hardly be associated with lack of school knowledge. Superstitions are not taught; they are absorbed with the environment through natural imitation. Instead of ignorance, one would rather speak here of an alien ethnic background accustomed

[7] Petersmann 1995, 79 = 2002, 42.

[8] Schmeling 2011, 106 (ad 30. 5); 311 (ad 74. 4); Vannini 2007, 426–427.

to different rites. Petersmann, however, seems to think that Trimalchio deliberately tried to imitate (Roman) superstitious customs, but the lack of their knowledge let him down.

A detailed discussion of the passages considered by Petersmann, I hope, will evaluate his interpretation and raise some noteworthy questions on individual customs. The episodes under study are the following:

1) wearing finger rings while eating (ch. 32);
2) entering the triclinium with the right foot forward (ch. 30);
3) Trimalchio's reaction to early cock crowing (ch. 74):
   a) pouring wine under the table;
   b) sprinkling wine on the lamp;
   c) putting the ring from one's left hand onto the right one;
4) Trimalchio's private religion: worshipping his *Lares* (ch. 60).[9]

2. Wearing Finger Rings at the Table

Trimalchio's first appearance at the table shows vulgar pomp and vanity. He wears expensive and, perhaps, effeminate scarlet pallium, and a fringed cloth with a wide border (*laticlavia*) is wrapped round his neck. He also flaunts his jewelry (32. 3–4):

> habebat etiam in minimo digito sinistrae manus anulum grandem subauratum, extremo vero articulo digiti sequentis minorem, ut mihi videbatur, totum aureum, sed plane ferreis veluti stellis ferruminatum. et ne has tantum ostenderet divitias, dextrum nudavit lacertum armilla aurea cultum et eboreo circulo lamina splendente conexo.
>
> He also had on the little finger of his left hand an enormous gilded ring, and on the last joint of the ring finger a smaller one of what seemed to me pure gold, but was really all set around with a kind of iron stars. And not to show off just this wealth, he bared his right arm, which was adorned with a golden bracelet and an ivory hoop held together by a glittering metal plate.

In imperial Rome, it was common to wear many rings on a hand and even several on one finger;[10] however, gold rings were the privilege

[9] Episodes (3) and (4) will be discussed in the forthcoming second part of the article.

[10] Plin. *NH* 33. 24–25; Sen. *NQ* 7. 31. 2; Mart. 5. 61. 5; 11. 59. 1; etc.

of senators and equestrians *equo publico*. It was in the first century AD that social tensions associated with this restriction escalated:[11] golden rings were perceived as a privilege of the equestrian class, and the laments that the distinctions of the noble classes, including the right to golden rings, were being appropriated by freedmen, are frequent in textual sources.[12]

Thus, Trimalchio combines ostentatious luxury with formal respect for the law – that is why the ring on his little finger is only gilded, and the ring on his ring finger is set around with iron stars (curiously, when planning his tombstone monument, he calls for a sculpture of himself with five gold rings[13]).

Some scholars, including Petersmann, are of the opinion that iron stars here also serve as a kind of talisman against the evil eye.[14] However, there are no convincing parallels for this: iron's protective power against the evil eye is well attested for antiquity, but usually it refers to objects made entirely of iron and not just set out with it, like iron rings worn by triumphators and brides.[15]

---

[11] For sources and secondary literature, see Bodel 1984, 240–245 (Appendix 3: The *ius annuli aurei* in the Julio-Claudian Period). Cf. also Zehnacker 1983, 141–144 (ad Plin. *NH* 33. 32–34). According to Plin. *NH* 33. 32, in 23 AD a senatorial decree was passed securing this right to equestrians who had a confirmed census of 400 000 sesterces, a freeborn father and paternal grandfather, and the right to sit in the first fourteen rows in the theater. In 24 AD, a special law (*lex Visellia de libertinis*) prescribed penalties for former slaves who usurped the rights of those born free and seems to have prescribed by imperial decree the possibility of conditionally equating freedmen with equestrians: *Cod. Iust*. 9. 21. 1; 9. 31; 10. 33. 1; *Cod. Theod*. 9. 20.

[12] Plin. *Epist*. 8. 6. 4 (on Pallas; cf. Sherwin-White 1966, 453–454 ad loc.); Plin. *NH* 33. 33 *passimque ad ornamenta ea etiam servitute liberati transiliant, quod antea numquam erat factum*; Mart. 2. 29; 5. 14; 11. 37. The situation in which freedmen dare not wear gold rings serves as one of the arguments in defense of Petronius' traditional dating from Nero's times: Browning 1949, 12–13.

[13] 71. 9: *facias… et me in tribunali sedentem praetextatum cum anulis aureis quinque*. Browning 1949, 13: "by that time he will be well beyond the reach of any sanctions".

[14] Petersmann 1995, 80 = 2002, 43; Smith 1975, 69 ad loc., referring to Marshall 1907, XXII–XXIII (catalogue of ancient rings from the British Museum, section "Rings used as charms"); however, there is no report of a ring similar to Trimalchio's (unless one is referring to silver rings with golden nails or pins, which according to Marshall had the power to ward off evil spirits, like rings made of iron nails).

[15] See, e.g., Kroll 1897, 7–8; iron rings worn by brides and triumphators – Plin. *NH* 33. 11–12; Heckenbach 1911, 92–97; Frazer, *GB* III. 313; Wolters 1935, 64 n. 8.

More importantly, Petersmann has suspected two contradictions to the general practice here:[16]

> But, what has not been observed up to now is, that according to another superstitious custom mentioned by Plin. *Nat*. 33, 24 one must never wear a ring on the *digitus medicinalis* as Trimalchio does, nor finger-rings at all during meals: these had to be taken off prior to the repast – probably for some religious reason – as we know from Plin. *Nat*. 28, 24 <…>. But in this respect too Trimalchio proves to be a total ignorant, since he wears his finger-rings during the entire meal and even displays them proudly along with other jewelry.

Thus, Trimalchio incurs blame for two alleged gaffes:
1) one must not wear a ring on one's ring finger (!);
2) one must not wear any finger rings at all at a meal.

The first rebuke is based on a misunderstanding. Pliny's passage in question states that no ring was worn on the *digitus medius*, i.e., the middle finger, because that finger had magical powers. *Digitus medicinalis* is the ring finger on which rings were normally worn (there is plenty of written and archeological evidence for this[17]).

The error comes from A. Jungwirth's article "Ring" in the *Handbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens* cited by Petersmann: "der Ring darf nicht am *digitus medicinalis* getragen werden. Vgl. die Begründung bei Plinius 33,24: *ne vis eius occulta eo vinculo minueretur*" (col. 706). In reality, however, the words quoted by Jungwirth are not Pliny's: they are taken from Joseph Heckenbach's work *De nuditate sacra* (1911), written in Latin. Heckenbach refers to the aforementioned passage from Pliny 33. 24 (that no rings were worn on the middle finger, *digitus medius*) and offers his explanation in Latin,[18] which Jungwirth mistakenly quotes as a passage from Pliny.

---

[16] Petersmann 1995, 80 = 2002, 43.

[17] Plin. 33. 24 *singulis primo digitis geri mos fuerat, qui sunt minimis proximi…*; Gell. 10. 10 (cf. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 4. 8 [672 c]) *veteres Graecos anulum habuisse in digito accipimus sinistrae manus, qui minimo est proximus. Romanos quoque homines aiunt sic plerumque anulis usitatos*; Macr. *Sat.* 7. 13. 7 *cur sibi communis adsensus anulum in digito qui minimo vicinus est, quem etiam medicinalem vocant, et manu praecipue sinistra gestandum esse persuasit?* Many Roman sculptures depict a ring on a ring finger (e.g., the bronze statue of Tiberius from Herculaneum and the Etruscan bronze statue known as *L'arringatore*); the seated female figure depicted in the *Villa dei misteri* has a ring on her ring finger; and so on.

[18] Heckenbach 1911, 84–85: "Eadem ex superstitione in digito medio, qui medicus nominabatur, anulum portare vetabatur, ne vis eius occulta eo vinculo minueretur".

In short: Petersmann followed Jungwirth, who confused Heckenbach with Pliny and in the footsteps of Heckenbach wrongly identified *digitus medicinalis* (*medicus*) with *digitus medius*.[19] Here Trimalchio must be acquitted: wearing rings on a ring finger was common practice for both Greeks and Romans.

Petersmann's second rebuke, referring to Plin. *NH* 28. 24, is more important, as it is relevant for the study of everyday life in ancient Rome. It would be indeed noteworthy if Romans did remove their finger rings while eating, and Pliny's evidence – the text offers many textual difficulties – deserves a closer look.[20]

---

[19] Ample evidence leaves no doubt that the terms *medicus*, *medicinalis*, and ἰατρός refer to the ring finger: Isid. *Orig*. 11. 1. 70–71 *...quartus anularis, eo quod in ipso anulus geritur. idem et medicinalis, quod eo trita collyria a medicis colliguntur* (idem *De diff. rerum* 2. 63 [Migne *PL* 83, col. 79–80] *quartus medicus, quod eo…*); Porph. ad Hor. *Sat*. 2. 8. 26; *Comm. Cornuti* in Pers. 2. 33; [Ps.-]Galen. *Introd*. XIV, p. 704 Kühn: …ἐφεξῆς ὁ μέσος καὶ μετὰ τοῦτον ὁ παραμέσος, ὁ τοῖς ἰατροῖς ἀνακείμενος καὶ ἀπ' αὐτῶν τοῦνομα κεκληρωμένος; Macr. *Sat.* 7. 13. 7 (see n. 17 above); Marcell. 15. 11: *digitis tribus, id est pollice, medio et medicinali, residuis duobus elevatis*.

Earlier, some scholars erroneously claimed these terms referred to the middle finger (mainly misguided by Petr. 131. 4 and Pers. 2. 33, where the middle finger is used as a protection against spells): Bächtold–Stäubli 1930, 1492 f. (*HWDA* s.v. "Finger", with lit.); Seligmann 1910, II, 183–184 with n. 113 on p. 390; Heckenbach 1911, 84–85; Sittl 1890, 123 with n. 6 (who, however, admits the possibility that it is the ring finger). Sometimes *medius* and *medicus* are confused in mss.

The problematic phrase *digitis medicinalibus* in Marcell. 2. 9; 25. 14; 32. 5 and the Additamenta to Theod. Prisc. (p. 284. 2 ff., 327. 14 ff. and 283. 27 Rose) was explained by Niedermann 1914, 329–330 as an "elliptic plural" that implies '*digito medicinali et pollice*' (type: *Castores = Castor et Pollux*), which gained almost universal support. There are good arguments in favor of this, though this usage is still puzzling and parallels for it are hardly convincing. Gornatowski 1936, 30 n. 179 suggests that in this case the term *medicinalis* might be extended to the middle finger or the thumb; Fischer 1965, 22–23 with n. 32 and 27 with n. 72 argues for the former, and Corbeill 2004, 7; 45 (idem 1997, 4) for the latter.

In the late Greek-Coptic glossary by Dioscorus of Aphrodito (*P.Lond.*1821. 300, see Bell–Crum 1925, 194; 213), ὁ ἰατρικός is surprisingly glossed as "forefinger" (lit. "a finger near the thumb"), which is followed by other Greek terms for the index finger glossed as "the same" ("likewise again"). This must be some kind of mistake: either Dioscorus mistakenly thought the term ἰατρικός referred to the forefinger or the text restored here is wrong.

[20] I quote the text from Ernout 1962 and apparatus also from Mayhoff 1897 and Wolters 1935. Ernout adopts in the text the form *tralaticium*.

(28. 24) quin et absentes tinnitu aurium praesentire sermones de se receptum est. Attalus adfirmat, scorpione viso si quis dicat "duo", cohiberi nec vibrare ictus. et quoniam scorpio admonuit, in Africa nemo destinat aliquid nisi praefatus Africam, in ceteris vero gentibus deos ante obtestatus, ut velint. Nam si mensa adsit, anulum ponere translaticium videmus, quoniam etiam mutas religiones pollere manifestum est.

---

praesentire *Er* : praesentium *VR*[1] | aliquid nisi praefatus *Er* : nisi aliquid praefatus *VR*[1] | nam *codd.* : "*an* iam?" *Mayhoff in app.* | mensa *VRd* : mens *E* : si mens ad<flicta> sit *Detlefsen* | anulum : nullum *E*, *vulg. ante Harduinum* | translaticium *E* : tralatium *VR* : tralatitium *Harduinus* | mutas *V*[2]*, Sillig* : multas *codd.* | religiones *R* (-legiones *V*) : religionesque *E* | quoniam etiam *VR* : etiam quoniam *E* : quin etiam *f, Harduinus, Sillig* | quin etiam mutas religiones pollere manifestum est. nam si mensa adsit... *Wolters* | nam si mensa – manifestum est *Sillig in app. transp. post* iudicatur (§ 26)

Yes, one even assumes that absentees recognize by the sound in their ears that they are the object of talk. Attalos claims that if you see a scorpion and speak "two" (*duo*), the animal is banished and does not sting. And in Africa, as the scorpion reminded me, no one does anything until they have said "Africa"; among the other peoples, however, one solemnly calls on the gods for help beforehand. For if one is at the table, it is customary, as we see, to take off the ring, since superstitious customs are obviously effective even without words.

Furthermore, the "silent" superstitious practices, i.e., the gestures, are listed:

(25) alius saliva post aurem digito relata sollicitudinem animi propitiat. pollices, cum faveamus, premere etiam proverbio iubemur. in adorando dextram ad osculum referimus totumque corpus circumagimus, quod in laevum fecisse Galliae religiosius credunt. fulgetras poppysmis adorare consensus gentium est.

---

alius *codd.* : manifestum est aliis *"durch andere Beispiele" Ulrichs 1857, 253* : alius <… alius> *Sillig in app.* : *"an* aliquis*?" Mayhoff in app.* | saliva *Er* : salivamus *VR*[1]

> Another soothes the anxiety of the mind by wiping saliva behind the ear with a finger. A proverb also lets us "press our thumbs"[21] when we are in someone's favor. When we pray, we bring our right hand to our mouth and turn our whole body around, which in Gaul is done to the left because it is considered more reverent. It is a common custom among the peoples to worship lightning with a smacking sound of the lips.

The *communis opinio* based on the passage above is that Romans did in fact remove their rings before the meal;[22] this view, however, is little

---

[21] Sittl 1890, 125 with n. 4 and others interpret it by analogy to the German gesture of thumbs enclosed in the fists ("j-m die Daumen drucken/halten"), but Corbeill 2004, 46–66 argues in favor of pressing the thumbs down on top of the fists (the gesture attested in Romania ["a ţine pumni"]). Hor. *Epist*. 1. 18. 67 *fautor utroque tuum laudabit police ludum* seems to refer to the same gesture and confirm that it was performed with both hands. Wolters 1935, 71 rightly objects to [Orelli–Baiter–]Mewes 1892, 461, Kiessling[–Heinze] ^{4}1914, 461 (ad loc.) and others that Alciphr. 4. 16 Scheper [2. 4 Mein.] 5 τοὺς δακτύλους ἐμαυτῆς πιέζουσα καὶ τρέμουσα implies that Glycera "presses her nails into the flesh" and does not refer to the gesture in question (Fornés Pallicer – Puig Rodríguez-Escalona 2006, 969 are on the same lines with Wolters).

The opposite gesture (Iuv. 3. 36 *pollice verso*; Prud. *c. Symm*. 2. 1099 *converso police*; *AL* 415. 28 Riese *infesto pollice*) was used in gladiatorial games as a sign to deliver the deathblow (Corbeill 2004, 62–64 shows that, contrary to popular opinion, there are no grounds to believe that the thumb was pointed downwards; the objections by Fornés Pallicer – Puig Rodríguez-Escalona 2006, 967 f. leave me unconvinced). Hence it is universally assumed that *pollices premere* was also a mercy gesture for the *missio* of fallen gladiators (like waving handkerchiefs in Mart. 12. 29. 7–8), but this does not seem certain to me. Corbeill 2004, 52–61 discusses two gladiatorial representations: on the Nîmes medallion, the thumb is indeed pressed down on the fist, while on the relief from Munich's Glyptothek, the thumb is pressed on the top of the palm, but the index and the middle finger are stretched out (and it is only the left hand that conveys the gesture).

[22] Boehm 1905, 30; Heckenbach 1911, 86, with reference to the same practice in Jewish tradition attested in Haberland 1888, 259–260 (who refers to Buxtorf 1729, 270, on which see below); Ganschinietz 1914, 837; Wolters 1935, 67 (he adds that in southern Germany on the Rhine it is forbidden to sit cross-legged at the table, and Muslims cross their legs only at the end of the meal); Jungwirth 1936, 106; Deonna–Renard 1961, 73 with n. 1; Lelli 2014, 208 (S. 121. 2: "A tavola bisogna togliersi gli anelli"; this is accompanied by references to informants from southern Italy who answered "yes" when asked, "If you sit at the table, do you have to remove your rings?" One informant added, "lo facevano i ricchi, per far vedere quanto era grande" [Lelli, per litteras]; cf. n. 40 below).

known outside religious studies. Usually, this prohibition is explained in that rings, like knots and bands, were metaphorically perceived as holding obstacles. This idea was traced in detail by J. Frazer, who cites numerous examples of prohibitions on knots, bands, etc. in sacred acts or critical situations (such as childbirth, marriage, and death).[23] Such prohibitions are partially documented in Greek and Roman cult practices.

Thus, in Ovid, Numa is not allowed to wear rings before his incubation.[24] The Flamen Dialis is allowed to wear only cave or through-born rings.[25] There is a similar prohibition in the late Pythagorean regulations,[26] and a sacred inscription from Arcadia attests the same custom.[27] Taking this into account, one might suggest that Romans sacralized the meal or the table with a similar prohibition.

It is sometimes added that this alleged habit might be rooted in hygienic reasons, as well (after all, one should wash hands several times

---

Eitrem 1915, 62, "Der Ring w e i h t. Wie man sonst eine sakrale Handlung durch einen Rundgang einleitet, legt man nach Plin. XXVIII 24 einen Ring auf den Tisch, ehe man irgendetwas anfängt", and Dölger 1930, 215, "in Rom lege man stillschweigend den Ring auf den Tisch", possibly mean that Pliny's words do not refer to the meal, but to a prayer prior to some undertaking. The use of a table for a prayer is conceivable (see n. 31 below); however, (1) it is not clear why anyone should be near a table if not for a meal; and (2) the sense 'if you happen to use the table for a prayer' is very far from what the words *si mensa adsit* can possibly convey.

[23] Frazer *GB* III, 293–316 ("knots and rings tabooed"); cf. Heckenbach 1911, 70; Wolters 1935, 61–62; Nilsson [2]1955, 114; Serv. ad *Aen* 4. 518 *in sacris nihil solet esse religatum*. For women's loose hair in sacred rituals, cf. Petr. 44. 18 and Heckenbach 1911, 83–84. Similar prescriptions with regard to rings are sometimes attested for healing practices (Plin. *NH* 23. 110 *solutus vinculo omni cinctus et calciatus a t q u e e t i a m a n u l i*). Pace Ganschinietz 1914, 837, Scrib. Larg. 152 (~ Marcell. 26. 10) *qui contundit, anulum ferreum non habeat* is different, as he specifically objects to iron (cf. 57 [~ Marcell. 12. 4] *quolibet vase dum ne aereo*).

[24] Ov. *Fast*. 4. 657 f. *usus abest Veneris, nec fas animalia mensis* / *ponere, nec digitis anulus ullus inest…* Cf. Frazer 1929, 321 f. ad loc.

[25] Gell. 10. 15. 6 *item anulo uti nisi peruio cassoque fas non est* (scil. *Dialem*); Fest. 72. 25 Lindsay *Sed ne anulum quidem gerere ei licebat solidum, aut aliquem in se habere nodum*.

[26] Iambl. *Protr*. 21 κβ′. Δακτύλιον μὴ φόρει (cf. Clem. *Strom*. 5. 5. 28. 4; [Ps.-]Plut. *De liberis educ*. 12e μὴ φορεῖν στενὸν δακτύλιον [= *Mant. Prov*. 2. 17, *CPG* II, p. 761]).

[27] Dittenberger *SIG*[3] 999 (Lycosurae lex sacra): μὴ ἐξέστω / παρέρπην ἔχοντας ἐν τὸ ἱερὸν τᾶς / Δεσποίνας <…> μηδὲ ὑποδήματα μηδὲ δακτύλιον…

during a meal). Finally, this custom is reported to be documented in Jewish tradition.[28]

If this is so, Petersmann's observation is of great value: those unfamiliar with this Roman custom should be ashamed of their ignorance, and Trimalchio should be ashamed of violating the universally recognized religious law. However, there are some reasons to doubt the accuracy of this opinion.

First, this passage from Pliny is the only source for it. This may not be a decisive argument per se, as many important customs of everyday life are attested in but one or two passages, yet it gives reason for caution.[29]

Second, the text of the passage overall abounds with textual difficulties and very likely contains corruptions. I agree with Wolters and Sillig that *nam* is hardly comprehensible here (hence either emendation of *nam* or transposition seems necessary) and with Ulrichs and Sillig that the single *alius* is suspicious. It is noteworthy that *L* reads *mens* instead of *mensa* and *nullum* instead of *anulum*, the more so as in this passage *L* repeatedly offers correct readings against corruptions in *VR*: *praesentire* vs. *praesentium*, *aliquid nisi* vs. *nisi aliquid*, *translaticium* (thus Ernout's app.; *-titium* Mayhoff) vs. *tralatium*, *saliva* vs. *salivamus* (on the other hand, *religionesque* vs. *religiones* cannot be correct unless we assume

---

[28] See n. 22 above.

[29] According to Mart. 11. 59. 2–3, rings were usually taken off when sleeping and in baths (*nec nocte ponit anulos* / *nec cum lavatur*); meals are not mentioned there. It is also unclear where rings should be put if the usual practice was to take them off during meals. *Dactyliotheca* (Mart. 14. 123; Plin. *NH* 37. 11) or *loculus* (Ov. *Am*. 2. 15. 19, Iuv. 13. 139) are usually thought of as something too big to be carried in one's bosom (Kay 1985, 201 [ad Mart. 11. 59. 4], with reference to Daremberg–Saglio s.v. "Dactyliotheca" [E. Pottier]: "Perhaps we should imagine something more like a small cabinet than a modern jewelry case".

Curiously, Plin. *NH* 33. 27 *gravatis somno aut morientibus anuli detrahuntur* was misinterpreted by Boehm 1905, 30, Heckenbach 1911, 86, Ganschinietz 1914, 837, and Jungwirth 1936, 706 as a religious custom similar to the one mentioned by Frazer *GB* III, 313 ff. ("in the Greek island of Carpathus, people never button the clothes they put upon a dead body and they are careful to remove all rings from it"); they also refer to similar German and Austrian superstitions that concern burial as well as sleep (see Samter 1911, 129, who, however, rightly suspects a mistake in bracketing Pliny's passage together with these). In fact, Pliny deplores here the moral decline by contrast with the old times: "now food and drinks are protected from stealing with the help of a ring <…> and it is not enough to seal the keys themselves; t h e s i g n e t r i n g s a r e t a k e n o f f w h e n o n e i s a s l e e p o r d y i n g". It follows that at least signet rings were not always taken off before going to sleep.

further corruptions). Thus, *L*'s reading *si mens adsit* ('For if one is reasonable…', cf. Tac. *Ann*. 2. 14. 3 *si ratio adsit*) deserves attention as an alternative to *si mensa adsit* of the editorial vulgate. I cannot make sense of the following *nullum ponere tralaticium videmus* in *L*, but there remains a possibility that further emendations are required and putting rings off at the table is but a result of textual corruption.

Third, I find lexicological and certainly syntactic difficulties in the editorial vulgate. I have not found any examples of the phrase *mensa adest* in the sense of 'someone is at the table' (even if in theory it could be explained as referring to separate tables in front of each couch). Even more suspicious is the present subjunctive and modus potentialis. This type of conditional clauses suggests that the situation described is hypothetical and estimated as possible or probable; thus, it can hardly refer to ordinary regular events ("if one should happen to have a meal…") and is inappropriate for iterative use.[30] In this case one would expect something like *ante mensam* / *cenam* / *cenandum, cum cenamus*, *si cenandum est*, etc.

Fourth, three of the other examples of silent gestures listed later in the passage – propitiating anxiety, concern for the other (*faveamus* contains the idea of a possible failure), and worshipping lightning (the gesture is probably apotropaic) – deal with solicitude or danger. The prayer (*in adorando…*) does not necessarily imply troubles, but even so the meal does not seem to fit well in this context unless we assume that the table is regarded as sacred (cf. the apotropaic kissing of the table along with the prayer against *Nocturni* in 64. 1[31]).

---

[30] Cf. the other two examples of *si… adsit* in Pliny: *NH* 5. 38 *si locorum notitia adsit*: wells do not need to be dug deep if one has a knowledge of the localities; 11. 58 *si custos adsit*: if the beekeeper is present (at the battle of conflicting bee swarms), the swarm that feels that he favors them does not attack him.

[31] This evidence for kissing the table is unique; for its sacralization in general, cf. Plut. *Quaest. conv*. 7. 4. 7 (704 b) ὁ Λεύκιος ἔφη τῆς μάμμης ἀκηκοὼς μνημονεύειν, ὡς ἱερὸν μὲν ἡ τράπεζα, δεῖ δὲ τῶν ἱερῶν μηδὲν εἶναι κενόν (likewise *QR* 64 [279e]), Riess 1894, 30 (*RE* s.v. "Aberglaube"), with reference to German customs, Courtney 1980 ([2]2013), 117 (ad Iuv. 2. 110) and Dölger 1930, 213–216, who states that kissing the table was a regular ceremony and goes as far as to hypothesize that it could have influenced the Christian habit of kissing the altar. At any rate, it is noteworthy that sometimes the table was indeed used as a substitute for altars when praying at a meal: Ov. *Am*. 1. 4. 27 (quoted below, p. 253; see McKeown 1989, 88–89 ad loc., with lit.); Sen. M. *Contr.* 9. 2. 7 *utrisque manibus mensam tenens "di tibi" inquit "immortales parem gratiam referant"*.

Fifth, the examples of prohibiting ties and knots in antiquity cited above (n. 23–26) are confined to genuinely sacred acts that hardly match the entire process of a meal even if the table might be regarded as sacred. Moreover, in Pompeian frescoes with banqueting scenes (e.g., in Casa dei casti amanti), women are often seen wearing armbands or bracelets,[32] which surely should have been forbidden along with finger rings, if the latter were prohibited.

Furthermore, it can be shown that the alleged parallel with a Jewish custom of taking rings off can be dismissed. I have found no mention of this in the Talmud, and the experts in Jewish culture whom I asked about it were unfamiliar with such a custom. All the references boil down to Johannes Buxtorf the Elder's "Synagoge Judaica". Haberland[33] refers to the edition of 1739, 270–271:

> Sie halten sehr starck auf dieses Gebott von Waschung der Hände vor und nach dem Essen, daß man nicht bald einen Juden findet, der es vergisset. Sie halten ja so genau darauf, daß keiner kein Ring an den Fingern behalten soll, damit nichts unsaubers unter dem Ring verbleibe, und wann einer ihn anbehielte, wäre eben so viel, daß wann er gar mit ungewaschenen Händen esse.

With slight corrections, the same is to be found in the first German edition of 1603,[34] and it corresponds also to the posthumous Latin edition of 1641.[35] At first glance, this confirms that the ring was taken off while eating. Yet the wording allows an alternative interpretation, namely that the ring was taken off only when washing hands and then put on again (although this is not said *expressis verbis*, but tacitly implied).

Fortunately, in the first Latin edition of 1604,[36] which was supervised by Buxtorf the Elder himself, the wording is also more explicit, if a bit less elegant:

---

[32] Cf. Fortunata's *armillae* and *periscelides* mentioned in ch. 67. Admittedly, I have not found finger rings in the banquet scenes from Pompeii. It is possible that this detail was too small to be depicted (cf., however, n. 17 above).

[33] See n. 22 above.

[34] Buxdorf 1603, 249.

[35] Buxtorf 1641, 180–181: "Praeceptum hoc de manum lotione, sive ante cibum, sive a cibo, tanti faciunt, ut vix Judaeum reperias, qui illius obliviscatur, imo tam scrupulose et illud observant, ut nemo annulum in digito retinere audeat, ne quid sordis sub illo lateat: si quis vero annulum non detraxerit, idem valet, ac si illotis manibus comederet".

[36] Buxdorf 1604, 193.

> Tanta, inquam, sollicitudine lotionem manuum observant, ut nemini s e l a v a n t i annulum in digito retinere liceat, ne quid forsan immundi sub annulo restet. Quam annuli de digito detractionem tam accurate observant quoque ipsam, ut si quis s e l a v a n s illum non detraxerit, eum perinde facere existiment, atque si manibus illotis ad mensam cibi capiendi gratia sessum se conferret.

The addition of *se lavanti* and *se lavans* makes it probable that taking rings off was prescribed not for the entire meal, but for when washing one's hands, and that they were subsequently put on again (to be taken off again when washing hands after the meal). The reference to Jewish custom is unreliable if not false.

Finally, and most importantly, there is direct written evidence – that went unnoticed in the discussion of Pliny's passage – that Romans did not take off their rings during the meal.

Thus, in Ovid's *Amores* 1. 4 the poet negotiates with his mistress, among other things, the secret signs they are to exchange during the banquet in the presence of his rival (her husband or lover, who has certain rights over her[37]), in order to lessen his agony. Among other things, the manipulation of the ring is mentioned (v. 23–28):

> si quid erit, de me tacita quod mente queraris [v.l. loquaris],
> pendeat extrema mollis ab aure manus;
> cum tibi, quae faciam, mea lux, dicamve, placebunt,
> v e r s e t u r d i g i t i s a n u l u s u s q u e t u i s.
> tange manu mensam, tangunt quo more precantes,
> optabis merito cum mala multa viro.

> If you wish to reproach me secretly, let your ear be touched with your gentle hand. And if you, my love, approve of my speech or action, keep twisting the ring on your finger.[38] Touch the table with

[37] For the choice, see McKeown 1989, 77–78, who inclines to the latter.

[38] I side with McKeown 1989, 88, who takes *digitis* as poetic plural (citing 2. 15. 20) but does not exclude the alternative understanding 'with your fingers'. Showing rings to a lover is also mentioned among other flirting tricks as a pretext for touching in Naev. (?) 78 Rib. *anulum dat alii spectandum* (*alii d. an.* codd.; Isid. Orig. 1. 26. 2 *Ennius de quadam impudica*…; Paul. Fest. *Epit*. 29 M. on the preceding verse *Naevius in Tarentilla*); Plaut. *Asin*. 778 *spectandum ne cui anulum det neque roget*; Tib. 1. 6. 25–26 *saepe, velut gemmas eius signumque probarem, / per causam memini me tetigisse manum,* quoted in Ov. *Trist*. 2. 451 f.; but these examples may not refer to banqueting.

> your hand as one does in praying every time you wish the man many evils that he deserves.

Another example is from Macrobius (*Sat*. 7. 13. 6):

> His dictis Avienus anulum de mensa rettulit, qui illi de brevissimo dexterae manus digito repente deciderat, cumque a praesentibus quaereretur cur eum alienae manui [*Willis*; aliena manu *cod.*] et digito, et non huic gestamini deputatis potius insereret, ostendit manum laevam ex vulnere tumidiorem.
>
> After he had said this, he took a ring from the table, which suddenly fell from the little finger of his right hand. And when those present asked him why he put the ring on the other hand and finger and not on those that were better suited to the purpose, he showed his left hand, which was swollen from the wound.[39]

Thus, Romans did not take off their finger rings during a meal.[40] The text in Plin. *NH* 28. 24, which allegedly confirms the opposite, must be either corrupt (which I find more probable in view of the lexical, syntactical, and textual difficulties discussed above) or misinterpreted.[41]

---

[39] Further, the custom of wearing finger rings in earlier times, namely the reason for choosing the fourth finger of the left hand, is discussed. Rings slipping off fingers are mentioned in Ov. *Am*. 2. 15. 13 and Mart. 14. 123. 1 *saepe gravis digitis elabitur anulus unctis*, which Leary 1996, 188 (1993, 228) thinks refers to baths.

[40] Though Lelli's publication (see n. 22 above) contains an indispensable repertory of ancient superstitions and offers an important and ambitious attempt to prove that numerous Graeco-Roman superstitions have survived up to now in modern Italy, his method of offering direct questions to elderly informants and their testimony is not always reliable. E.g., kissing the nostrils of a (female) mule to relieve sneezing and hiccups (Plin. *NH* 28. 57) or a head cold (*gravedo*, *NH* 30. 31, *Med. Plin*. 1. 10. 5 and Marcell. 10. 61 [there *nares muli* for men, *nares mulae* for women]) is inaccurately given under the heading "mal di testa" (p. 206), yet four informants allegedly confirm belief in this remedy. So, it is possible that those who gave a positive answer to the question about taking rings off at the table did not attest to a real practice, but merely expressed their own attitude, being provoked by a loaded yes-no question.

[41] One might, e.g., take *mensa* as a table for sacred offerings (*OLD* s.v. 2) or, if keeping to the idea of a simple table regarded as sacred (cf. n. 31 above), suggest that at some point rings were taken off and then put on again; either of these views entails substantial difficulties.

At any rate, Petersmann's second rebuke levelled at Trimalchio is unjust. Trimalchio's rings in ch. 32 have nothing to do with superstitions at all (if we do not consider possible superstitious connotations of iron stars in the golden ring, see n. 14 and 15 above).

3. Stepping with the Right Foot Forward

While entering the triclinium, the guests were prescribed to step in with the right foot forward, which is reported with irony (30. 5–6):

> his repleti voluptatibus cum conaremur in triclinium intrare, exclamavit unus ex pueris, qui supra hoc officium erat positus: "dextro pede!" sine dubio paulisper trepidavimus, ne contra praeceptum aliquis nostrum limen transiret.
>
> When we, overwhelmed with such delights, were endeavoring to enter the triclinium, one of the slaves who was assigned to that service exclaimed: "With the right foot!" We, of course, shuddered a little, fearing lest one of us should have crossed the threshold against the instruction.

Superstitions connected with the right and the left foot (or with the 'favorable' and the 'unfavorable' one, on which see below) abound in ancient texts.[42] Note that prescriptive superstitions of this kind are manifold and do not always refer to entering a space with the right foot. Sometimes they refer to setting off on the right foot,[43] sometimes to putting on shoes,[44]

---

[42] See the detailed overview in Hijmans a.o. 1981, 275–278 (ad *Met*. 6. 26 *pessumo pede domum nostram accessit*); Wagener 1935, 73–91; Deonna–Renard 1961, 68–69; Grondona 1980, 77–81 ("I timori dell' ingresso"). For literature on similar customs in modern times, see also Lelli 2014, 180 (S. 57. 4 "Se si entra da qualche parte, bisogna mettere prima il piede destro"). For getting up with the right foot and putting on the right stocking first, see Bächtold-Stäubli 1930/31, 227–228 (*HWDA* III s.v. "Fuß").

[43] Ioann. Chrys. *In epist. ad Ephes*. cap. 4. Hom. 12. 94 (*PL* LXII, p. 92; quoted also in Haupt 1876 II, 255 f.) Ἐγὼ αὐτὸς ἐξιὼν, τῷ ἀριστερῷ προτέρῳ προύβην ποδί· καὶ τοῦτο συμφορῶν σημεῖον.

[44] Suet. *Aug*. 92. 1 *Auspicia et omina quaedam pro certissimis observabat; si mane sibi calceus perperam ac sinister pro dextro induceretur ut dirum*; Plin. *NH* 2. 24: *Divus Augustus prodidit laevum sibi calceum praepostere inductum quo*

and quite often to crossing a threshold (it was considered a bad omen to stumble);[45] those limping on the right foot were of ill omen.[46]

Finally, there are a number of expressions that refer to a 'lucky' or 'unlucky' foot in the sense of a favorable or unfavorable omen;[47] sometimes these are introduced by an interrogative pronoun (*quo pede?* – lit. 'with what foot?', i.e., 'under what omens?', 'in a good or unkind hour?').[48] Given that *dextro pede* and *sinistro pede* are attested in a similar metaphorical sense,[49] it is natural to assume that all these

die seditione militari prope adflictus est; Ioann. Chrys. *ibid.* (n. 43) νῦν ὁ οἰκέτης ὁ μιαρὸς τὰ ὑποδήματα ἐπιδιδοὺς, πρῶτον ὥρεξε τὸ ἀριστερόν· συμφοραὶ δειναὶ, καὶ ὕβρεις. At first sight there is a difference here: Augustus sees the unlucky omen in putting the boot on the wrong foot, while Chrysostomus sees it in putting on the left shoe first. Yet, it is important that Suetonius speaks of the l e f t boot put on the wrong foot (*perperam ac sinister pro dextro*, "wrongly, and namely the left instead of the right", not vice versa!). That is to say, Augustus was naturally putting the boot on the right foot first, but the boot turned out to be the left one; the same is probably meant in Chrysostomus.

[45] See Ogle 1911, 251–271; Meister 1925, 25–28; Pease 1977, 486 [= 1923, 304] ad Cic. *Div*. 2. 84; Bömer 1980, 155 ad Ov. *Met*. 10. 452; Hijmans a.o. 1981, 277–278; Weiser-Aall 1936, 1520 (*HWDA* VII s.v. "Schwelle"). Curious evidence is found in Aug. *De doctr. Christ*. 2. 31 (77) *limen calcare cum ante domum suam transit, redire ad lectum, si quis dum se calciat sternutaverit, redire domum si procedens offenderit*.

[46] Plin. *NH* 28. 35 *simili modo et fascinationes repercutimus dextraeque clauditatis occursum* (in view of Luc. *Pseudologist*. 17 τοὺς χωλοὺς τῷ δεξιῷ ἐκτρεπόμεθα, H. Rubenbauer [*Th.l.l.* V. 922, 8–9 s.v. *dexter*] is mistaken in explaining "sc<ilicet> claudi a dextra venientis").

[47] E.g., Verg. *Aen.* 8. 302 *pede secundo* (Serv. ad loc.: "*omine prospero*"; cf. 10. 255); Hor. *Epist*. 2. 2. 37 *pede fausto*; Ov. Fast. 1. 514 *felici pede*; Apul. 6. 26. 1 *pessumo pede*; further examples in Sutphen 1901, 361 f. (repr.: Häussler 1968, 200 f.).

[48] Ov. *Her*. 21. 71 f. *quo pede processi, quo me pede limine movi*, *picta citae tetigi* / *quo pede texta ratis?*; Prop. 3. 1. 5: *quove pede ingressi* (possibly alluding to the meaning of 'verse foot').

[49] Iuv. 10. 5 *quid tam dextro pede concipis*...? (see Mayor 1900, 66–67 ad loc. for further examples); Prud. *contra Symm*. 2. 79: *feliciter et pede dextro*; Sil. 7. 171–172 *attulit… pes dexter et hora Lyaeum*; Apul. 1. 5. 4: *sinistro pede profectum me spes compendii frustrata est* and Sen. *Ben*. 2. 12. 2 quoted below on p. 259. (Pace Mayor, *ibid*., Le Bonniec 1961, 88 and Green 2004, 234 ad Ov. *Fast.* 1. 514 *ripaque felici tacta sit ista pede*, Eur. *Bacch*. 943 does not refer to the beginning of the journey, but to the coordination of movements: one has to lift the thyrsus with one's right hand and at the same time lift one's right leg.)

expressions are explained by the idea that the first step should be taken with the right foot.[50]

The passage from the *Cena* is most similar to that from Vitruv. 3. 4. 4:

> gradus in fronte constituendi ita sunt, uti sint semper inpares; namque cum dextro pede primus gradus ascendatur, item in summo templo primus erit ponendus.
>
> The steps in front of the temple should be built so that their number is always unequal; for since the first step upwards must be taken from the right foot, the first step at the top of the temple will be the same".[51]

Relying on Vitruvius, Petersmann sees in Trimalchio's prescript to enter the triclinium with the right foot a bold and ignorant claim to the divine nature of his house:[52]

> Trimalchio <…> attributed to his triclinium even more holiness than to a temple…
>
> Now it becomes clear why on entering Trimalchio's *triclinium* the guests had to be more careful to step in with the right foot forward than at the entrance of a temple: since Trimalchio considers himself a divine being, his dining room, too, where he receives sacrifices and

[50] Thus Hijmans a.o. 1981, 275: "…it is likely that *dexter* and *laevus* are intended both in a literal and metaphorical sense" (with ref. to Ov. *Ibis* 101 *ominibusque malis pedibusque occurrite laevis* cum schol. ad loc. *in gaudio occurritur dextro pede, in funere laevo*). Additional argument for this is *pedem observare* in the short catalogue of pagan superstitious rites and customs in Martin of Braga's "*De correctione rusticorum",* cap. 16 (6th cent. AD), which obviously refers to the right and the left foot.

[51] Hijmans a.o. *ibid*. n. 2 notice that the temple of Artemis in Tauris in Ov. *Pont*. 3. 2. 5 has 40 steps: *templa manent hodie vastis innixa columnis, / perque quater denos itur in illa pedes*.

[52] Petersmann 1995, 79; 83 = 2002, 42; 46. Cf. Baldwin 1988, 39: "The point of *dextro pede* is to have Trimalchio's dining room treated as a temple <…>. The boy, then, functions as an acolyte in the present secular context". Sutphen 1901, 361 f. (repr.: Häussler 1968, 200 f.), though stating that this superstition "arose from the care to be observed in entering temples and other consecrated places on the right foot", does not regard its applying to entering the triclinium as unusual.

> the worship of his guests, and furthermore, his entire house, has to be regarded as a place more sacred than an ordinary temple.

The scene with the Lares in ch. 60 that Petersmann here implies to be an analogy (to be discussed in the second part of this paper) does look like a travesty of an imperial cult. Yet, the prescript "*dextro pede!*" can well be explained otherwise than as a bold or ignorant sacralization.

It does not follow from Vitruvius' text that only temples, and not private houses or rooms, were to be entered with the right foot forward. On the contrary, some examples of metaphorical usage (above all, Apul. *Met*. 6. 26: *pessumo pede domum nostram accessit* and Amm. Marc. 26. 6. 18 *Palatium pessimo pede festinatis passibus introiit*)[53] make it likely that it was important not only to leave, but also to arrive at a certain place with the proper foot, the 'favorable' and the 'unfavorable' foot being the right and left one, respectively.[54]

The narrator does present the use of a separate servant to observe the entrance "on the right foot" as an eccentricity, but there is no need to suspect here a distortion of religious customs or even a claim to a special sacred status for the host (even though the honors requested by him do reveal comically exaggerated ambitions). Trimalchio regularly flaunts

---

[53] For 'favorable/unfavorable foot' on arrival, cf. also Sil. *Pun*. 7. 171–172 (above n. 49); Cat. 14. 21–23 *at vos interea valete, abite* / *illic, unde malum pedem attulistis, saecli incommoda, pessimi poetae*; Prop. 3. 1. 5 (n. 48 above); Aug. *Epist*. 17. 2 (of the Punic name *Namfamo*/*Namphamo*, נעם פעמו) *quid aliud significat quam boni pedis hominem? id est, cuius adventus adferat aliquid felicitatis, sicut solemus dicere secundo pede introisse, cuius introitum prosperitas aliqua consecuta sit* (further, he cites *Aen*. 8. 302 *et nos et tua dexter adi pede sacra secundo*). Cf. also schol. in Aristoph. *Aves* 721 θεράποντ' ὄρνιν: ἐπεὶ πολλάκις εἰώθαμέν τινας τῶν θεραπόντων καλόποδας λέγειν καὶ καλοιωνίστους (thus Dübner 1883, 226; Rutherford 1896, 484 and Holwerda 1991, 114 prefer v.l. καλλίποδας <...> καλλοιωνίστους); Haupt 1876 III, 596 refers to the name Ἀγαθόπους.

[54] See n. 50 above. According to Rini 1929, 85, in some regions of Tuscany the bride is believed to be cursed with bad luck if she steps over the threshold of the new house with her left foot (for omens at the threshold, cf. n. 45 above). Evidence for the lucky right and unlucky left foot in English folklore is found in Lean 1903 (mentioned by Wagener 1935, 87–88 with nn. 81–84), e.g., II. 1. 146–147: "To enter the house with the skir or left foot foremost – Bring down evil on the inmates. <...> Dr. Johnson held to this, and when he had done it, went out and re-entered right foot foremost. He seems to have had the same feeling as to making the first step out of doors. <…> [See Dr. Hill's ed. of Boswell, i. 485.]"; cf. *ibid*. 260.

a wide scope and meticulous organization of all aspects of his life, and assigning single servants to peculiar one-time duties is a part of this.[55]

The narrator's irony is aimed not only at the claims to an exaggerated social status, but also at the carefully planned stage management of the feast.[56] It is the simplemindedness of the host and his tireless persistence in what he believes to be a model of refined life and elegant taste that amuses the educated guests and the readers.

Along with stressing the luxury and creative household management, this might also aim at a sort of pun: "*dextro pede!*" in the sense of a metaphorical welcoming[57] reinterpreted literally.[58] If so, this joke would find a good parallel in Sen. *Ben*. 2. 12. 2, where Caligula is being chastised for making a person kiss his left foot after granting him life: *non hoc est rem publicam calcare, et quidem, licet id aliquis non putet ad rem pertinere, sinistro pede?* If not, the prescript might be just a way to involve the guests in his carefully planned performance from the very start.[59] It is hardly legitimate to see here a manifestation of Trimalchio's obsession with death[60] (this aspect will be discussed in detail in the forthcoming second part); for now, we only note that, like many other episodes, it is largely intended for the public.

---

[55] A trumpeter (*bucinator subornatus*; hardly an automaton, as sometimes believed) is assigned to the water clock to announce each hour "so that the master may know how much of his life he has lost" (26. 9); a special servant reads aloud the names of the *apophoreta* to the guests (56. 8 *puer <…> super hoc positus officium*; cf. the same wording in 30. 5 (unjustly deleted by Fraenkel [reported in Sullivan 1976, 108] as a gloss from 56. 8).

[56] See Keyer 2012, 273 with n. 42.

[57] Cf. Hor. *Epist*. 2. 37 *i pede fausto*; *Aen*. 8. 302 with Serv. ad loc. [see n. 47 and 53 above].

[58] Dölger 1930, 239 also sees here intended ambiguity between the metaphorical and the literal sense.

[59] I owe this idea to Petra Schierl. Hardly had the guests entered (30. 7 *ceterum ut pariter movimus dextros gressus*) when the slave who lost the steward's dinner dress at baths pleaded for their help, so that they had to repeat the entrance (*rettulimus dextros gressus*; Fraenkel [n. 55 above] deleted *dextros* in 30. 7 and 30. 9 as repetitive, but it helps to stress the guests' loyalty to the procedure) and petition for him; the steward reluctantly agrees (the dress had but sentimental value for him: *Tyria, sine dubio, sed iam semel lota,* 30. 11). In 31. 1–2 the protected slave turns out to be the butler, who promises his gratitude in return with a witty saying. It seems very likely that this whole scene, like many others in the *Cena*, was staged on purpose, so as to show off luxury and witticisms prepared in advance.

[60] Grondona 1980, 77–81.

At any rate, pace Petersmann, the episode of crossing the threshold gives no grounds to suspect Trimalchio of distorting popular customs.

To be continued.

Denis Keyer
University of Bern

denis.keier@unibe.ch
deniskeyer@gmail.com

Bibliography

J. Andreau, "Freedmen in the Cena", in: J. R. W. Prag, I. D. Repath (eds.), *Petronius: A Handbook* (Chichester 2012) 114–124.

H. Bächtold–Stäubli, "Finger", in: H. Bächtold–Stäubli, E. Hoffmann-Krayer (eds.), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* II (Berlin–Leipzig 1930) 1478–1496.

H. Bächtold-Stäubli, "Fuß", in: H. Bächtold–Stäubli, E. Hoffmann-Krayer (eds.), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* III (Berlin–Leipzig 1931) 224–236.

B. Baldwin, "Editing Petronius: Methods and Examples", *Acta Classica* 31 (1988) 37–50.

H. I. Bell, W. E. Crum, "A Greek-Coptic Glossary", *Aegyptus* 6 (1925) 177–226.

J. Bodel, *Freedmen in the Satyricon of Petronius.* Diss. (Michigan 1984).

J. Bodel, "The *Cena Trimalchionis*", in: H. Hofmann (ed.), *Latin Fiction. The Latin Novel in Context* (London – New York 1999) 38–51.

F. Boehm, *De symbolis Pythagoreis* (Berlin 1905).

F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso, Metamorphosen: Kommentar. Buch X–XI* (Heidelberg 1980).

R. Browning, "The Date of Petronius", *CR* 63 (1949) 12–14.

Joh. Buxdorf, *Synagoga Iudaica: Das ist, Jüden Schul…* (Basel 1603).

Joh. Buxdorf, *Synagoga Iudaica; Hoc est, Schola Iudaeorum…* (Hanover 1604).

Joh. Buxtorf, *Synagoga Judaica, auspiciis authoris jam olim Latinitate donata* (Basel 1641).

Joa. Buxtorf, *Synagoga Judaica, noviter restaurata, Das ist: Erneuerte Jüdische Synagog, oder Jüden-Schul* (Frankfurt–Leipzig 1729).

A. Corbeill, "Thums in Ancient Rome: *Pollex* as Index", *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 42 (1997) 1–21.

A. Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome* (Princeton–Oxford 2004).

E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London 1980; Berkeley, CA ²2013).

W. Deonna, M. Renard, *Croyances et superstitions de table dans la Rome antique*, Coll. Latomus 46 (Bruxelles 1961).
D. Detlefsen (ed.), *C. Plinii Secundi Naturalis Historia* III: *Libri XVI–XXII* (Berlin 1868).
F. J. Dölger, *Antike und Christentum: Kultur- und Religionsgeschichtliche Studien* (Münster i. W. 1930).
F. Dübner, *Scholia Graeca in Aristophanem* (Paris 1883).
U. Eigler, R. Lämmle, "Trimalchio", in: H. Heinen a. o. (eds.), *Handwörterbuch der Antiken Sklaverei (HAS)* III (Stuttgart 2017) 3103–3110.
S. Eitrem, *Opferritus und Voropfer der Griechen und Römer* (Kristiania 1915).
A. Ernout (ed., tr., comm.), *Pline l'Ancien, Histoire naturelle: Livre XXVIII* (Paris 1962).
H. Fischer, "The Use of Gesture in Preparing Medicaments and in Healing", *History of Religions* 5 (1965) 18–53.
A. Fornés Pallicer, M. Puig Rodríguez-Escalona, "Los gestos con el pulgar en los combates de gladiadores", *Latomus* 65 (2006) 963–971.
J. G. Frazer, (ed., tr., comm.), *Publius Ovidius Naso, Fastorum libri sex*, III: *Commentary on Books III and IV* (London 1929).
J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* [III]: *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul* (London ^{3}1911).
R. Ganschinietz, "Ringe in dem Folklore", in: *RE* 1A (1914) 833–841.
A. Gornatowski, *Rechts und Links im antiken Aberglauben* (Breslau 1936).
S. J. Green, *Ovid, Fasti 1: A Commentary* (Leiden–Boston 2004).
M. Grondona, *La religione e la superstizione nella* Cena Trimalchionis, Coll. Latomus 171 (Bruxelles 1980).
C. Haberland, "Über Gebräuche und Aberglauben beim Essen", *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* 17 (1887) 353–385; 18 (1888) 128–170; 255–284.
Jo. Harduinus (ed.), *Caii Plinii Secundi Historiae naturalis libri XXXVII* II (Paris ^{2}1741).
M. Haupt, *Opuscula* II, III: 1 (Leipzig 1876).
R. Häussler (ed.), *Nachträge zu A. Otto, Sprichwörter und sprichwörtliche Redensarten der Römer* (Darmstadt 1968).
Jos. Heckenbach, *De nuditate sacra sacrisque vinculis,* RGVV 9: 3 (Giessen 1911).
B. L. Hijmans jr. a.o. (eds., tr., comm.), *Apuleius Madaurensis, Metamorphoses: Books VI 25–32 and VII* (Groningen 1981).
D. Holwerda (ed.), *Scholia in Aristophanem, Pars II: Scholia in Vespas; Pacem; Aves et Lysistratam, Fasc. III continens scholia vetera et recentiora in Aristophanis Aves* (Groningen 1991).
H. Jungwirth, "Ring", in: H. Bächtold-Stäubli, E. Hoffmann-Krayer (eds.), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* VII (Berlin–Leipzig 1936) 702–724.
N. M. Kay, *Martial, Book XI: A Commentary* (London 1985).
D. Keyer, "Trimalchio's Astrology: Naïve Superstitions or Intentional Jokes?", *Hyperboreus* 18: 2 (2012) 264–294.

A. Kiessling, R. Heinze (eds., comm.), *Q. Horatius Flaccus* III: *Briefe* (Leipzig [4]1914).
W. Kroll, *Antiker Aberglaube* (Hamburg 1897).
H. Le Bonniec (ed., comm.) Ovide, Les Fastes, Livre 1 (Paris 1961).
V. S. Lean, *Collectanea: Collections of Proverbs (English & Foreign), Folk Lore, and Superstitions…* II: 1 (Bristol 1903).
T. J. Leary (ed., comm.), *Martial's Apophoreta: An Introduction and Commentary.* Diss. (Cape Town 1993).
T. J. Leary (ed., comm.), *Martial, Book XIV: The Apophoreta* (London 1996).
E. Lelli, *Folklore antico e moderno: una proposta di ricerca sulla cultura popolare greca e romana*, Filologia e critica 99 (Pisa–Roma 2014).
F. H. Marshall, *Catalogue of Finger Rings, Greek, Etruscan and Roman, in the Departments of Antiquities, British Museum* (London 1907).
C. Mayhoff (ed.), *C. Plini Secandi Naturalis historiae libri XXXVII* IV: *Libri XXIII–XXX* (Leipzig 1897, repr. Stuttgart 1967).
E. B. Mayor (ed., comm.), *Thirteen Satires of Juvenal* II (London 1900).
E. S. McCartney, "A Bibliography of Collections of Greek and Roman Folklore. Material in Individual Authors and Groups of Authors", *CW* 40: 13 (1947) 99–101.
J. C. McKeown, *Ovid: Amores. Text, Prolegomena and Commentary* II: *A Commentary on Book One*, ARCA 22 (Leeds 1989).
K. Meister, *Die Hausschwelle in Sprache und Religion der Römer,* Sitzungsber. der Heidelberger Akad. der Wiss., Philos.-hist. Klasse 1924/25: 3 (Heidelberg 1925).
M. Niedermann, "Sprachliche Bemerkungen zu Marcellus Empiricus de medicamentis", in: *Festgabe H. Blümner* (Zürich 1914).
M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* (Munich [2]1955).
M. B. Ogle, "The House-Door in Greek and Roman Religion and Folklore", *AJPh* 32 (1911) 251–271.
Io. G. Orelli, G. Baiter, W. Mewes (eds., comm.), *Q. Horatius Flaccus* II: *Satirae. Epistulae. Lexicon Horatianum* (Berlin 1892).
A. S. Pease (ed., comm.), *M. Tulli Ciceronis de divination liber secundus* (Urbana, Ill. 1923; repr. Darmstadt 1977).
H. Petersmann, "Religion, Superstition and Parody in Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis*", in: *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel* VI (Groningen 1995) 75–85.
H. Petersmann, *Lingua et Religio: Ausgewählte Kleine Schriften zur antiken Religionsgeschichte auf sprachwissenschaftlicher Grundlage* (Göttingen 2001).
T. Pinna, "Magia e religione nella *Cena Trimalchionis*", in: G. Solinas a. o. (eds.), *Studi di filosofia e di storia della cultura* (Sassari 1978) 449–500.
E. Pottier, "Dactyliotheca", in: Daremberg–Saglio II: 1 (1892).
E. Riess, "Aberglaube", in: *RE* 1 (1894) 29–93.
E. Riess, "Omen", in: *RE* 35 (1939) 350–378.
A. Rini, "Popular Superstitions in Petronius and Italian Superstitions of To-Day", *CW* 22 (1929) 83–86.

H. Rubenbauer, "*Dexter*", in: *Th.l.l.* V: 1 (1909–1934).
W. G. Rutherford, *Scholia Aristophanica* I (London 1896).
E. Samter, *Geburt, Hochzeit und Tod: Beiträge zur vergleichenden Volkskunde* (Leipzig–Berlin 1911).
G. Schmeling, *A Commentary on the* Satyrica *of Petronius* (Oxford 2011).
G. L. Schmeling, J. H. Stuckey, *A Bibliography on Petronius* (Leiden 1977).
S. Seligmann, *Der Böse Blick und Verwandtes: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Aberglaubens aller Zeiten und Völker* II (Berlin 1910).
A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford 1966).
Iu. Sillig (ed.), *C. Plini Secundi Naturalis Historia* IV (Gotha 1855).
C. Sittl, *Die Gebärden der Griechen und Römer* (Leipzig 1890).
M. S. Smith (ed., comm.), *Petronius, Cena Trimalchionis* (Oxford 1975).
E. Stemplinger, *Antiker Aberglaube in modernen Ausstrahlungen*, Das Erbe der Alten: Schriften über Wesen und Wirken der Antike 7 (Leipzig 1922).
E. Stemplinger, "Abergläubisches bei Petronius", *Neue Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Jugendbildung* 4 (1928) 319–325.
E. Stemplinger, *Antiker Volksglaube* (Stuttgart 1948).
J. P. Sullivan, "Interpolations in Petronius", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 22 (1976) 90–122.
M. C. Sutphen, "A Further Collection of Latin Proverbs. IV", *AJPh* 22 (1901) 361–391.
L. Ulrichs (ed., comm.), *Chrestomathia Pliniana* (Berlin 1857).
G. Vannini, "Petronius 1975–2004: bilancio critico e nuove proposte", *Lustrum* 49 (2007).
A. P. Wagener, "On 'Putting the Best Foot Forward'", *TAPA* 66 (1935) 73–91.
L. Weiser-Aall, "Schwelle", in: H. Bächtold–Stäubli, E. Hoffmann-Krayer (eds.), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* VII (Berlin–Leipzig 1936) 1509–1543.
X. F. M. G. Wolters, *Notes on antique* Folklore*, on the basis of* Pliny's *Natural History, Bk. XXVIII 22–29* (Amsterdam 1935).
H. Zehnacker (ed., tr., comm.), *Pline l'Ancien, Histoire naturelle: Livre XXXIII* (Paris 1983).

The author objects to H. Petersmann's view that Trimalchio's superstitious practice distorts common Roman customs and betrays his ignorance. The first half of the paper discusses two passages (Petr. 32. 3–4; 30. 5–6). (1) Petersmann erroneously states that Romans did not wear rings on their ring fingers and, relying on Plin. *NH* 28. 24, claims that Romans took off their rings during a meal. Yet, there is direct evidence for the opposite (Ov. *Am*. 1. 4. 26; Macr. *Sat*. 7. 13. 6), and for several reasons Pliny's words *nam si mensa adsit* are likely to have been corrupt or misinterpreted. (2) Relying on Vitruv. 3. 4. 4 (on entering temples), Petersmann presumes that entering with the right foot forward was confined to sacred places, so

that the prescript to enter Trimalchio's triclinium "*dextro pede*" renders divine honors to his house. Yet, passages like Ov. *Ibis* 101 with schol.; Apul. *Met*. 6. 26; Amm. Marc. 26. 6. 18 make it likely that not only temples, but also private houses were to be entered with the right foot forward.

Автор возражает против мнения Х. Петерсмана о том, что суеверные обычаи Тримальхиона искажают общепринятую практику римлян и выдают его невежество. В первой половине статьи рассматриваются два эпизода (Petr. 32. 3–4; 30. 5–6). (1) Петерсман ошибочно считает, что римляне не носили кольцо на безымянном пальце, и, опираясь на Plin. *NH* XXVIII, 24, утверждает, что римляне снимали кольца во время трапезы. Между тем имеются прямые свидетельства, которые говорят об обратном (Ov. *Am*. 1. 4. 26; Macr. *Sat*. 7. 13. 6), и есть основания считать слова Плиния *nam si mensa adsit* искаженными или неверно истолкованными. (2) Опираясь на Vitruv. III, 4, 4 (о входе в храм), Петерсман предполагает, что обычай входить в помещение с правой ноги относился только к священным местам, так что предписание входить в триклиний Трималхиона "dextro pede" придавало его дому божественный статус вопреки обычаям. Тем не менее, на основании Ov. *Ibis* 101 cum schol.; Apul. *Met*. 6. 26; Amm. Marc. 26. 6. 18 и др. можно предположить, что с правой ноги входили не только в храмы, но и в другие помещения.