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Tiberiana 1: Tiberian Neologisms

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Abstract: This is one of five *parerga* preparatory to a book to be entitled *Tiberius on Capri*, which will explore the interrelationship between culture and empire, between Tiberius' intellectual passions (including astrology, gastronomy, medicine, mythology, and literature) and his role as *princeps*. These five papers do not so much develop an argument as explore significant themes which will be examined and deployed in the book in different contexts.

“Tiberian Neologisms” examines several words that seem to have been invented or given new meanings during his reign, often by Tiberius himself.

Tiberiana 1: Tiberian Neologisms

In AD 17, the emperor Tiberius published an edict refusing New Year's gifts, in which he used a word which was not Latin. After thinking it over at night, he sent for all who were experts in such matters, for he was extremely anxious to have his diction irreproachable. Thereupon one Ateius Capito declared: "Even if no one has previously used this expression, yet now because of you we shall all cite it as an example of classical usage." But a certain Porcellus replied: "You, Caesar, can confer Roman citizenship upon men, but not upon words." And the emperor did this man no harm for his remark, in spite of its extreme frankness. (Loeb trans., E. Cary, slightly emended)

So Dio, at 57. 17. 2-3. In his biographical notice of the annoying grammarian M. Pomponius Porcellus, *sermonis Latini exactor molestissimus*, Suetonius presents the incident somewhat differently:

On another occasion, when this same Porcellus had criticized a word in a speech by Tiberius, Ateius Capito insisted that it was acceptable Latin and that – even if it were not – it certainly would be from then on: 'Capito's lying' Porcellus said, 'for you, Caesar, are able to give citizenship to people, but not to words.'

Gramm. 22. 2 (trans. R.A. Kaster)

The anecdote in its two versions well captures the flavor of stories told elsewhere about Tiberius' obsessive concern with words and his delight in discussions with experts. In his *Life of Tiberius* (71) Suetonius gives three brief illustrations of the emperor's

avoidance of Greek in the senate: he apologized in advance for using the word *monopolium* in a speech; he suggested using a Latin word or words, or a periphrasis, for the Greek *emblema* in a senatusconsultum (cf. Dio 57. 15. 1-2, Tacitus 2. 33: AD 16); and he forbade a soldier to give evidence in Greek (cf. Dio 57. 15. 3, locating the incident in the senate: also AD 16). Elsewhere Suetonius records Augustus' disapproval of his stepson's pursuit of *exoletas et reconditas voces*, presumably in Latin (*Aug.* 86. 2). The folkloric touches of a monarch pondering while everyone slept and then summoning his wise men to confer, are particularly appropriate to Tiberius. His obsession more generally with the *mot juste* is amply attested: e.g., Suetonius 27, cf. Dio 57. 8. 1-2, Tacitus 2. 87.

The tale may be given different spins – the restraint of the emperor in one version, the grammarian's freedom of speech in the other – but its lesson, that even an emperor could not confer citizenship on a word, is the same.

As it happens, the characters attributed to Ateius Capito and Pomponius Porcellus in their exchange on language and citizenship are mirrored by other sources: Capito as the fawning toady (Tacitus 3. 70, 75. 1-2: both tendentious) and Pomponius as the obstinate pedant (Seneca *Suas.* 2. 12-13). But what is obscured by these caricatures is that Porcellus, for all that the emperor summoned him to consult, is an extraordinarily minor figure, remembered only for his obnoxious character in three or four anecdotes, whereas Capito was one of the great men of his day, an ex-consul and at that time (AD 16) *curator aquarum*, as well as an acknowledged and well-published expert in the law, both human and divine. And it appears that, in this matter, Capito was right.

1. *colum*

Pliny *NH* 26. 9: Id ipsum mirabile, alios [*sc.* morbos] desinere in nobis, alios durare, sicuti colum. Ti. Caesaris principatu inrepsit id malum, nec quisquam id prior imperatore ipso sensit, magna civitatis ambage, cum in edicto eius excusantis valetudinem legeret nomen incognitum.

This itself is a wonderful fact, that some diseases should disappear from among us while others remain endemic, as for example colum. It was in the principate of Tiberius Caesar that this malady made its way into Italy. Nobody suffered from it before the emperor himself, and the citizens were greatly puzzled when they read in his edict, in which he begged to be excused because of illness, a name they had never heard before. (Loeb trans., W.H.S. Jones)

Colum from the Greek *colon*, was “a disease of the large intestine”, though what precisely it was is not clear.¹ *Magna civitate ambage* irresistibly suggests a “Blessed are the cheesemakers” discussion in the Forum: “Mehercule, what is *that* edict all about?” “Surely he can’t be referring to the imperial *colon*?” “No, no, you know how much he loves his vegetables: I think his colander is broken.” “Oh good, I was afraid he was composing poetry and had run into metrical trouble.” “Well at least his loom is working.” The public’s confusion will not have alleviated Tiberius’ aversion to the use of Greek words.

¹ Langslow 2000: 482 (references); 87, 91 (discussion of the meaning of Celsus 2. 12. 2B).

2. *mentagra*

Curiously, another novel disease invaded Italy under Tiberius, as Pliny tells us slightly earlier (26. 2). This was a painful and disfiguring facial eruption known as *mentagra*, *lichen* in Greek, which allegedly spread among the upper classes through social kissing, *veloci osculi transitu*: “so foul was it that any death was preferable.”

Ronald Syme discerned the context:

“An injunction put out by Tiberius will therefore acquire sharp relevance: ‘cotidiana oscula edicto prohibuit.’ [Suetonius 34. 2] The Princeps himself may have been one who suffered. Sensitivity about his physical appearance was adduced by Tacitus among reasons for his departure from the capital in 26: not only the ‘nudus capillo vertex’ but the ‘ulcerosa facies’. According to Pliny, the ‘mentagra’ reached Italy during the middle years of his principate.”²

Mentagra is just as much a neologism as *colum*, first appearing here in Pliny and thereafter only in a handful medical writers (*TLL*), and it is a much more interesting word. A perfectly good Latin term *lichen* already existed, *impetigo*. *Mentagra* seems to have been coined by analogy with the Greek *podagra*, gout, which developed from a hunting metaphor: it was a trap for the feet. But *mentagra* is a curious hybrid, combining the Greek trap with the Latin chin, *mentum*, hence a disease of the face. Presumably it was not invented before the disease first appeared in Italy, and presumably it was cited in Tiberius’ edict as the reason to refrain from daily kissing: like *colum* then, a *nomen incognitum* first used by an afflicted emperor in an edict. The coinage is clever, the word

² Syme 1981: 125-126 = 1376-1377.

vivid, the humor grim, pain at the bottom now matched by pain at the top. As we shall see, these are hallmarks of Tiberian neologisms.

3. *sellaria*

Two other words were notoriously coined by Tiberius, “words previously unknown”:

Tacitus *Ann.* 6. 1. 2 [AD 32]: Tuncque primum ignota antea vocabula reperta sunt sellariorum et spintriarum ex foeditate loci ac multiplici patientia; praepositique servi qui conquirent pertraherent, dona in promptos, minas adversum abnuentis, et si retinerent propinquus aut parens, vim raptus suaque ipsi libita velut in captos exercebant.

And that was the first time that the previously unknown designations of “sellarii” and “spintriae” were devised, respectively from the foulness of their place and their multifarious passivity. And the slaves who were charged with the searching and bringing resorted to gifts for the ready, threats against the reluctant, and, if a relative or parent held them back, violent seizure and personal gratification, as though their victims were captives. (trans. A.J. Woodman)

Suetonius *Tiberius* 43. 1: Secessu vero Caprensi etiam sellaria excogitavit, sedem arcanarum libidinum, in quam undique conquisiti puellarum et exoletorum greges monstrosique concubitus repertores, quos spintrias appellabat, triplici serie connexi, in vicem incestarent coram ipso, ut aspectu deficientis libidines excitaret. Cubicula plurifariam disposita tabellis ac sigillis lascivissimarum picturarum et figurarum

adornavit librisque Elephantidis instruxit, ne cui in opera edenda exemplar imperatae schemae deesset.

On retiring to Capri he devised “holey places” as a site for his secret orgies; there select teams of girls and male prostitutes, inventors of deviant intercourse and dubbed analysts, copulated before him in triple unions to excite his flagging passions. Its many bedrooms he furnished with the most salacious paintings and sculptures and stocked with the books of Elephantis, in case any performer should need an illustration of a prescribed position. (Loeb trans. D.W. Hurley, slightly modified)

From these and related passages, it is (rightly) assumed that Tacitus and Suetonius share a common and antagonistic source (probably Servilius Nonianus, who was there – but that is another story). Here, along with their common pairing of *sellaria* and *spintriae*, compare Tacitus’ *conquirent* with Suetonius’ *conquisiti*, and note the echo between Tacitus’ *multiplici patientia* and Suetonius’ *triplici serie connexi*.

Sellarii. From *sella*, of course, chair, seat, even bench or stool in a latrine: something you sit on. R. Martin, in his commentary on Tacitus *Annales* V and VI, translates *sellarii* and *spintriae*: “‘stoolmen’ and ‘squeezers’, derived from the foulness of the place and the multiple submissiveness”. A.J. Woodman, in his indispensable recent translation, glosses this passage in note 16, p. 166: “The former term is derived from *sellarium* = “privy” (see Suetonius, *Tiberius* 43. 1 “in his Capri retreat he even devised *sellaria* as the place for his arcane lusts”); the latter term is connected with the Greek word for catamite.”

Martin, Woodman, et al. assume that *sellariorum* in Tacitus is masculine, from *sellarii*, as distinct from Suetonius' *sellaria*. OLD offers: *sellarium*, "privy", citing Pliny NH 34. 84 and 36. 111, and Suetonius l.c.; and *sellarius*, "a type of male prostitute (cf. prec.)", citing only Tacitus l.c. (These 4 references are the only ones that Diogenes turns up to these words) But I don't see why Tacitus' *sellariorum* can't be derived from the neuter plural *sellaria* attested in Suetonius. At first glance, *sellaria* are the place(s) in/on which the *spintriae* performed. If "sellariorum" is tied to "foeditas loci", and balanced in Tacitus by "spintriarum" and "multiplici patientia", that suggests a place rather than people.³

Sellaria. D.W. Hurley, in her invaluable revision of the Loeb Suetonius of J.C. Rolfe, neatly and suggestively translates *sellaria* as "holey places", noting that "*sellarium*, "a place for seats," was a latrine. Tiberius used it to suggest anal intercourse." Spintriae are for her "analists".

Sellae might indeed mean seats in a latrine, and the assumption that *sellarium* = latrine could be supported by the *foeditas loci* in Tacitus, but it is not necessary: sometimes a seat is just a seat. In the two Pliny references, both plural, *sellaria* should mean neutrally sitting-rooms, places with seats, as indeed the Loeb takes it. Both

³ Epigraphically we also have:

- *bisellarius*, used of decurions (*AE* 1927. 124; Formiae; 1966. 75, Larinum; *ILS* 7227, Luna; *CIL* XIV. 4136, Ostia; *ILGN* 362, Genava, an aedile). *OLD* cites various inscriptions and Varro, *LL* 5. 128 as: having the right to sit on a *bisellium* as an honor for municipal services in the provinces (sic): a sort of magisterial double-wide? Anyway irrelevant.
- *subsellarius* (*AE* 1990. 484, Eborā, Lusitania; *ILS* 7634, Rome). A maker of benches according to *OLD*: possibly, but not necessarily.
- *sellarius* (*ILS* 5313, Rome). *OLD*: a member of a racing establishment (of uncertain function) – apparently a hapax in this sense. Not a male prostitute. Something to do with saddles presumably?

references (qqv.) are, curiously, to the Domus Aurea – they *could* mean latrines, but again I don't see that it's necessary. Furthermore, while the plausible idea (Martin) that latrines are where male prostitutes ply their trade may obtain today, I don't know of any ancient evidence for this: Roman cruising grounds were the baths (above all), brothels of course, wharves, and theaters.⁴

In fact, *sellaria* lead us to vocabulary for prostitutes sitting outside their place of business to attract customers. Juvenal has one perched on an *alta ... sella* (3. 136): his scholiast calls her *sellaria*. The latter reference seems largely to have escaped modern scholarship; it turns up only in the *Glossarium Eroticum* of the indefatigable Gaston Vorberg.⁵ Likewise to the point is Martial's epigram 5. 70:

Infusum sibi nuper a patrono
 plenum, Maxime, centiens Syrius
 in *sellariolis* vagus popinis
 circa *balnea* quattuor peregit.
 O quanta est gula, centiens comesse!
 quanto maior adhuc, nec *accubare*. (My italics)

Syriscus pulled in the full ten million showered on him by his patron recently, Maximus, just by hanging about on cantina barstools down around the four bathhouses. Oh what a gorge to gobble down ten millions! Yet how much greater a feat not even to recline with him! (trans. R. Taylor)

This epigram, ripe with innuendo (note the teasing delay of *centiens* in the first two lines), presents the same image as Juvenal's prostitute: Syriscus lured his "patron" by

⁴ Taylor 1997: 341, 363-370.

⁵ Vorberg 1928-1932: 589.

sitting on *sellariola* down by the baths. That is to say, the connotation of *sellaria* is not one of some bizarre act of sodomy on the seats of a latrine (or anywhere else), but rather one of advertisement, of show, of displaying oneself on a stool provocatively in a public place for the purpose of prostitution.

Moreover, Suetonius glosses “*sellaria*” in the singular, *sedem ... in quam* (his pun is, I hope, unconscious). It seems to me, from this and from Tacitus’ *locus (foedus)*, that we are dealing with a room or suite of rooms in the palace called Sellaria, the place of seats or benches. If that is so, it immediately recalls another theatrical *mise en scene* devised by Tiberius, where again solicitation to sex, rather than sexual activity itself, is the subject – see below. So an aptly Tiberian neologism.

If “Sellaria” is correct, I strongly suspect that we should delete both “*sellarium*, privy, latrine” and “*sellarius*, male prostitute” (despite the late antique scholiastic hapax *sellaria*, female prostitute) from the lexicon.

4. *spintriae*

The term invented by Tiberius for the denizens of his Sellaria. Who precisely were they and just what awful things did they do?

Soon after the emperor’s death, his successor expelled the *spintrias monstrosarum libidinum* from Rome – how they got there is a question, for their occupation is inextricably part of the legend of Capri – and he was barely dissuaded from drowning them in the sea (Suetonius *Caligula* 16. 1). The story comes in a package of virtuous deeds from the early days of the reign, but it still seems a bit rich from a Caligula. If *he*

disapproved of the *spintriae*, they must have been very bad indeed. What they did remains sunk in mystery and confusion as deep as the watery grave which they so narrowly escaped. The *OLD*, confident and discreet, offers: “**spintria**, -ae, *m.* [cf Gk. *sphingkter*] A type of male prostitute”, citing Petronius 113. 11, as well as the Tacitus and the two Suetonius passages (from the lives of Tiberius and Caligula) noted above, and Suetonius’ life of Vitellius, 3. 2.⁶ The derivation of the term from the muscle that closes the anus seems obvious, hence the connotation of anal intercourse. *LSJ* notes an obscure fragment of Cratinus preserved by Photius where Greek *sphingktes* means pederast, glossed as *kinaidos* in Hesychius, the only two references cited for the word. Hence we have in English Martin’s “squeezers”, Woodman’s “catamites” (in a note), Hurley’s “analists”. But this emphasis on male anal intercourse is highly misleading.

Curiously, we know more about how the word was created than what it actually means. J. André has traced the development in Latin of Greek feminine agent nouns with the suffix *-tria*: *citharistria*, *psaltria*, *sambucistria* being the oldest; followed by *poetria*; *crotalistria* (and *spintria*); *hierophantria*, *lyristria*, *pharmaceutria*; *sophistria*, *tympanistria*; and, the latest additions, *ascetria* and *monastria*. As he observes, all are female professions, and their Latin borrowings represented fall into three groups (*spintriae* aside): musical, literary, and religious.⁷

J. Adams adds the most interesting item: Petronius 37. 6, which offers *lupatria*, prostitute, where the Greek suffix is attached to a Latin root, of which Adams notes, “It is to be presumed that among bilingual speakers of Latin the normal Greek process of

⁶ Dio claims (64. 4 2) that Vitellius had been Tiberius’ boytoy (Gk. *paidika*). Add *HA Heliogabalus* 33. 1: *libidinum genera quaedam invenit, ut spinthrias veterum imperatorum vinceret*.

⁷ André 1971: 103-107.

derivation was forgotten once the suffix *-tria* had acquired an association with female purveyors of sex (cf. {Greek} *laikastria*). Therefore the suffix could be applied to a Latin base (even one which was non-verbal) provided that the semantic field was appropriate....” Hence the sexual terms *lupatria*⁸ and *spintria*. In a note he observes that the origin of *spintria* is not straightforward, and although masculine in Suetonius it “may originally have been coined as a feminine (since one female can participate in such an act). It may have been generalised to include all three members of the sexual chain, passing into the generalising masculine in the process.”⁹

But in fact, as André noted in passing, there is no evidence that the *spintriae* were only male.

Look closely again at Suetonius 43. 1: *Secessu vero Caprensi etiam sellaria excogitavit, sedem arcanarum libidinum, in quam undique conquisiti puellarum et exoletorum greges monstrosique concubitus repertores, quos spintrias appellabat, triplici serie connexi, in vicem incestarent coram ipso, ut aspectu deficientis libidines excitaret.* Or, inelegantly: “In his Caprean retreat he even devised a Sellaria, a place for hidden lusts, in which sought-out-from everywhere gangs of girls and of male prostitutes and devisers of monstrous coupling, whom he called *spintriae*, joined together in triple chains, defiled each other before him, so he might arouse his declining lusts by their sight.”

How the components of this sentence fit together is not at all clear. Unless Suetonius is being very sloppy, the subjects of the plural verb *incestarent* must be the *greges* (of girls and *exoleti*) and the *repertores* (of monstrous coupling). Less certainly,

⁸ Neumann 1980 emends *lupatria* to *lupatris*, unconvincingly in my opinion.

⁹ Adams 2003: 420 and n. 15.

the people *connexi* in triple chains should likewise refer to both *greges* and *repertores*, or at least could do so: the phrase defines just how they are defiling each other. What then to do with the clause *quos spintriae appellabat*? It could conceivably refer to the *repertores* alone, but the drift of the sentence suggests that it refers to the *greges* as well – in which case, *spintriae* were both male and female. And even if *quos* refers to the *repertores* alone, there is still no reason to assume that said *repertores* could not be men and women.

Other appearances of the word *spintria(e)* are of no help: Tacitus gives no hint as to the sex of the victims (which is how he presents them); nor does Suetonius in the *Caligula* passage noted above; the alleged attachment of the scurrilous cognomen Spintria to Vitellius, after his debauched boyhood on Capri is no indication, since a female nickname could always be abusively applied to a male¹⁰; and the fragmentary passage from Petronius is, despite speculation, quite unclear (on the surface, it seems to refer to a female).

The word *spintria* derives from professional female sexual activity, not male. There is simply no firm evidence that the term referred precisely to male prostitutes (through some assumed connection with anal intercourse) – why indeed should Tiberius coin an unnecessary synonym for *exoleti* or *cinaedi*, if that is all they were? Added to this must be the observation that Tiberius was just not interested in men: apart from one dubious anecdote in Suetonius (44. 2), about an alleged double rape, there is no sign of homosexual interests in the emperor – his tastes inclined in a different direction, as we

¹⁰ Curiously, the fragmentary *CIL* VI. 37761 records an *Augusti libertus* who appears to have been *nomenclator Vitelli Spintheri*.

shall see. Why then would he want an all-male troupe of prostitutes, and of what use would the notorious books of Elephantis be to them if he did?

Thus, sphincter in the specific sense of anal muscle and connoting male-male intercourse is misleading, and the obscure Greek *sphingtes* meaning *cinaedus* irrelevant. There is no reason to believe that *spintriae* were not both male and female, their name somehow derived from “female purveyors of sex.”

Suetonius was outraged by *monstrous concubitus* and *monstrous libidines*. But what precisely was so monstrous? Would Martial have been as upset? There are at least three helpful defining elements in Suetonius’ description. One is that the *spintriae* (male or female) engaged in group sex: *triplici serie connexi*, cf. Tacitus’ *multiplici patientia*. A second lies in Suetonius’ explanation that the *cubicula* on Capri were stocked with the most obscene of artworks, both painting and sculpture, and the (undoubtedly illustrated) sex manuals of Elephantis, to provide examples if needed. This need for blueprints, as it were, strongly suggests that, whatever outrage the group couplings may have aroused, novelty was not its cause; in other words, that Tiberius’ alleged transgressions lay within the bounds of the common or garden variety of sexual depravity, they were not some bizarre and ultimately risible Sadean fantasy. And third, if the performers were at a loss, when they checked out those artworks around them, perhaps even paused to look something up in the library, they did so to discover *exemplar imperatae schemae*, an example of the posture which had been ordered. That is, if Suetonius is to be believed, the performers were not creative artists, they were doing what they were told to do,

perhaps by a *repertor concubitus* (a sort of team leader?) or, more likely, by the emperor himself.¹¹

I would like to write that, “This is not the place for an excursus on Roman group sex”, but I’m afraid it is. A vigorous but not rigorous survey of literary and material sources suggests two relevant norms in the representation (at least) of sex with more than one partner.¹²

One concerns the numbers: gangbangs seem invariably to involve 3 or 4 people.¹³ I have found no example of ancient art showing more than four people involved in a single sexual encounter (that is, as distinct from simultaneous but disconnected activity, aka an orgy), and only one such scene referred to in literature – where Martial tells us explicitly (12. 43) that a filthy poet’s verses depicting five and even more *symplegmata*, performed by *exoleti*, touch on matters *not* covered in the soft books of Elephantis, the sort of things that only a *perditus fututor* would dare. All of which suggests that, if they indeed went by the book, Tiberius’ *spintriae* performed in groups of 3 or 4, not less, not more.

The other observable norm is the mixture of the sexes. In very nearly all of the known representations, written or artistic, both men and women are involved when there are more than two partners. I know of no depiction of purely homosexual group sex (all male or all female) in Graeco-Roman art, and only two references to it in literature. One

¹¹ The alternative ms. reading of *impetratae* does not affect the point here.

¹² The full range of artistic representation is represented in Clarke’s excellent book of 2003. Vorberg 1928-1932 has a lot of illustrations: group sex does not loom large.

¹³ Examples of threesomes: Clarke pp.38-39, 129, 144, 145, 146, 147, 151; Ausonius *Epp.* 43 Green (from Strato, *AP* 11. 225, 12. 210); Martial 10. 81; Petronius 140. 7-10; Seneca *NQ* 1.16. 5. Foursomes: Clarke: 131, 139; Martial 9. 32. 4; Seneca *NQ* 1. 16. 7; Gallus *AP* 5. 491; Nicarchus 11. 328.

is to the *Veneris novae figurae* mentioned by Martial in 12. 43 (above), as the sort of acts that *exoleti* might provide and keep quiet about: but Martial does not say that they actually performed them, only that such multiple couplings are the product of the overheated imagination of the poet Sabellus. The other appearance of homosexual group sex comes in Seneca's denunciation of the unutterably depraved Hostius Quadra (*NQ* 1. 16. 5) – who is depicted in the same passage as indulging in group sex with men and women together, and with two and three partners indifferently. But barring these two extreme examples, group sex seems to have been universally accepted as a mixed sport. This norm further supports the contention that Tiberius' *spintriae* included both men and women: if his troupe were only men, Suetonius or Tacitus really should have remarked explicitly on this new depth of depravity.¹⁴

At this point we are closer to a proper understanding of *spintriae*. Their numbers surely included both men and women. They worked in groups, most likely of three or four. And they were truly performers, acting according to models, if needed, and under direction: tableaux très vivants. All of which helps towards a definition.

Sphincter, sphinges, *spintriae* derive essentially from the Greek *sphinggo*, I bind together, I compress. As older commentators saw, the *spintria*'s immediate antecedent in Latin is *spinter*, bracelet or armllet, something that encircles and binds the arm, known to Plautus and defined by Festus (448-449L) as a kind of armllet which women used to wear in the old days on their upper left arm.¹⁵ This *spinter* tells us all we need to know. At first glance, a *spintria* should simply be a woman who provided the same service for a

¹⁴ Of course what was “monstrous” in Suetonius' eyes might have transgressed precisely these two norms, i.e., have involved more than four people or all males, but there is no indication at all that such was the case.

¹⁵ Vorberg 610; Forberg 2. 180.

client, binding and compressing not his arm but his penis, be it orally, vaginally, or anally. A precise definition would thus be “bracelet worker”, analogous to *lupatria* as “she-wolf worker”, another bilingual hybrid slang term for female sex workers.

As to the setting on Capri, the word has two strong denotations. First is *multiplex patientia*. The *spintria* should be submissive in not one but two or three ways in a single tableau; that is, cunnilingus aside, she is penetrated, is a “bracelet”, two or three ways simultaneously. And second, “she” can also be a he, a passive male so effeminate as to be grouped with female sex workers: such Juvenalian transgendering fits in perfectly with Tiberius’ sense of humor.

In short, *spintriae*, bracelet workers, were performers, male or female, noted for multiple submission in group sex acts. The old emperor’s sexual habits, as presented by an overheated Suetonius (*maiore adhuc ac turpiore infamia flagravit, vix ut referri audirive, nedum credi fas sit*), are dominated by oral sex¹⁶ and by voyeurism¹⁷, two passions appropriate to the elderly and infirm. I suspect that it was the latter, the performative aspect, that shocked Suetonius as much as what the performers actually did. At any rate, I believe that “*spintria*, male prostitute” ought to be deleted from the lexicon.

Finally, it should be noted that the word bears a family resemblance to a neologism discussed earlier, *mentagra*, as a hybrid bilingual metaphor which is both vividly concrete and grimly humorous. Perhaps Tiberius really did invent them.

¹⁶ The little boys, his *pisciculi*, swimming and nibbling between his legs; the unweaned infants sucking at the penis of the princeps; the valuable mythological painting kept in his bedroom, which depicted Atalanta fellating Meleager (or rather, indulging in ‘69’, as Hallett 1978 argues); the pleasure he allegedly derived from both receiving oral sex from women (*feminarum capitibus includere*) and giving it to them (*obscaenitate oris; hircum vetulum capreis naturam liguirre*).

¹⁷ For another example, see below – note also his interest in erotic art.

5. *pisciculi (sensu obsceno).*

Suetonius 44. 1: Maiore adhuc ac turpiore infamia flagravit, vix ut referri audirive, nedum credi fas sit, quasi pueros primae teneritudinis, quos pisciculos vocabat, institueret, ut natanti sibi inter femina versarentur ac luderent lingua morsuque sensim adpetentes; atque etiam quasi infantes firmiores, necdum tamen lacte depulsos, inguini ceu papillae admoveret, pronior sane ad id genus libidinis et natura et aetate.

In the immortal words of Gore Vidal: “Tiberius, Capri. Pool of water. Small children... So far so good. One’s laborious translation was making awful sense. Then... Fish. Fish? The erotic mental image became surreal. Another victory for the Loeb Library’s sly translator, J. C. Rolfe, who, correctly anticipating the prurience of schoolboy readers, left Suetonius’ gaudier passages in the hard original.”¹⁸

Tiberius the alleged inventor of “Sex in the Swimming Pool”, was followed by Domitian and perhaps by Elagabalus, and imitated by Martial.¹⁹

Add a graffito from Pompeii, which reads: Fonticulus Pisciculo suo / p{u}lur(i)ma(m) salut(em), “Fonticulus sends many greetings to his Pisciculus” (*CIL* IV. 4447). Or, “Little Spring (or Fountain), effusively greets his good friend Little Fish”. Fish swim in fountains. Fonticulus and Pisciculus are both male. This is a graffito at Pompeii. Did Tiberius start a local trend?

¹⁸ Vidal 1959: 523. Schoolboy prurience is now rewarded by D.W. Hurley in her 1998 Loeb revision of Rolfe’s translation.

¹⁹ Cameron 1973.

6. *Caprineum*

Suetonius 43. 2: In silvis quoque ac nemoribus passim venerios locos commentus est prost[r]antisque per antra et cavas rupes ex utriusque sexus pube Paniscorum et Nympharum habitu, quae palam iam et vulgo nomine insulae abutentes Caprineum dictitabant.

Not easy to translate: Also, he arranged for places devoted to sex in the woods and groves everywhere and youths of both sexes in the guise of Panisci and Nymphs, offering themselves throughout the caves and hollow rocks. These places they now openly and commonly called the Caprineum, playing on the name of the island.

Prima facie these appear to be tableaux vivants, and (strictly speaking) Pans and Nymphs should be encountering each other, not passersby, in great Pan's favorite setting for amorous adventures, caves and hollow rocks. This would continue the emphasis on voyeurism in chapter 43, following directly on *Sellaria, spintriae*, outrageously pornographic paintings and statuettes (*tabellis et sigillis lascivissimarum picturarum et figurarum*), and the illustrated sex manuals of Elephantis. Such tableaux vivants, living equivalents of garden sculpture, are attested elsewhere.²⁰ The Caprineum becomes a parallel for the Sellaria as a place on Capri where actors allegedly offered themselves for sexual activity.

²⁰ Think of Orpheus at the banquet of Hortensius (Varro *RR* 3. 13. 2-3), or Ajax at the banquet of Trimalchio (Petronius *Sat.* 59. 7), or Glaucus at the banquet of Antony and Cleopatra (Velleius 2. 83. 2).

Caprineum is hapax. The -eum/-eion suffix could refer to a temple, shrine, seat, along the lines of Museum: perhaps then a nod to the half-goat/god Pan, who was indeed present, whatever Tiberius may have intended with his theme-park.²¹

Who are “misapplying” the name of the island? Unlikely to be “people”, as in the Loeb. *Abutentes dictitabant* should be attributed to the only visible antecedents, the Panisci and Nymphae, who thus outrage public opinion by openly referring to the Goat Shrine where they worked. That is to say, if not coined by Tiberius himself, the word was put into circulation by his employees.

7. *Mallonia*

As so often elsewhere, it is not clear that Suetonius had any idea of what was going on with the Caprineum. This is only too obvious in a subsequent and related passage, which is surely the most bizarre in his Life of Tiberius (45):

Feminarum quoque, et quidem illustrium, capitibus quanto opere solitus sit inludere, evidentissime apparuit Malloniae cuiusdam exitu, quam perductam nec quicquam amplius pati constantissime recusantem delatoribus obiecit ac ne ream quidem interpellare desiit, “ecquid paeniteret”; donec ea relicto iudicio domum se abripuit ferroque transegit, obscaenitate oris hirsuto atque olido seni clare exprobat. Unde nota in Atellanico exhodio proximis ludis adsensu maximo excepta percrebruit, “hircum vetulum capreis naturam ligurire.”

²¹ OLD cites CIL I. 1005. 4, *caprinarius* as “a devotee of Pan”.

How much he was in the habit of giving himself pleasure at the heads of women as well, even those of high birth, is very clearly shown by the death of a certain Mallonia. When she was brought to his bed and refused most vigorously to submit to anything more, he turned her over to the informers, and even when she was on trial he did not cease to call out and ask her “whether she was sorry”; so that finally she left the court and went home, where she stabbed herself, openly upbraiding the hairy and smelly old man for the obscenity of his mouth. Hence a stigma put upon him at the next plays in an Atellan farce was received with great applause and became current, that “the old goat was licking the sex of his does.” (Loeb trans., D.W. Hurley)

The more one considers this tale, the less sense it makes. Tiberius, we are told, was accustomed to take great pleasure in forcing women, even women of rank, to fellate him; that is, he enjoyed *irrumatio*. His vice, for which this passage is the only evidence, is supposed to be made extremely obvious by one example (how this is so, is not clear), a woman who is not otherwise known. She is brought to the emperor and refuses, apparently, “most vigorously to submit to anything more”. What does this mean? That she had submitted to intercourse but refused *irrumatio*? That she had submitted to *irrumatio* but refused something even worse? And however does this illustrate the emperor’s penchant for the act? In fact, as Bob Kaster points out, taken at face value the Latin *nec..... recusantem* should mean that she did *not* most vigorously refuse to submit!

She is then charged, but with what we are not told, and the emperor not only attends the proceedings but repeatedly interrupts the trial with the cryptic and melodramatic “Are you sorry?” in a most unTiberian manner – observers must have

gaped in bewilderment. But there is a serious chronological dilemma here. The sources are unanimous, rightly or wrongly, that Tiberius indulged in sexual debauchery only after he retired to Capri in 27 – before that, not a whiff of impropriety. Yet this is a formal trial (*delatores, rea, iudicium*); such trials took place as far as we are aware at Rome, never on Capri; and Tiberius did not return to Rome after 26. In a word, no debaucheries for Tiberius before 26, no trials for him afterwards.

Mallonia then goes home and kills herself, but not before accusing the emperor – dramatically, before witnesses – of being a goatish *cunnilingus*. Tiberius is now hairy and smelly – traits not otherwise associated with the second *princeps*, yet all too neatly apposite to a line about a goat which is conveniently spoken in a subsequent production of an Atellan farce (in Rome?), and is then popularly applied to him. But the line itself is a problem, in that “the elderly goat” licks the sex of “does”: *caprae* are not she-goats, *caprae*, but female roe-deer. The deeper significance, or even likelihood, of this startling, unparalleled, bestial, inter-species, oral sex I am not competent to judge. More importantly, how this goatish cunnilingus illustrates Tiberius’ alleged fondness for irrumation (*quanto opere solitus sit*) is not a little puzzling, since the two are in one sense opposites.

The tale in fact blends two dramas. One is Livian tragedy, Verginia meets Lucretia: the baffled stage tyrant (“Are you sorry?”) perverts justice to wreak vengeance on an innocent woman whom he wishes to seduce; and the virtuous matron prefers death to dishonor, but not before denouncing her debaucher.

The other drama is surely Atellan farce, working back from the line about “the elderly goat”. First, if this comes from an actual Atellana, someone in the audience (as in

the story, or perhaps a detractor of Tiberius in his study) noted with that special Roman quickness in such situations a “spectacular” pun. If the original line means something like (in Hurley’s translation) “the elderly goat licks the sex of his does”, it can also be taken as “the elderly goat licks genitalia on Capri”: that is, *capreis* is a dative of reference in the first interpretation, a locative in the second. The wordplay must have been irresistible – unless, as seems only too possible, the story was invented for the occasion.²²

Second, the goatish-ness informs the female victim’s denunciation of Tiberius. *Hirsutus* and *olidus* together inevitably signify goat, but – however metaphorically apt it might be – the description doesn’t really fit a princeps who was notoriously both bald and concerned with hygiene.

And third, the inappropriate words are spoken by a fictitious woman. The *nomen* Mallonius is quite plausible, but rare and undistinguished. This appears to be its only instance in all of Greek and Latin literature and it seems not to occur at all on Greek inscriptions. Latin inscriptions are distinctly unpromising. Mallonii appear in Lusitania (one: *AE* 1898. 1), Aquitania (one: *AE* 1962. 224 = *ILTG* 182), Lugdunensis (one: *CIL* XIII. 3123), Narbonensis (two: *CIL* XII. 1983, a freedman; 2452 and 2454, apparently a senator), Liguria, at Albintimilium (one: *AE* 1990. 381, with a Greek name), Latium, at Linternum (one: *AE* 2001. 853, a freedman Augustalis) and Cumae (two: *CIL* X. 3698, 3699, a magistrate and a priest), and at Rome (two families, both with Greek names, a husband and wife at *CIL* VI. 21888, and a woman with (apparently) her husband and son

²² Note also that in the alternate, Tiberian, version, the sex of the emperor’s partners is unspecified, and *natura* can refer to both *mentula* and *cunnus*. Appropriately for the Atellana, oral sex was considered an Oscan vice: Porphyrio ad Horat. *Sat.* 1. 5. 62 *Campanum in morbum – Campani, qui Osci dicebantur, ore immundi habiti sunt. Unde etiam obscenos dictos putant quasi Oscos.*

at VI. 21889: all five of these people Mallonii or Malloniae). In sum, Mallonii have on the one hand a definitely Celtic and provincial flavor (Spain, three Gallic provinces, Liguria); on the other hand, libertine origins in Italy. The curiales at Cumae are late third century; that the Narbonensian senator even bore the name Mallonius is uncertain (*PIR*² I 846), and on any calculation he is much later than Tiberius. That is to say, Suetonius implies that Mallonia was *illustris*, yet the family does not amount to anything at all in first century Rome.

The name is possible, then, but historically most unlikely. In fact, it too is a pun. *Mallos* is Greek for “a tuft of wool”: Mallonia should be translated as Woolly Female. Who better to complain about the unwanted sexual advances of a hirsute, malodorous billy-goat than a nanny-goat? Mallonia is an invention from first to last.

The name Capreae lent itself to attacks on Tiberius. Capri was famously the Island of Goats.²³ Tiberius himself was elderly and reclusive and interested in the goat-god Pan (a subject to be pursued elsewhere). Goats, and Pan, were promiscuous (and smelly: see the two rubrics for *libido* and *odor* in *TLL*, *s.v. hircus*). The mix was too attractive, hence Caprineum, the Goat Shrine, where young people in suitable mythological guise supposedly performed sexual acts. Hence too a clever and vicious piece of gossip concocted from reminiscences of the Roman stage to blacken the Old Goat on the Island of the Goats.

8. *a voluptatibus*

²³ Silvestri 1998.

Between lurid and disjointed accounts of Tiberian excess in food and drink (42) and the emperor's sexual outrages (43-45), Suetonius notes almost in passing that he created a new office, *novum officium a voluptatibus*, which is neatly rendered “master of the imperial pleasures” in the Loeb of J.C. Rolfe. Tiberius placed in charge of it a Roman knight, T. Caesonius Priscus (42. 2), who unfortunately is otherwise unknown. His function is problematic.

What appears to be the same bureau turns up on a handful of later inscriptions, career or funerary. It was apparently the second high office held by Paeon Aug. lib. as *proc. voluptat.* (*ILS* 1569, near Praeneste), probably under the Flavians. It was also the second high office held by another imperial freedman, Ti. Claudius Aug. lib. Classicus, as *divi Nervae proc. a voluptatibus* (*IK* 13. 852, Ephesus, which gives his career in both Greek and Latin: freed by Claudius, he ended up a knight under Trajan). And third comes the knight A. Ofellius Maior Macedo, *epitropos apo twn apolausewn Sebastou* under Hadrian (*ILS* 8849, Nicopolis; Pflaum *Carrières* 112). Finally, in his standard paper on the subject, Weaver points out that the Ianuarius (Aug.) lib. (*CIL* VI. 8619, Rome), “probably from the early third century”, who was promoted from a post with a salary of HS 40,000 *ad splendidam voluptatum statio[nem]*, must likewise have been procurator voluptatum.²⁴

Two slave employees are also attested for the same office. Corinthus Caesaris n. Mettianus, who raised a dedication to Trajan's Genius after 102, gives his occupation as *pedisecus rationis [vol]uptuariae* (*ILS* 1824, Rome). And Euphemus Caes. n. vern. *ex ration. volu.* receives a dedication from his mother (*CIL* VI. 8564 = 33734, Rome).

²⁴ The information in this and the following paragraph comes from Weaver 1980.

There should be no reasonable doubt that the office in these six inscriptions, despite the oscillation between *voluptatum* and *voluptatibus*, is one and the same.

The evidence for it, where it can be dated, is thus bunched around the late first and early second century, from the Flavian era through to Hadrian, with Ianuarius a late entry.²⁵

The nature of this procurator's duties is unknown, but the translation "director of imperial entertainments" (Weaver, Pflaum) is probably near the mark, that is, he was in some manner in charge of imperial *spectacula*. This is indicated, above all, in the cursus inscription of Claudius Classicus, who was procurator simultaneously *a voluptatibus et ad ludum matutinum*, that is, "in charge of training gladiators for the morning shows, an important extension of imperial entertainment facilities under Trajan" (Weaver 151). Furthermore, several inscriptions from Italy and North Africa taken together confirm a close connection, variously phrased, between public *ludi* or *spectacula* and the *voluptas populi*: *CIL* IX. 4976 (Cures Sabini); X. 7295 (Panormus); XIV. 3014 = *ILS* 6252 (Praeneste); *Inscr. Aqvi.* 1. 522 (Aquileia); *IRT* 564, 567, cf. 652 (Lepcis Magna); *AE* 1988. 116 (Thurnburga: *quod insigni lusionis editione patriae suae voluptates ampliaverit*).

All of which leaves us in a quandary. As far as we can see, *voluptates* appear to refer to perfectly respectable public *spectacula*, yet Suetonius includes it in his tirade

²⁵ Flavian: even if Paean's date is uncertain, it is unlikely that Nerva created the office for Classicus during his brief reign. Hirschfeld (1905, 295-296 n.3) drew attention to *CIL* VI. 8665, commemorating *Epelys Ti. Claudi Caesari[s] / Aug. disp. maternus / ab aedificis voluntaris*, and plausibly suggested reading the last word as *voluptatis*. (The words *voluptas* and *voluntas* are often confused on testamentary inscriptions.) Epelys under Claudius would provide a welcome link between Priscus under Tiberius and Paean under the Flavians.

against the vices of Tiberius. Why does he give the knight in charge his formal *tria nomina*, something he does very rarely in his Lives (if ever – I have not checked)? He certainly would know of the office in his own day with what looks like the same title: why then does he make no effort to distinguish them, the vicious from the respectable? Or did he consider them to be the same, despite the chronological gap in attestation, and include the notice here inadvertently?

The ambiguous title of *a voluptatibus* again fits in with the emperor's wry humor, and we can easily accept that Tiberius himself coined the term for his *novum officium*. What he meant by it remains an open question.

9. *Scalae Gemoniae*

“A flight of steps leading alongside the Carcer (q.v.) to the top of the Capitoline on which the bodies of executed criminals were thrown for public exposure and disgrace..... They are first mentioned only in the time of Tiberius, so it is likely that they were a replacement for the Gradus Monetae (q.v.; cf. Ovid, *Fast.* 1. 638), destroyed when Tiberius rebuilt and enlarged the Temple of Concordia..... In the popular mind Gemoniae was clearly derived from *gemere*, but it was a proper name, although we are unable to make a connection with a particular person....”²⁶

²⁶ So Richardson 1992: 345; cf. *LTUR* IV (1999), 241, s.v. *Scalae Gemoniae* (F. Coarelli). Consensus among topographers suggests that these stairs, near the Carcer and visible from the Forum, were likely to have been the lower part or extension of the so-called Gradus Monetae, steps which led from the Temple of Concordia up to the Temple of Juno Moneta on the arx: Richardson above, Coarelli above; *LTUR* II (1995) 372, s.v. *Gradus Monetae* (T.P. Wiseman); Haselberger 2002: 135, s.v. *Gradus: Moneta* (A.G. Thein). These steps are named only once, by Ovid in his *Fasti*, at 1. 637-638, that is, just

The references to this horrific spot²⁷ can be grouped significantly:

A. Tiberian:

AD 20 The mob *effigies Pisonis traxerunt in Gemonias*: Tacitus 3. 14. 4

28 The body of a slave of Titius Sabinus *abiectus in gradibus gemitorii*: Pliny
NH 8. 145; cf. Dio 58. 1. 3 (on the *anabasmoi*)

31 Sejanus' servants slip on the *anabasmoi*: Dio 58. 5. 6. Near the Carcer.

Sejanus' corpse is thrown onto the *anabasmoi* near the Temple of Concord:

Dio 58. 11. 5

Sejanus' children's *corpora in Gemonias abiecta*: Tacitus 5. 9. 2, cf. Dio 58.

11. 6 (*en tois anabasmois*); *FO* 31, [*in Gem(oniis)?*] / *iacuerunt*

33 Sejanus' followers [*compl[ures / in s]calis [Gemoniis iacuer(unt)]*]: *FO*

After the death of Agrippina, Tiberius claims credit *quod non... strangulatam in Gemonias abiecerit*: Suetonius 53. 2, cf. Tacitus 6. 25. 3 (Agrippina was not *in Gemonias proiecta*).

37 After the death of Tiberius some *uncum et Gemonias cadaveri minarentur*:

Suetonius 75. 1.

Unsure how to treat condemned criminals after Tiberius' death, the guards

strangulaverunt abieceruntque in Gemonias Suetonius 75. 2

before Tiberius. Richardson very plausibly suggests (I have not noticed this elsewhere) that they were replaced by the *Scalae Gemoniae* in the course of Tiberius' reconstruction of the Temple of Concordia, which he dedicated in A.D. 10, just ten years before the first notice of the *Gemoniae*. But all this is now cast into doubt: Tucci 2005: 30 and n. 90.

²⁷ All but one in *LTUR*. Rivière 2004: 69-88 adds little.

Uncertain date, on the fate of Tiberius' victims: *Nemo punitorum non in Gemonias abiectus uncoque tractus, viginti uno die abiecti tractique, inter eos feminae et pueri*: Suetonius 61. 4

B. Post-Tiberian

42 Followers of the rebel Vinicianus taken to the *anabasmoi*: Dio 60. 16. 1

69 Prefect of the City Flavius Sabinus executed, *absciso capite truncum corpus Sabini in Gemonias trahunt*: Tacitus *Hist.* 3. 74. 2; cf. *Epit. de Caes.* 8. 4

Vitellius *apud Gemonias minutissimis ictibus excarnificatus atque confectus est*: Suetonius *Vitellius* 17. 2; cf. Tacitus *Hist.* 3. 85 (*ad Gemonias.... propulere*), Dio 65. 21. 2 (brought to the *anabasmoi* and killed); cf. *Aurelius Victor* 8. 6 (*ad scalas Gemonias tractus*), *Epit. de Caes.* 8. 4-5, Orosius 7. 8. 8-9

106 [- caput] Decibali [- - - / - - in sca]llis Gemoni[is - - -]: FO

206/207 Tertullian refers to *gradus Gemonii*: *Adv. Val.* 36. 1

268 After the death of Gallienus, the senate *satellites propinquosque per scalas Gemonias praeceps agendas decrevit*: *Aurelius Victor* 33. 31

469 Condemned Arvandus lives in fear of *uncum et Gemonias et laqueum*:

Sidonius Apollinaris Epp. 1. 7. 12

C. Allegedly Pre-Tiberian

236 BC The senate orders that M. Claudius (Clineas) be executed in jail for making a shameful treaty with the Corsicans, *corpus contumelia carceris et detestanda Gemoniarum scararum nota foedavit*: *Valerius Maximus* 6. 3. 3a

103 After a brilliant career, Q. (Servilius) Caepio *in publicis vinculis spiritum deposuit, corpusque eius funestis carnificis manibus laceratum in scalis Gemoniis iacens magno cum horrore totius fori Romani conspectum est*: Valerius Maximus 6. 9. 13. That is, they were visible from the Forum.

The anecdotes of Valerius Maximus have no value for republican history. M. Claudius was actually exiled, not executed, according to Zonaras 8. 18, based on Dio (cf. fr. 45). Even better, Q. Caepio likewise did not die in jail but went into exile: Cicero *Balb.* 28 – and Valerius Maximus 4. 7. 3! It is surely not a coincidence that Valerius was working on his *Facta et Dicta* in the 20s AD and published it sometime after the fall of Sejanus in 31 (9. 11 ext. 4): his anachronistic testimony is Tiberian.

So, as is commonly assumed, the Gemonian Stairs are an invention of Tiberian times. The longevity of the new toponym after Tiberius is impressive, particularly in the horrifying murder of the emperor Vitellius actually in situ. The very late notice in Sidonius may be antiquarian, dressing up a vague fear, likewise Tertullian in distant Africa, but the *senatusconsultum* of 268 looks authentic, and of course the head of Decebalus in 106 is irrefutable: that is, the Tiberian name lasted.

There seems to be universal consensus as to the derivation of the name: “Gemoniae was undoubtedly connected in the popular mind with *gemo*, ‘I groan’,..... but incorrectly. It is rather derived from the proper name Gemonius, but the reason for its use is unknown.”²⁸ That is, *Scalae Gemoniae*, with an adjectival form of a good Roman name, was analogous in its formation to *Curia Iulia* or *Via Appia*. In more detail, K. Ziegler, in his influential *Pauly-Wissowa* article asserted that the folk etymology was

²⁸ So Platner-Ashby 466; similarly Richardson and Coarelli, above.

to be rejected for compelling linguistic and practical reasons, and that the stairs were probably named after a Gemonius, who may have been the first criminal exposed on them.²⁹ But all this is very dubious.

Two easy observations about this consensus. One is that apparently the bodies of common criminals were not thrown onto these stairs, only those of *political* criminals, traitors and their associates, a grisly object lesson in full view of the Forum. The other is that, despite the universal assumption, there is simply no evidence either that the stair's name was a popular etymology derived from *gemo*, or that it recalled a criminal named Gemonius.

The *nomen* is extremely rare. One or two Etruscan versions aside, it seems to appear three times in Latin inscriptions: twice at backwoods Piquentem in Histria, in two women who are clearly related in some way, a Gemonia Capitonis f., wife of L. Mamilius Sp.f. Megaplinus, and a Gemonia Marcella daughter of Megaplina Maximilla (*CIL* V. 446, 447); and once on a tile formerly in the museum at Pisaurum, provenance unknown and now lost, which names a Gemonius Palatinus (!) (*CIL* XI. 6689. 116). (Ziegler also cites the place-name Gemuniana on *CIL* II. 1639.) And it turns up only once on Greek inscriptions, in a Gemonia whose surname is lost, related to and probably the wife of, a Messenian aristocrat with the legendary name of Tib. Claudius Aristomenes, who flourished in the reign of Nero: *IG* IV. 2. 1450.³⁰ The name is found nowhere in Greek and Latin literature, and it is tellingly absent from the 30 to 40,000 Latin inscriptions of Rome, some of which record names of stupendous obscurity. The eponymous Gemonius, criminal or otherwise, is a most unlikely invention.

²⁹ *PW* 7. 1 (1910) 1115-1116.

³⁰ This is the only attestation in the East known to an expert: Spawforth 2002: 102.

The derivation of “*Scalae Gemoniae*” is surely the reverse of the modern consensus about it: not that popular imagination connected the proper name *Gemonia/us* with the verb for groaning/mourning/lamenting, but that the verb “*gemo*” lies behind the creation of a pseudo-place-name. There might even be a putative traitor *Gemonius*, aetiologically invented to account for the toponym, much as the nearby *Mons Tarpeia* was named after the traitorous Vestal “*Tarpeia*”. In any event, the alleged “folk etymology” is actually rather sophisticated – it sounds more like one of the clever pasquinades for which the people of Rome were notorious. Or it might even derive from the emperor himself, with his antiquarian bent and his dark sense of humor. And inevitably it recalls the equally fictitious *Mallonia*.

10. *Carnulus* and *carnificina*

Suetonius 61. 5: *Mori volentibus vis adhibita vivendi. Nam mortem adeo leve supplicium putabat, ut cum audisset unum e reis, Carnulum nomine, anticipasse eam, exclamaverit: “Carnulus me evasit.”*

Those who wished to die were forced to live; for he thought death so light a punishment that when he heard that one of the accused, *Carnulus* by name, had anticipated his execution, he cried: “*Carnulus* has given me the slip.”

As far as I am aware, the name *Carnulus* appears nowhere else in Greek and Latin literature or on inscriptions, and the word appears to be hapax. I suspect that the anecdote has a point which (as so often) the biographer has either ignored or

misunderstood. *Carnulus* is an otherwise unattested diminutive of *caro*, *carnis*, meat. Here Tiberius melodramatically laments that this particular “morsel” or “cutlet”, *carnulus*, *unum e reis*, has escaped him, and Suetonius has mistakenly inferred that this was the name of the accused. *Carnulus* then may have two apt resonances.

First, the victim as a piece of meat, a part of a meal, recalls the common trope of the tyrant as cannibal, feeding off his people metaphorically.³¹ Reminiscent of the Mallonia scene, with its frustrated Snidely Whiplash, the story has a theatrical element which surely came from an anti-Tiberian tradition that Suetonius was too dull to appreciate. Compare the anonymous verse quoted by him (59. 1):

Fastidit vinum, quia iam sitit iste cruorem;

Tam bibit hunc avide, quam bibit ante merum.

That man does not care for wine, since now he is thirsty for blood;

He drinks it as greedily as he drank undiluted wine before.

But second, *carnulus* also recalls the *carnifex*, the butcher and by extension the torturer and executioner.³² Not unnaturally at Rome, the word became a favorite term of political invective: Verres was *crudelissimus carnifex civium sociorumque*, Pompey, memorably, *adulescentulus carnifex*.³³ The word must have been applied to Tiberius: Suetonius devotes a long section (61ff.) to the daily executions under the cruel tyrant (*nullus a poena hominum cessavit dies*); indeed, when Tiberius finally realized that his son Drusus had been poisoned by his daughter-in-law Drusilla and her paramour Sejanus

³¹ Well introduced at Leigh 1996. On Atreus, Thyestes, and the Julio-Claudians: Champlin 2003: 306-308.

³² “Carnulus” as “morsel/cutlet”, and Tiberius as *carnifex*, I owe to Bob Kaster, who suggested them after I had given up.

³³ Cicero *In Verrem* 2. 1. 9; Helvius Mancina *ap.* Valerius Maximus 6. 2. 8. Et al.

“there was no one whom he spared from torment and death” (62. 1). And then, as one climax of the list of horrors, a startling contemporary note from the biographer: *carnificinae eius ostenditur locus Capreis, unde damnatos post longa et exquisita tormenta praecipitari coram se in mare iubebat.....*, at Capri they still point out the scene of his executions, from which he used to order that those who had been condemned after long and exquisite tortures be cast headlong into the sea before his eyes. (Loeb trans., J.C. Rolfe) “*Carnificina*” in the *OLD* is (1) the work or act of the executioner or torturer, hence (2) execution or torture. But the word has a third meaning which escaped the *OLD*, and which Rolfe intuited: at Livy 2. 23. 6, where it appears paired with *ergastulum* in a debtor’s lament, it clearly means torture chamber.³⁴ I suspect that we should in fact take *Carnificina* as a proper noun – here *locus Carnificinae* – like *Sellaria* and *Caprineum* and other sites on Tiberius’ island: his Torture Chamber, or Butcher Shop. Like the *Mallonia* story, then, an anti-Tiberian neologism, grafted onto the known habits of the emperor, or perhaps even created by him.

So, yes, Caesar could confer citizenship on a word. *Colum* and *spintria* are enough to demonstrate that. More interesting are the patterns of thought, if 10 examples can be said to reveal patterns.

One is a particularly Roman sense of humor, harsh and cynical, be it that of Tiberius, his followers, or his enemies. *Mentagra*, *Sellaria*, *spintriae*, *pisciculi*,

³⁴ The word does not seem to appear in inscriptions, and I can find no text where it has what should be its basic meaning of butcher shop.

Caprineum, Mallonia, Scalae Gemoniae, even Carnificina: each of these novelties has something clever about it, often a pun or a double meaning. Even a voluptatibus is suitably ambiguous.

Another is that that Capri indeed begins to look like something of a theme-park under Tiberius, with exotic foreign and mythological names given to various locations on the island, just as they were to “landscapes of allusion” at other aristocratic villas, most memorably Hadrian’s Tivoli: Sellaria and Caprineum join Venerii Loci, Pharos, Apragopolis, and Villa Iovis (or Ionis) on the island, and perhaps Carnificina.³⁵

I would be grateful for further insight into the notes above, and particularly for any other “Tiberian neologism”.

³⁵ Görler 1990 for an introduction to the subject.

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