

APOCOLOCYNTOSIS - A SUGGESTION

Confessedly *cucurbita* is used in Latin to denote a foolish person (see, for example, Petronius 39, and Juvenal xiv, 58), but, the identification of κολοκύντη with *cucurbita* in this special sense accepted, it is still difficult to perceive a connection between the usual title and the content of the satire. When he was alive Claudius was foolish in many ways, a veritable "pumpkin-head". Why should there be given to a burlesque which describes indignities the poor creature had to endure after death a title which implies his *conversion* into a pumpkin¹⁾? Some critics have suggested that the "pumpkinification" part is missing from our text, others that the title belongs to a piece now lost²⁾. The former conjecture does not hold good, since the work is a neat whole with a fitting conclusion as it stands, and the latter unsupported by evidence.

The title in the best MS (Codex Sangallensis, No. 569 in the library of St Gall) runs thus: Divi Claudii incipit Αποθησις Annei Seneca per satiram. Here Bücheler³⁾ supposed that an original phrase, Divi Claudii Αποκολοκύντωσις, had been corrupted with a marginal explanation, Apotheosis per satiram. The general drift of this argument is likely enough, but the word ἀποκολοκύντωσις is worth closer study. Our *sole* testimony for it is found in Cassius Dio lx, 35:

συνέθηκε μὲν γὰρ ὁ Σενέκας σύγγραμμα, ἀποκολοκύντωσιν αὐτὸ
ὡσπερ τινὰ ἀπαθανάτισιν ὀνομάσας.

ἀποκολοκύντωσιν L', corr., ἀποκολοκέντωσιν VC.

The tradition is not unanimous on the reading and since the word ἀποκολοκύντωσις seems to be unsatisfactory as a title, what can be made

quod Iunoni sacra primus fecit, aber auch Cassiod. var. 7, 18: hoc (sc. opus, i. e. arma) primum Phoroneus Iunoni dicitur obtulisse, ut inventum suum numinis... auspicio consecraret. In allen Fällen ist Phoroneus der älteste Erfinder-König. Cassiodor scheint die beiden Hygin-Versionen zu verbinden, ebensogut kann Hygin aber auch die ältere Verbindung getrennt haben; denn natürlich ist ‚arma‘ für eine aitiologische Fabel ergiebiger als ‚aram‘, wenn auch ‚plane obscurum‘ bleibt, was Phoroneus mit Heras Waffen zu tun haben soll, Kremmer 72 f. Aber Hygin leitet auch die Weinnischung qua κεράσαι von Cerasus ab, die erste medizinische Klinik von Asklepios, in Umdeutung der incubatio, des κατακλίνειν εἰς Ἄσκληπιῶδ, vgl. Aristophan. Plut. 411; vesp. 124; weiteres Kremmer a. O.

1) The real point of the satire is surely that although he has been officially deified Claudius is nevertheless treated in the next world with the same contempt and disrespect that he suffered in life; he is not made more of a fool but is one just as much.

2) See the literature cited by Duff, *Hist. of Latin Lit. in the Silver Age* (1960), pp. 195 and 548.

3) *Symbola Philologorum Bonnensium*, 1864, p. 31 ff.

of the variant ἀποκολοκέντωσιν? The removal of the letter τ produces a seemingly possible Greek word which would have considerable relevance to the matter of the satire. ἀποκένωω and κένωσις are employed in physiological contexts, and κόλον is an anatomical term relating to the intestines. In the satire at the end of section 4 where the passing of Claudius is recounted we have:

ultima vox eius haec inter homines audita est, cum maiorem sonitum emisisset illa parte qua facilius loquebatur: "vae me, puto, concacavi me." quod an fecerit nescio; omnia certe concacavit.

Interpreting this evidence we may be able to assume a scatologically humorous title ἀποκολοκένωσις. From the other available sources, too, we see that the satirist has throughout very cleverly introduced Claudius' weaknesses, intellectual and physical; the Latin passage quoted above may allude to another well-known bodily infirmity of the emperor about which we have not elsewhere been informed. ἀποκολοκένωσις could, furthermore, contain an allusion to the reputed manner of Claudius' death by mushroom poisoning⁴), the author both having in mind the effects on the constitution such a method of assassination would have, and at the same time subtly referring to the emperor's deification by the name of an action which marked its commencement⁵).

κόλον was taken over into Latin. Lewis and Short quote Pliny the Elder and Scribonianus Largus (who accompanied Claudius to Britain in 43 B. C. as a medical officer and was physician to Messalina), but along with the T. L. L. they offer a defective account for they have not distinguished κόλον and κώλον⁶).

ἀποκολοκένωσις, then, would have more meaning as a title than ἀποκολοκόντωσις, for, apart from being readily intelligible within the narrow group of cultivated persons in which the satire was doubtless circulated, it would relate distinctly to a crucial incident in the text — an incident which for Claudius signifies the end of this life and the beginning of humiliations in the next, god though he be.

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4) Tacitus, *Annals*, xii, 66—7; Suetonius, *Claudius*, xlv; Pliny, *N. H.*, xxii, 92, and Dio, lx, 34, 1. Josephus, *Ant. Jud.*, xx, 8, 1, is hesitant. Cary, *Hist. of Rome* (second ed., 1954), p. 539: "The alternative explanation that Claudius, who was over sixty and had always been a gross feeder, died of syncope, should not be rejected out of hand."

5) Tacitus, *Annals*, xii, 67, after reporting the story that the poisoned mushrooms did not appear to be efficacious at first, adds: "simul soluta alvus subvenisse videbatur".

6) It may be argued that κόλον is a technical word and therefore likely to be generally unfamiliar. But Roman medical men were deeply indebted to their Greek predecessors. The *Compositiones* of Scribonianus Largus, for example, is based entirely on Greek works. It is not impossible, then, that educated Roman patients would pick up Greek medical terms from the doctors who attended them and even give them a currency, however limited.