

## JUVENAL, SATIRE 1.155–7

pone Tigillinum, taeda lucebis in illa  
qua stantes ardent qui fixo gutture fumant,  
et latum media sulcum deducit harena (1.155–7).

These lines, presented as they appear in the O.C.T., are among the most difficult and hotly disputed that Juvenal wrote.<sup>1</sup> The poet defends his decision not to attack contemporary politicians directly: ‘expose a Tigellinus’, he says, ‘and you know what the consequences will be’. It has long been recognized that the consequences related are probably inspired by those suffered by the Christians in A.D. 64 during the reign of Nero,<sup>2</sup> and so vividly described by Tacitus. After the great fire (which broke out again on the sixth day on the estate of none other than Tigellinus; cf. *Ann.* 15.40), the Christians were put to death by a number of refined punishments, which included being turned into human torches: ‘aut crucibus adfixi aut flammandi, atque ubi defecisset dies, in usum nocturni luminis urerentur’ (15.44). Those condemned to die in such a way were wrapped in what was known as the *tunica molesta* (for the name see Juvenal 8.235 and Martial 10.25.5); Seneca, *Ep.* 14.5, provides details of this contrivance: ‘illam tunicam alimentis ignium et inlitam et textam’.

The main difficulty of the passage as it stands is that there is no real subject for *deducit* in line 157; the scholar Pithoeus sums up the despair that the line provokes: ‘nec ullus est in his Satyris locus, quem ego ex Grammaticorum Glossis minus grammaticae intellegam.’ Housman, in his edition, felt obliged to supply a missing line after 156. Grammatically, of course, a subject could be supplied from the *qua* of the previous line, referring back to *taeda*; in Latin a relative pronoun is often supplied from a different case in a preceding clause, as in Cicero, *Verr.* 4.9: ‘mancipium putarunt quo et omnes utimur et non praebetur a populo.’ But the result would hardly make sense; the *taeda* could draw a furrow only if it were dragged along; it would not, however, be an efficient way of producing a human torch, and in any case *stantes* shows that the victims are standing up. The suggestions that *sulcus* might refer to a group of men burnt in a row, or to the pool of pitch that has poured from the bodies, have not won wide support. *Sulcus*, as Duff remarks, must refer to some sort of depression in the soil.<sup>3</sup> In view of these problems, some scholars prefer to accept the reading *deducis*, which has a slightly weaker manuscript authority. It might be argued then that Juvenal has introduced a second, distinct, punishment of being dragged along the ground. This, however, produces the difficulty that the tense changes from the future *lucebis* to the present *deducis*; it is not easy to understand how the punishments could have been inflicted on different occasions. One explanation

<sup>1</sup> I do not propose to enumerate all the scholars who have expressed views on the problems over the centuries. Useful summaries can be found in H. Henninius, *D. Junii Juvenalis Satyrae* (Utrecht, 1685) (especially valuable for scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and for scholiasts); L. Friedländer, *D. Junii Juvenalis Saturarum Libri V* (Leipzig,

1895); J. Duff, *D. Junii Juvenalis Saturae XIV* (Cambridge, 1914).

<sup>2</sup> Scholiast: ‘quem si laeseris, vivus ardebis, quemadmodum in munere Neronis vivi arserunt.’

<sup>3</sup> For the curious notion that *sulcum* refers to light see S. G. Owen, *CR* 11 (1897), 400–1.

for the change of tense, as old at least as the edition of John Britannicus, is that Juvenal is not describing a form of punishment but is using a popular Latin figure of speech 'to plough the sand', in the sense of 'to waste time', as in 7.48–9: 'nos tamen hoc agimus tenuique in pulvere sulcos / ducimus et litus sterili versamus aratro.' But the context of punishments inflicted in a public display surely requires that the reference to *harena* be a concrete reference to the amphitheatre. In sum, then, the basic problem of the passage is the absence in it of anything capable of drawing a furrow in the sand. There is, in addition, one minor problem. The men are said to be standing *fixo gutture* (or *pectore*, in the better manuscripts). Now they can hardly have their throats or chests transfixed—there is no point in killing someone if you plan to burn him alive. If *fixo* means 'bound', as it can do, to some sort of stake, the resultant immobility would seem to rule out any opportunity to draw a furrow. If the reference is to the attachment of the *tunica* (but hardly to the throat) then the Latin is decidedly odd, and we should have expected *fixa tunica* or the like.

The problem can, in my opinion, be solved, and the key comes from an unexpected source. On a celebrated mosaic from the Roman Villa on the hill of Dar Buc Ammera, near Zliten in Tripolitania, published by Aurigemma and dated by him to the end of the first century A.D. (and thus contemporary with Juvenal) there appear several scenes from the amphitheatre.<sup>1</sup> On one section are depicted two unfortunate victims standing on what Aurigemma calls 'carrelli per supplizi'. These small carts resemble miniature rickshaws with small wheels, an upright pole to which the victim is attached, and a long horizontal pole pulled by a slave.<sup>2</sup> In the Zliten mosaic these contraptions are used to wheel the victim about as he is attacked by wild animals, but there is no reason why they could not have been used to transport human torches in the arena. It would, of course, be impossible to prove that this happened during the persecution of the Christians (or, more importantly, that Juvenal might have imagined that it happened), but it should be noted that Tacitus' account does seem to draw distinction between those who were crucified and those who were turned into human torches (on the problems of the text see Furneaux ad loc.). This distinction is supported by Sulpicius Severus, *Sac. Hist.* 11: 'multi crucibus affixi, aut flamma usti, plerumque in id reservati, ut, cum defecisset dies, in usum nocturni luminis urerentur.' It may be that Juvenal in the passage under discussion has some such device in mind (although not necessarily of the same precise design as on the Zliten mosaic; one might expect broader wheels, capable of drawing a *latum sulcum*), and I suggest that the *taeda* of line 155 is a corruption of *raeda*.<sup>3</sup> This allows us to make perfect sense of 156–7. The victim stands on the *raeda*, attached by the neck (or better, by the chest) to the upright pole, and the *raeda* draws a furrow in the sand as it is pulled along. If the corruption occurred in an early stage of the manuscript tradition, because of the unfamiliarity of the scribe with the 'carrelli', it is easy to understand why later scribes had such difficulty with *deducit*.

<sup>1</sup> *I mosaici di Zliten* (Rome, Milan, 1926), pp. 180–4. The mosaics are also depicted in *La Mosaïque gréco-romaine* (Paris, 1963), p. 155, fig. 19, which also contains a discussion of their date (pp. 147–54).

<sup>2</sup> I am not aware of any literary references to the 'carrelli'. Tertullian, *Apol.* 50.3,

says: 'tali curru triumphamus', but his intention is almost certainly figurative.

<sup>3</sup> In line 155 the manuscripts are divided between *lucibus* and *lucet*; while the different readings affect the over interpretation of the passage, it makes no difference to my argument about *taeda/raeda*, whichever is adopted.

This suggested emendation derives support from the lines that follow. Juvenal draws a neat contrast between the courageous writer who might dare to take on a Tigellinus and the poisoner who has already dispatched three uncles. The writer will end his days being pulled around the arena on a cart, covered with burning pitch. The poisoner will also be carried about, but he will rest on soft pillows and look down with contempt on his fellow-men:

qui dedit ergo tribus patruis aconita, *vebatur*  
pensilibus plumis atque illinc despiciat nos?

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