

JUVENAL, 1. 155–7

It is gratifying to read, in a recent issue of this periodical,¹ Mr. A. A. Barrett's informed exposition of the syntax of this passage, even though he balks at the need to extract a grammatical subject for the verb *deducit* in 157 from the relative pronoun *qua* in the previous line. However his persuasive presentation of what he relies on as evidence in support of his suggested interpretation from the mosaics from Zliten in Tripolitania,² which portray scenes in an amphitheatre, may seduce the unwary into an over-ready acquiescence in his proposal to read *raeda* in 157 for *taeda* of the manuscript tradition. Juvenal's words were correctly understood by T. Maguire as long ago as 1881,³ and the solution was restated with clarity in a note by W. V. Clausen recently.⁴ Nevertheless misconceptions will persist for so long as we lack commentaries⁵ which set out in full the passages needed to illuminate, in more senses than one, the imagery underlying Juvenal's phrase 'latum media sulcum deducit harena', and meanwhile something more needs to be said. Imagery there must be here, since the adjective *latum* consorts ill with a literal interpretation of *sulcum*,⁶ whether in the sense of a furrow traced on the ground by a dragged corpse (a suggestion which confuses two distinct forms of punishment and which was disposed of long ago) or to the tracks made by the two wheels of the curious little vehicles, aptly described as 'rickshaws' by Mr. Barrett, portrayed on the mosaics in which a stake-bound figure is being conveyed. Furthermore the presence of rampant animals in these mosaics leaves no doubt that the punishment of being thrown to wild beasts (*ad bestias mitti, bestiis obici*) is depicted, not that of burning, while our ignorance of the use of any similar conveyance in a punitive connection indicates that we have here a representation of a peculiar and probably local custom.

However warmly one may welcome in principle attempts to solve literary problems by reference to surviving monuments, in this instance Mr. Barrett was ill-advised to relegate to a footnote the possibility of *sulcum* referring to a furrow of light. A modern reader may well be puzzled by this image, but writers of the Silver Age expected their public to respond to echoes of Augustan poetry, since by their day Virgil and Horace were established as 'school authors'.⁷ A reader or listener of Juvenal's own time, alerted by the verb *lucebis* in 155, could hardly have failed to recall Virgil's description of a comet or meteorite in *Aeneid* 2. 693 f.:

de caelo lapsa per umbras
stella facem ducens multa cum luce cucurrit.
... tum longó limite sulcus 697
dat lucem et late circum loca sulphure fumant.

¹ *CQ* N. S. 27 (1977), 438–40.

² These were first published by S. Aurigemma in *Dedalo* 4 (1923), 397 ff., with illustrations on pp. 399 and 401. They were later republished in his book *I mosaici di Zliten*, 1926, pp. 180 ff., with the illustrations reproduced: the most detailed is that on p. 184 (fig. 114).

³ *Hermathena* 4 (1881–3), 422–3.

⁴ *Harvard Stud. in Cl. Philol.* 78 (1974),

181–3.

⁵ H. L. Wilson in his edition of 1903 refers to Owen's article in *CR* 11 (1897), 401 f., and to Virgil *Aen.* 2. 693 f. in a footnote. Other editors are less helpful.

⁶ Mr. Barrett notes the inapplicability of *latum* to the tracks made by narrow-treaded wheels, but takes this difficulty in his stride (p. 439, near the bottom).

⁷ Cf. Juvenal 7. 227 and 234 f.

With this may be compared Lucan 5. 561–3:⁸

ad quorum motus non solum lapsa per altum
aera dispersos traxere cadentia sulcos
sidera . . .

or Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica* 1. 568–9 (of Jupiter):

ingenti flammantem nubila sulco
direxit per inane facem.

In Greek the same image is found twice in Apollonius Rhodius, once at 4. 296–7 (noted by Clausen, p. 182 n. 4) and even more graphically at 3. 140–1,⁹ where Aphrodite says she will reward Eros for his services in implanting a passion for Jason in Medea's heart with a magical ball such that

εἴ μιν εἰς ἐνὶ χερσὶ βάλοιο
ἀσπὴρ ὥς φλεγέθοντα δι' ἥερος ὀλκὸν ἴησω.

The language is imaginative, but hardly bolder than Aeschylus' *φλογὸς μέγαν πῶγωνα* (*Agamemnon* 306) of the beacon-relay announcing the fall of Troy.

Thus what Juvenal is describing here is the moment of ignition of either a single stake-bound victim, or, if full weight is to be attached to *latus*, that of several such persons planted in a line or rectangle (or circle) *media barena*. If this took place at night, as Tacitus indicates in his lurid description of this atrocity ('... ubi defecisset dies . . .', *Ann.* 15. 44), the spectacular visual effect of the 'furrow' of light traced against the darkened background of the amphitheatre as the blaze shot up is easily imagined.

There is indeed a mild prothusteron in the mention of 'fixo gutture'¹⁰ fumant' in 156 before the reference to the furrow of light in 157, but the two events are sufficiently close together in time for this not to affect the argument. It is also true that Juvenal has used the compound verb *deducit* where *ducit* might have been expected, as for instance we find in Cato's phrase 'sulcos ducito' (*de Agr.* 33, 2). However in similar senses simple and compound forms of this verb are used indifferently without perceptible effect on the meaning: thus Pliny (*N. H.* 6. 165) has 'fossas duxit', yet 'fossas deduxit' occurs in *Bell. Alex.* 38, 3. So too both *ducere* and *deducere* are used with the nouns *linea* and *littera* in the sense of 'trace'.

Mr. Barrett has done a useful service in redirecting attention to this once controversial passage, and the Zliten mosaics have an interest in their own right. It should however be clear that Juvenal's text here can be understood unemended and without recourse to them.

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⁸ Add too Lucan 10. 500–2 and Silius Italicus 1. 354–7.

⁹ Curiously this passage has not, so far as I am aware, been brought into the discussion of these lines of Juvenal previously.

¹⁰ For the purpose of this discussion the problem of the variants *pectore/gutture* is

unimportant. I cannot repress a persistent feeling that these may be both ancient, going back, for all we can tell, to Juvenal himself, although it seems that the more cogent examples of this phenomenon in his writings are concentrated in his book III, containing satires 7, 8, and 9.