

A MEDICAL THEORY AND THE TEXT AT LACTANTIUS, *MORT. PERSEC.* 33.7 AND PELAGONIUS 347

I. LACTANTIUS

It would be a mistake to attempt to identify in modern terms the disease of Galerius described so graphically by Lactantius, *Mort.* 33 (cf. the similar description at Eus. *H.E.* 8.16).¹ Consumption by lice or worms, if not genital ‘gangrene’, was a typical end for a tyrant or the impious,² and there must be an element of literary exaggeration in Lactantius’ account. But whatever one makes of the nature of the illness, Lactantius did set out to give the passage a scientific plausibility by his use of technical medical phraseology, and by an allusion to a medical theory at 33.7. Recognition of this theory allows one to settle the text at one point, where editors have failed to agree. There is also a second place in the chapter where familiarity with medical Latin points one towards the solution of a textual problem.

There is a doctrine found in both medical and veterinary texts which holds that the treatment, particularly the early treatment, of an external affliction may merely cause it to turn inwards (or elsewhere), and hence to become more serious. The doctrine is stated with particular clarity in veterinary texts: Apsyrus, *Hipp. Berol.* 69.1, p. 268.18 ψώραν τὴν ἐν τοῖς ἵπποις γενομένην οὐ δεῖ προσφάτως θεραπεύειν, ἀλλ’ ἐὰν, ἄχρισ οὐ ἔξω τραπῇ πάσα. ἔστι γὰρ ἀνάχυσις μάλεως τῆς ὑποδερματίτιδος, ἣν τάχιον θεραπεύων στεγνώσεις τὴν ἔξοδον· στυπτικῶν γὰρ ὄντων τῶν προσφερομένων, ἀναγκαῖον ἔσω τρέπεσθαι καὶ συμβαίνει κακοποιεῖσθαι (this whole passage was used by the author of the *Mulomedicina Chironis*, 613–14: note 613 ‘quod non oportet recentem sanari, nisi cum se tota foras seuocauit. est enim similis maleus succutaneae, ex qua ei fit scabies. cui quidem si citius succurras, difficiliter euadit. cum enim sint acra medicamenta, quae eis imponuntur, necesse habet morbus introuersus abscondere et in peius se uertit’); *Mul. Chir.* 196 ‘quod si prius deforis aliquid imposuerit, morbus interius magis fugit et cito eis necem inferat’; Vegetius, *Mul.* 1.9.4 ‘nam extrinsecus coepta medicamenta morbum non adimunt, sed interius compellunt et hac ratione periculum generant’; id. 1.16.1 ‘cui talis est adhibenda medicina, ut non extrinsecus uredinem uel uulnuscula ipsius curare temptemus. nam morbus refugiet intrinsecus et penetrabit in uiscera ac periculum gignet.’ For medical Latin, note Celsus 6.2.1 ‘ubi aliquod in eo uitium est, non incommodum est summam cutem potius subinde corrumpi quam id quod nocet in aliam partem magis necessariam uerti’, Philumenus,

¹ Such attempts have been made: see O. Temkin, ‘History of Hippocratism in Late Antiquity: the Third Century and the Latin West’, in id. *The Double Face of Janus, and Other Essays in the History of Medicine* (Baltimore and London, 1977), p. 168 n. 4.

² See Thomas Africa, ‘Worms and the Death of Kings’, *Classical Antiquity* 1 (1982), 1ff., A. Keaveney and J. A. Madden, ‘Phthiriasis and its Victims’, *Symb. Osl.* 57 (1982), 87ff., J. M. Riddle, ‘Gargilius Martialis as a Medical Writer’, *J. Hist. Med.* 39 (1984), 408ff., especially 416–20, M. Davies and J. Kathirithamby, *Greek Insects* (London, 1986), pp. 173ff. (stressing the imaginary character of phthiriasis). Among the numerous passages which might be cited, note II Maccabees 9.5–12 (on the death of Antiochus Epiphanes, a passage which influenced Lactantius: see J. L. Creed, *Lactantius, De Mortibus Persecutorum* (Oxford, 1984), xxxviii), Acts 12:23 (death of Herod Antipater), Tert. *Scap.* 3.4.

p. 16 Puschmann 'non debet reprimi, ne materia in aliam conuersa partem superscriptas generet passiones'.

Galerius' *ulcus*, which begins in *inferiori parte genitalium* (1) and then spreads (4), is treated constantly by the doctors: 6 'non desinunt tamen infelices medici uel sine spe uincendi mali fouere curare.' The only result is that it turns inwards and seizes his internal organs (7). There is an obvious allusion here to the theory described above, and one is accordingly required to adopt the minor emendation of Toinard: '*repercussum medellis malum recidit introrsus et interna comprehendit*' (*repercussis medullis* C: *repercussis medellis* Nic. Heinsius).³ The affliction is forced back by the treatment and retreats inwards. One should compare the compound *recidit* with *refugiet* at Veg. 1.16.1, *introrsus* with *interius*, *intrinsecus* and *introuersus* in various of the passages cited above, and *interna comprehendit* with *penetrabit in uiscera* in Veg. 1.16.1. J. L. Creed⁴ retains *medullis* and changes *repercussis* to *percussis*, following Graevius. This text is implausible. *Percussis medullis* is tautologous in the vicinity of *interna comprehendit*, and the sequence of events is by no means clear. A *malum* which fell inwards and caught hold of the victim's *interna* might conceivably then 'strike' his marrow, but to have the marrow mentioned at the start of the sentence is difficult. The elimination of the transmitted *repercutio* is also a banalisation of the text. *Repercutio* is a rare word, but one used elsewhere by Lactantius, once indeed in this work in a medical context in another death scene (49.3; cf. *Op. Dei* 15). For a further medical use of the term – of the driving of something (the *matrix*) back into the body – see Theod. Prisc. p. 230.3 'odoribus enim insuauibus repercutitur'. Heinsius' emendation⁵ is better, but (in common with that of Graevius) it allows no reference to the external treatment as turning the *malum* inwards.

That Lactantius should have alluded to a scientific theory at 33.7 is made more plausible by the phraseology he adopts a few sentences earlier (§4), phraseology which betrays his attempt to confer a medical tone on the passage. As the *ulcus* spreads, 'it begins not to feel the treatment', 'incipit uulnus non sentire medicinam'. This expression is a medical cliché (with *sentio* used in the medical sense 'to be affected by, feel the influence of': see *OLD* s.v. 5). It occurs most notably in a passage of Celsus which has a number of similarities to our own (see further below): 5.28.3A 'ipsum ulcus neque tactum neque medicamentum sentit'. Cf. Cels. 3.21.8 'id enim, quod extenuatur, medicinam sentit'; note too Scrib. Larg. 11 'quod cum primum senserit, remoueatur remedium' (with a different, but synonymous object), Pelagonius 269.2 (with another synonymous object) 'haec facientes cotidie, usque cum et curam sentiat' (the passage is based on Apsyrus, but the phraseology was not determined by the Greek: *Hipp. Berol.* p. 179.14 *ἔως ἂν ἐνδῶ τὸ πάθος*), Pel. 229 'si nihil senserit' (elliptical, and no doubt idiomatic: 'if (the condition) has not responded at all'), Vegetius, *Mul.* 1.12.4 'ut animal... sentiat medicinam', id. 1.64.1 'tussienti autem cum passi hemina dabis, et statim sentiet curam', id. 2.67.6 'si uero tanta indignatio fuerit, ut eiusmodi non sentiat curas'.

The first passage of Celsus cited above resembles our passage of Lactantius in that it too deals with a type of malignant *ulcus* (equated with Gk. *θηρίωμα*, and perhaps

³ The emendation, attributed to a *uir insignis*, is in Nic. Toinard, *Notae in Lactantium* (p. 382), which can be found in P. Bauldri (ed.), *Lucii Caecilii Firmiani Lactantii De Mortibus Persecutorum cum notis Stephani Baluzii*² (1692). Also attributed to Boherellus (ibid., p. 223).

⁴ See n. 2. S. Brandt (*L. Caelii Firmiani Lactantii opera omnia* II.1 (CSEL xxvii, 1893)) and J. Moreau (*Lactance, De la mort des persécuteurs* (Paris, 1954)) print *repercussum medellis*.

⁵ To be found in Bauldri (p. 223).

to be identified with phagadoenic ulcer).⁶ It is indeed possible that Lactantius was familiar with Celsus' description of this *ulcus*. Apart from the shared cliché and subject matter, there are other similarities of phraseology and thought between the two passages, which I list below. It must be stressed that direct dependence of Lactantius on Celsus cannot be proved. But whether or not Lactantius knew Celsus, he was certainly familiar with medical accounts of pustulent sores, and has exploited the phraseology used by medical writers to describe them.⁷ The similarities between the passages are as follows:

(i) Celsus speaks of his *ulcus* 'coming to birth', as does Lactantius of his: Cels. 5.28.3A 'id (ulcus) et per se nascitur', Lact. 33.1 'nascitur ei ulcus malum' (cf. Cels. 2.6.5 'ulcus, quod... natum est'). *Nascor* is commonly used in medical writings of the outbreak of skin diseases: e.g. Cass. Fel. pp. 13.12 'nascitur quidem pruritus in superficie cutis capillosis in locis', 15.4 'nascuntur aliquando in uultu aliquando in toto corpore...', 16.6 'nascuntur aliquando in uultu aliquando in brachiis...', *saep.* (note the word order in these passages, comparing that of Lactantius), Veg. *Mul.* 1.5.1 'uulnera in corpore eius scabiei similia nascuntur', id. 2.109.2 'aliquando in corpore ipsius similia furunculis tubercula nascuntur'.

(ii) Celsus varies his terminology by calling the *ulcus* a *malum* (3B 'id quoque malum serpit'); so too does Lactantius: 7 'malum recidit introrsus'; cf. §§6, 10 and also §1 'nascitur ei *ulcus malum* in inferiori parte genitalium *serpitque latius*', comparing the verb employed by Celsus with *malum*. For *malum* elsewhere in Celsus of *ulcera* and the like, cf. 5.26.34B 'dum malum serpit' (of *gangrena*), 5.26.34C 'si nihilo magis malum constitit, uri...debet' (same disease), 5.28.4D-E 'ipsa autem *ulcera* si mediocriter serpunt...ac si celeriter *malum serpit*'.⁸ The use of *serpo* by both Lactantius and Celsus in these passages is typical of accounts of spreading disease. In Celsus note especially 6.18.2G 'si uero *ulcus latius* atque *altius serpit*', comparing Lact. 33.1 cited above. Here Celsus, like Lactantius, is dealing with *ulcera* which afflict the *partes obscenae* (6.18.1).

(iii) In both Lactantius and Celsus blood flows from the sore: Lact. 33.2 'et rupta uena fluit sanguis usque ad periculum mortis', Cels. 5.28.3A 'nonnumquam ex ulcere sanguis erumpit.' The verb-phrase of Lactantius (*fluit sanguis*) is different from that of Celsus, but it can be paralleled in another similar passage of Celsus (6.18.3B-C):

si cancer ipsum colem occupauit...exciso cancro uulnus esse adurendum...ergo longa quiete et immobili paene corpore opus est, donec ex ipso crustae leniter resoluantur. ac si uel uolens aliquis uel imprudens, dum ingreditur immature, crustas diduxit, et *fluit sanguis*.

This passage not only shares a phrase with Lact. 33; it also presents much the same pattern of events. A *cancer* afflicts the male genitalia (*colem*). Surgery (*exciso*) and cauterisation (*adurendum*) are to be tried. In Lactantius' account surgery is certainly employed (2 'medici secant curant'), and possibly cauterisation as well, if one introduces *urunt* either instead of or before *curant* (*urunt* for *curant*, Boherellus <*urunt*> *curant* Columbus). According to Celsus, the patient must remain still for a

⁶ See A. T. Sandison, 'Diseases of the Skin', in D. Brothwell and A. T. Sandison, *Diseases in Antiquity* (Springfield, Ill., 1967), p. 451.

⁷ In a different connexion Lactantius' familiarity with medical writings has been demonstrated by K.-D. Fischer, 'Der Weg des Urins bei Asklepiades von Bithynien und in der Schrift *De Opificio Dei* des Kirchenvaters Lactantius' in *Centre Jean Palerne, Mémoires III, Médecins et Médecine dans l'Antiquité* (ed. G. Sabbah, Saint-Étienne 1982), pp. 43-53.

⁸ For the common use of *malum* of diseases, see *TLL* viii.229.68ff. (Cato, *Agr.* 157.6 onwards). *Malum* is particularly frequent in Celsus (more than 20 examples cited by the *TLL*).

long time so that a scar may form and then gradually peel off; premature movement may cause the scar to break ('si...dum ingreditur immature, crustas diduxit'), with a resultant flow of blood. So in Lactantius a scar is formed (2 'tandem perducitur ad cicatricem'), but a slight movement bursts the scar and bleeding begins: 3 'rursus leui corporis m<otu u>ulneratur; plus sanguinis quam ante decurrit.' It is the context in which the verb-phrase *fluit sanguis* is embedded, rather than the phrase itself, which is significant.⁹

(iv) Both Lactantius (7; see below) and Celsus draw attention to the *odor* of the *ulcus*: Cels. 3A *odor foedus*, 3B *odor intolerabilis*.

When dealing with varieties of *ulcus*, Celsus repeatedly mentions the *odor* of the sore, and seems invariably to apply a forceful adjective to the noun (cf. *odor malus* at 5.26.20D, 5.26.31B, 5.28.5, 6.2.1, 6.2.2, 6.3.1, 6.18.2F): *odor* did not necessarily indicate a bad smell. Celsus' habit of qualifying *odor* in such contexts leads one to another textual problem in Lactantius.

At 33.7 Moreau and Creed, following Nic. Heinsius¹⁰ and others,¹¹ print 'odor it autem non modo per palatium, sed totam ciuitatem peruadit' (*odoritatem* C; for some other suggestions, see below).¹² The placing of *autem* in third position in the sentence is implausible. It is true that *autem* sometimes comes in the third or even a later place, but the words before it usually form some sort of unit (see the extensive material collected at *TLL* ii.1577.1ff., with explanations of the positions occupied by *autem*). It would be a different matter to have *autem* standing genuinely as third word in its sentence. I have found no comparable example in Lactantius. Brandt collects examples of *autem* in third place in Lactantius,¹³ but all are special cases: *Diu*. 1.8.5 'quid est autem...', 3.16.4 'bonum est autem...', 5.9.11 'si qui autem doloris uel mortis metu...deseruerint', 7.14.8 'hic est autem dies sabbati'. *Si qui* forms a unit which cannot be split. In the other three cases the enclitic *est* takes precedence over *autem* in occupying the second position in the clause.

Eusebius, in his account of the death of Galerius (*H.E.* 8.16), has an expressive adjective with his equivalent of Lactantius' *odor* (θανατώδης τε ὀδμὴν ἀποπνεῖν), and there can be no doubt, given Celsus' use of *odor* + adjective in such contexts, that it is an adjective which is needed where Heinsius introduced *autem*. But what adjective did Lactantius use? *Taeter* was an early suggestion (Baluzius *odor teter non modo per palatium...*, Columbus *odor ita teter*, Cuperus *odoritas teter*),¹⁴ and *acer* has been proposed more recently (Corsaro *odor it acer*).¹⁵ *Taeter* has the advantage of being both suitably expressive, and commonly associated with *odor* (*TLL* ix.2.470.26ff.). *Acer* too is attested with *odor* (e.g. *Lucr.* 4.123; *TLL* i.360.35ff.), but it would indicate rather a pungent than a foul smell. Of the two, *taeter* is more likely to be right, though not in any of the collocations listed above. Cuperus' *odoritas teter* can be rejected, because it is *odor* which is needed in the context. In the proposed texts of both Baluzius and Columbus, *peruadit* (at least on a straightforward reading of the passage) would have to be construed in the first clause with a *per*-phrase (*non modo per palatium [peruadit]*), and in the second with a direct object (*sed totam ciuitatem*

⁹ For some examples of the collocation, see *TLL* vi.1.970.24ff.

¹⁰ See Bauldri (above n. 3), p. 223.

¹¹ Is. Vossius and Boherellus (in Bauldri, op. cit.). Vossius as an alternative offered *odor is autem*.

¹² Brandt suggested *odor it non modo...*, but the MS. reading seems to demand something between *it* and *non*. ¹³ *CSEL* xxvii, index p. 382.

¹⁴ All proposals to be found in Bauldri (pp. 82, 307 and 202 respectively).

¹⁵ I have not seen the work of F. Corsaro (Catania, 1970), cited by Creed.

peruadit);¹⁶ a verb seems to be required in the first clause. This problem could be overcome by printing *odor it taeter non modo*...

But there is another possibility which differs from the paradosis by only one letter, *odor it ater*... *Ater odor* is a bizarre and memorable Virgilian expression¹ (*Aen.* 12.591 'uoluitur ater odor tectis', in a simile), commented on by Servius for its originality (*ad loc.* 'noue: nam in odore quis color est?'). At dramatic points in the narrative Lactantius not only quotes whole lines of Virgil (as twice in the present chapter; cf. 12.1, 16.2, 30.5), but he also works in Virgilian expressions (44.3 'confirmato animo...et ad utrumque paratus' / *Aen.* 2.61 'fidens animi atque in utrumque paratus', 44.9 'eo uiso pugna crudescit' / *Aen.* 11.833 'deiecta crudescit pugna Camilla'). He may have done so here (note that at 44.9, drawing on a late book of the *Aeneid*, he reverses the Virgilian word order). *Ater* in the context would take on something of the sense 'baleful, associated with death' (see *OLD* s.v. 8, and note Eusebius' *θαναωδη*), whereas in the Virgilian passage it can be taken as transferred from the (black) cause of the *odor* (*fumus*: note Servius 'sed hoc dicit: odor atrae rei, fumi scilicet "ater odor", id est pessimus, ut "fumoque impleuit amaro"').

I referred earlier to Lactantius' attempt to give a scientific tone to the passage by his choice of language, some of which can be paralleled in Celsus. I conclude this section by mentioning a few other expressions in the passage which are redolent of the style of Celsus. *Perducere ad cicatricem* (2) is cited by the *TLL* (iii.1047.21ff.) only from Celsus (5 times) and Pliny the Elder. A far more usual phrase was *inducere cicatricem*. At §4 Lactantius uses the verb *inuado* of the inroads made by the *cancer* ('proxima quaeque cancer inuadit'). The only other writer extant who has the expression *cancer inuadit* is Celsus (6.15.1 'si quando autem ulcera oris cancer inuasit').¹⁷ With Lactantius' use of *proxima* here (Baluzius; *pro maxima* C) see also Cels. 7.2.5 'ne quis umor intus subsidat, qui proxima et adhuc sana erodendo sinuet'. For *rupta uena* (§2), cf. Cels. 8.4.7 *uena aliqua...rupta. Periculum mortis* (§2) was a common expression in medical texts, including that of Celsus (e.g. 7.8.2 'et ex ea mortis periculum sit'; 9 times in Celsus). With Lact. 33.11 '*doloris urgentis per interualla*' cf. Cels. 3.2.1 '*dolores graues urgent*'.¹⁸ This short list does not exhaust the medical/scientific terminology employed by Lactantius in the chapter.¹⁹

II. PELAGONIUS

In the editions of Ihm and Fischer²⁰ Pelagonius 347 is printed as follows: 'pecus cum scabiauierit, non statim curari debet, ne res periculo superueniatur et in morbum se

¹⁶ The same criticism can be made of Graevius' *odor dirus autem* (see Bauldri, p. 223), which also has *autem* in third position, and of *odor autem* in the anonymous ed. Ox. 1680 (see Bauldri loc. cit.).

¹⁷ See *TLL* iii.231.34, vii.2.111.74f.

¹⁸ The collocation is medical, but not exclusively so (*TLL* v.1.1845.63ff.).

¹⁹ *Sedes* 'anus' used twice by Lactantius (§§6, 9) was a calque on *ἔδρα*. Though not found in Celsus, it was a learned scientific term in Latin, with a medical flavour (Adams, *Glotta* 59 (1981), 255f.). *Sisto* (§2) of the staunching of blood was a technical term (cf. Scrib. Larg. 240 'omnem eruptionem sanguinis uelut cauterium sistit'). When Lactantius came to describe the appearance of worms (*uermes*) in the *ulcus*, he twice used phraseology reminiscent of Columella's account of *uermes* infesting *ulcera* (6.16.2-3): §7 '*uermes intus creantur*' (cf. Col. §3 '*uermes creant*'), §9, '*quis resolutis inaeestimabile scatebat examen*' (cf. Col. §2 '*solent etiam neglecta ulcera scatere uerminibus*'). Both writers were presumably using technical vocabulary (for *uermes creare*, cf. Col. *Arb.* 10.1; note too Diosc. Lat. II, p. 208.76 '*lumbrices creat*').

²⁰ M. Ihm, *Pelagonii Artis Veterinariae quae extant* (Leipzig, 1892), K.-D. Fischer, *Pelagonii Ars Veterinaria* (Leipzig, 1980).

conuertat' (*superueniatur* Ihm: *periculoso preueniatur* R; the emendation is undoubtedly right: 'when a beast suffers from *scabies*, he should not be immediately treated, lest the condition is overwhelmed by danger and turns into a *morbus*'). This passage, like *Mulomedicina Chironis* 613, quoted above, p. 522, is based on Apsyrtus, *Hipp. Berol.* 69.1, p. 268.18ff., also quoted above. In both the *Mul.* and Apsyrtus, as we have seen, the doctrine is stated that premature treatment of the disease causes it to turn inwards (*Mul. introuersus abscondere*, Aps. *ἔσω τρέπεσθαι*). Yet the transmitted text of Pelagonius talks oddly of the disease (*res*: see e.g. Cels. 6.6.1 F, *Mul. Chir.* 643) 'turning into a *morbus*.' Hoppe²¹ sought to defend the reading by arguing that *morbus* is not general in meaning here, but has its specialised veterinary sense 'glanders'. Ingenious as this suggestion is, it does not solve the problem, because Pelagonius' source Apsyrtus does not have corresponding phraseology. The difficulty can be resolved by emending *in morbum* to *introrsum* ('lest the affliction ... turn inwards'). The expression *introrsum se conuertat* would be equivalent to Apsyrtus' *ἔσω τρέπεσθαι*. For the use of *introrsum* in such a context, we have the parallel of Lactantius, *Mort.* 33.7 (*recidit introrsus*), not to mention *Mul. Chir.* 613 (*introuersus*).

If this emendation is accepted, it follows that the version of Pelagonius which Vegetius had before him was already corrupt, because Vegetius presents a similar text to that of our manuscript of Pelagonius (*Mul.* 2.135.1 'ne praeclusa cute in uisceribus residens conuertatur in morbum').

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²¹ K. Hoppe, 'Kritische und exegetische Nachlese zu Ihms Pelagonius I' (*Abhandlungen aus der Geschichte der Veterinär-Medizin*, Heft 19, Leipzig, 1929), 7.