

## A SLUR ON LUCIUS ASICIUS, THE POMPEIAN GLADIATOR

ROBERT I. CURTIS  
*University of Georgia*

A graffito scratched on the wall of the *Caserma dei Gladiatori* (Region V. v. 3) in Pompeii reads as follows:<sup>1</sup>

EDICTUM M. ATI PRIMI  
SI QUI(s) MURIA(m)  
BONA(m) VOLET  
PETAT A L. ASICIO  
... BUS MU ...  
SCITO MURIOLA ES  
IESUS

In his commentary on this graffito (*CIL* IV. 4287), August Mau states: “Ludit, nisi fallor, scriptor in nomine murmillonis et pisce quem in galea portat, quemque ‘petit’ retiarius.” He sees Lucius Asicius as not just any gladiator, but a *murmillo*, a gladiator who wore Gallic armor characterized by a helmet crowned with the image of a fish.<sup>2</sup> This conclusion draws confirmation from *CIL* IV. 4329, in which Asicius is apparently identified as a *murmillo*: ASICIUS MUR(millo) XV.<sup>3</sup> The use of words having *mur-* as a stem, that is *muria* and *muriola*, and of the verb *peto* would naturally elicit in the mind of any Roman reading the graffito the vision of the *murmillo* and the chant recited by the *retiarius*, the opponent often paired with the *murmillo* in the arena:

<sup>1</sup> This reading follows that given by August Mau in *CIL* IV. 4287. He first edited this graffito in *MDAI(R)* 5 (1890) 30, no. 55. On the name of Jesus see note 10 below.

<sup>2</sup> Festus *De verb. sign.* p. 285M: *Murmillonicum genus armorum Gallicum est ipsique murmillones ante Galli appellabantur in quorum galeis piscis effigies inerat.* Cf. Schol. Juvenal *Sat.* 8.200: *mirmillo armorum Gallicae nomen ex pisce inditum, cuius imago in galea fingitur.*

<sup>3</sup> The number after *MUR* is the conjecture of Mau. See August Mau, *MDAI(R)* 5 (1890) 29, no. 40. Asicius’ name appears in two other graffiti: *CIL* IV. 4374 and 4426.

retiario pugnanti adversus mirmillonem, cantatur: non te peto. piscem peto; quid me fugis, Galle?<sup>4</sup>

Mau is certainly correct in his identification of Asicius as a *murmillo* and rightly emphasizes the play on words beginning with *mur-*, but he does not comment on the intent of the graffito. To my knowledge no one has done so except the renowned Pompeian scholar Matteo Della Corte, whose comments appeared in a brief newspaper article in July 1961.<sup>5</sup> He interprets it as in part critical of Lucius Asicius; whereas M. Atius Primus praises Asicius, Jesus denigrates him:

Qui salta agli occhi la netta opposizione fra ciò che ha bandito col termine edictum (voce propria degli annunci di spettacoli gladiatorii) il munus editor (o impresario anfiteatrale) Marco Azio Primo, e quanto invece opina lo scrivente nell'ultima linea circa i meriti del mirmillone Lucio Asicio, esaltati dall'uno e, a dir poco, negati dall'altro che scrive.<sup>6</sup>

Della Corte, after discussing each of the key words in the graffito *muria* (a fish sauce, but here, by extension, a fish),<sup>7</sup> *huriola* (a diminutive of *muria*, meaning contemptuously, "small fry"),<sup>8</sup> and *murmillo* (a term implied by the identification of Asicius) renders the following translation:

Contro il bando (edictum) dell'impresario anfiteatrale Marco Azio Primo, proclamante che 'chi vuol gustare un ghiotto boccone, (cioè misurarsi con un vero campione), sfidi il mirmillone Lucio Asicio,' chi scrive apostrofa invece così il preteso campione: Asicio, tu sei, non un ghiotto boccone, ma un pesciolino.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Festus *De verb. sign.* p. 285M (= *Frag. Poet. Lat.*, p. 93, ed. W. Morel). Although frequently spelled *mirmillo* in literary sources, the spelling *murmillo* is the only form attested in inscriptions. For the *murmillo* and *retiarius* see Ludwig Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners Under the Early Empire*, trans. Leonard A. Magnus, 7th ed., vol. 4 (New York 1968) 173, 176–77; and K. Schneider, s.v. *murmillo*, *RE*, 16, 1 (1933), cols. 664–67.

<sup>5</sup> Matteo Della Corte, "Revisione di antichi testi," *Daily Roma* (Naples Edition), 13 July 1961, p. 3. See also Carlo Giordano and Isidoro Kahn (*The Jews in Pompeii, Herculaneum and in the Cities of Campania Felix* [Pompeii 1971] 34), who follow Della Corte's interpretation.

<sup>6</sup> Della Corte (above, note 5) 3. Since Della Corte's article is difficult to obtain I have thought it best to quote significant passages.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*: "letteralmente 'salsa da pesci in salamoia,' ma in senso trasiato, come qui, vale 'il pesce' dal quale si ricavava la salsa, e qualificata bona, cioè 'ghiottito pesce' per chi osasse sfidare Lucio Asicio."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*: "Muriola, più che diminutivo, dispregiativo, vale 'pesciolino'."

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

It is in the identification of Primus and in the interpretation of the nature of the criticism of Asicius that I must part company with Della Corte, who, by characterizing the graffito as only partially critical of the gladiator, fails to grasp the full impact of the slur on Lucius Asicius. I hope to demonstrate that the entire graffito disparages Asicius and that Jesus,<sup>10</sup> by a deliberate choice of words, seeks to give his declaration the weight of official authority.

Although the *gens at(t)ia* is attested at Pompeii, little is known of M. Atius Primus beyond the reasonable assumption that he was living during the years A.D. 62–79.<sup>11</sup> The identification of Primus, however, is crucial for an understanding of the graffito in which his name appears. The word *edictum* in its technical sense was used of a formal proclamation or decree of a magistrate such as, for example, a praetor, duumvir or aedile.<sup>12</sup> Although the names of many magistrates or candidates for office for the period A.D. 62–79 are known, Primus' name is not among them.<sup>13</sup> Della Corte believes that the word *edictum* was used in a nontechnical sense of *edictum muneris*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Neither Mau nor Della Corte offers any reason to think that the graffito was not entirely the work of one hand, nor does there seem to be any disagreement on the reading of the name Jesus. Although Mau transcribes the name as part of the graffito in *CIL* IV. 4287, he does not discuss it in his commentary. The name Jesus is not otherwise attested in Pompeii, although a badly deteriorated graffito, written in Hebrew on a wall in the House of the Cryptoporticus (Region I. vi. 2), may refer to a "Ieshua" or "Jesus" (*CIL* IV. 8010). See Giordano and Kahn (above, note 5) 35; and J. B. Frey, "Les Juifs à Pompéi," *Revue Biblique* 42 (1933) 382–83.

<sup>11</sup> The date of Primus' *floruit* rests upon two facts. First, the *gens At(t)ia* was among the new magisterial families rising to prominence in the post-earthquake period. A relation, Attius Amplus, was an aedilician candidate in the Neronian or Flavian period and his name appears as a witness in the wax tablets of Caecilius Jucundus. No other member of the *gens* can be attested before this period. (See Paavo Castrén, *Ordo Populusque Pompeianus: Polity and Society in Roman Pompeii*. Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae 8 [Rome 1975] 140, no. 54). Second, the house in which the graffito appears was not renovated and converted to a barracks for gladiators until after the earthquake of A.D. 62. (See Robert Étienne, *La vie quotidienne à Pompéi* [Paris 1974] 338). The people whose names appear in the graffiti in this building, therefore, must date after this time.

<sup>12</sup> Praetor: Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.41 (104); 2.3.7 (16); duumvir: *Lex Agraria* 52–53, 56–57 (= *FIRA*<sup>2</sup>, no. 8); and aedile: Pet. *Sat.* 53; Cic. *Phil.* 9.7; *CIL* IV. 10488.

<sup>13</sup> Castrén (above, note 11) 272–74.

<sup>14</sup> Della Corte (above, note 5) 3. See Georges LaFaye, s.v. *Gladiator*, *Dar.-Sag.*, vol. 4, p. 1593. The expression *edictum muneris*, frequently used by modern scholars to refer to a proclamation of upcoming games, has to my knowledge no ancient precedent. Seneca (*De brev. vitae* 16) comes the closest when he uses the verb *edico* to refer to an announced day for a gladiatorial spectacle: *tam me hercules, quam cum dies muneris gladiatorii edictus est*. However, only Seneca's reference (*Ep.* 117.30) to an *edictum et*

and so identified Primus as a *lanista* or *editor muneris gladiatorum*.<sup>15</sup> There are two objections to seeing Primus' words in this way. First, an advertisement usually lists only the types of gladiators to fight, the date and place of the games and any other pertinent aspects of the spectacle to be featured, such as whether or not an awning would be available to shade spectators.<sup>16</sup> Specific competitors were listed only in the *libellus* or *index*.<sup>17</sup> Second, since the announcements proclaim upcoming events they consistently use the simple future tense, not a conditional clause and jussive subjunctive as are found here.<sup>18</sup> This graffito, therefore, neither in form, nor in tone, nor in content suggests a public notice of forthcoming gladiatorial games. Consequently, we must look elsewhere for an explanation of *edictum*.

Roman comedy and satire provide many examples of the informal use of the word *edictum*.<sup>19</sup> Nearly all instances of this word in Roman comedy occur in situations of authority, and frequently the tone and language of the conversations are an obvious parody of some official magistrate, such as the praetor. Plautus was particularly fond of creating scenes which evoke formal legal proceedings and of working into the dialogue of his characters legal jokes and the comic use of legal language.<sup>20</sup> The imperious tone of the scenes comes from a

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*ludorum ordinem* and Persius' allusion (*Sat.* 1.134) to an *edictum* have been cited as referring to an announcement of gladiatorial games. (See Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *edictum*.) It seems more likely that both citations refer to a written notice of a magistrate's decree posted in a conspicuous place. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (s.v. *edictum*) sees the Seneca citation as such and omits any mention of Persius. The scholiast to Persius (*Sat.* 1.134) understands the reference in this way: *nolo me legant circulatores, qui mane edictum consulis vel imperatoris populo recitant, meridie levia carmina dicunt*. See also Auct. *Thes. Ling. Lat.* vol. 5, s.v. *edico*, col. 69. The *ludorum ordo* of Seneca may refer to a program for gladiatorial games, but the usual terms for such a listing of competitors were *libellus* (Cic. *Phil.* 2.38) and *index* (*SHA, Vita Claudii* 5).

<sup>15</sup> As an *editor muneris*, or *munerarius*, Primus could have held a magistracy or a priesthood or merely owned or sponsored a troop of gladiators; see for example, D. Lucretius Satrius Valens, a perpetual flamen of Nero (*CIL* IV. 3884, 7995), L. Valerius Primus, an *augustalis* (*CIL* IV. 9962), and Cn. Alleius Nigidius Maius, a *duumvir quinquinalis* (*CIL* IV. 1179).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, *CIL* IV. 7993: *pompa, venatio, athletae, vela erunt*; and *CIL* IV. 1177, 1181, 7989: *venatio, athletae et sparsiones. Vela* are also mentioned in *CIL* IV. 1180, 7992–95, 9969 and 9983.

<sup>17</sup> LaFaye (above, note 14) 1593. For a *libellus munerum edendorum* copied onto a wall in Pompeii by a man with time on his hands after the exhibitions see *CIL* IV. 2508.

<sup>18</sup> For the *edicta munerum* at Pompeii see *CIL* IV. 1177–81, 1183–1204, 1989, 3881–84, 7985–96, 9962–86.

<sup>19</sup> See also *Thes. Ling. Lat.* (above, note 14), cols. 68–69.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Plautus *Poenulus* 725 ff. (parody on the court proceedings presided over by a

careful choice of words designed to elicit in the mind of the audience the image of a magistrate and his edict. Plautus selects explicit words, such as *lictor*, *praetor* or some form of *edico*, to suggest the particular magistrate and couches the dialogue in phrases expressive of the official pronouncement itself. The conditional clause introduced by *si quis* (or *ne quis*) followed by the jussive subjunctive, which commonly appears in official proclamations, for example, is used by Plautus (*Poenulus* prol. 16–45) in mock imitation of the praetorian edict.<sup>21</sup> Horace (*Sat.* 2.2.49–52) similarly parodies the praetor's edict when he says:

tutus erat rhombus tutoque ciconia nido,  
donec vos auctor docuit praetorius. ergo  
si quis nunc mergos suavis edixerit assos,  
parebit pravi docilis Romana iuventus.

This is, I think, the sense in which the words of Primus should be understood. The declaration of M. Atius Primus is a parody of the public announcement of a Roman magistrate.<sup>22</sup>

Since a praetorian edict would be out of place in the Pompeian setting, was there a local municipal office to which our edict can logically be related? As in Rome, the official whose duty it was to put on games was the aedile. If it is correct that Primus was an aedile,<sup>23</sup> then Jesus must be parodying the aedilician edict concerning gladiatorial games over which he (Primus) was responsible, much as curule aediles in Rome issued regulations concerning the care of streets and

praetor), *Ibid.* Prol. 16–45, *Pseudolus* 125 ff., and perhaps *Asinaria* 371. For a discussion of Plautine parodies on the praetor's edict see Alan Watson, *Law Making in the Late Roman Republic* (Oxford 1974) 49–50. See also H. D. Jocelyn, "Imperator histricus," *YCS* 21 (1969) 97–123. For a legal joke see the *Lex Tappula* (*ILS* 8761). For a discussion of this *lex* see Anton von Premerstein, "Lex Tappula," *Hermes* 39 (1904) 327–47; and Herbert J. Rose, *A Handbook of Latin Literature* (New York 1960) 86.

<sup>21</sup> For the use of the phrase *si quis* in official proclamations see the *Edictum perpetuum praetoris urbani* 1.1–2 (= FIRA<sup>2</sup>, no. 65, pp. 337–38). For the parody on the praetor's edict in the *Poenulus* see Alan Watson, "The Imperatives of the Aedilician Edict," *Revue d'histoire du droit* 39 (1971) 77–79.

<sup>22</sup> This was stated, without elaboration, by the author of the article "edictum" in *Thes. Ling. Lat.* (above, note 14), col. 68, but apparently unnoticed by Della Corte.

<sup>23</sup> Although nothing approaching certainty can be attained, one can conjecture that Primus may have served as aedile at sometime during the period A.D. 62–79, but that his election notices have not survived. If he had served during the early part of this period it is not surprising that his *programmata* would have been white-washed and subsequent ones painted over them.

public games.<sup>24</sup> The form of the graffito does indeed point to the position of aedile. Alan Watson, in his study of imperatives in aedilician edicts, notes that proclamations of aediles regularly use verbs in the second or third person and either in the imperative or in the jussive subjunctive.<sup>25</sup> These commands also habitually use the expression *si quis* (or *ne quis*) to introduce the decree, just as we find in the aedilician edict from Herculaneum (*CIL* IV. 10488) and in Plautus' parody of the aedilician edict in *Captivi* 803 ff.<sup>26</sup> The association with the aedilician edict is made even clearer by the use of *scito* in line six. This word, which precedes *muriola*, is of uncertain reading, but Mau plausibly restores it as the singular, future imperative form of the verb *scio*. *Scito* is frequently used in a familiar style to mean "know this" or "be assured."<sup>27</sup> This is no doubt its meaning here. Any imperative, by its very nature, however, connotes authority and imperiousness. Jesus, therefore, by choosing the future imperative, extends the parody of the aedilician edict begun in line one, since this form, in the second person, is a common feature found in the edicts of aediles.<sup>28</sup> Although Jesus issues no "order,"

<sup>24</sup> Alan Watson, "The Development of the Praetor's Edict," *JRS* 60 (1970) 114, and notes 119–20. See *CIL* IV. 1189–91 for the aedile A. Suettius Certus who put on gladiatorial games in Pompeii. See also *CIL* X. 688 (from Surrentum), 3704 (from Cumae), and 6243 (from Fundi). Cf. Martial 5.41.4, where aedilician edicts are implied in reference to public entertainment; and Macrobius *Sat.* 2.6.1, for an aedilician edict on gladiatorial games: *Lapidatus a populo Vatinius cum gladiatorum munus ederet, obtinuerat ut aediles edicerent nequis in harenam nisi pomum misisse vellet*. For the form of the aedilician edict noted in Macrobius see especially David Daube, *Forms of Roman Legislation* (Oxford 1956) 35–49. Duumviri could also give gladiatorial games (*CIL* IV. 1179; X. 1074d), and so the possibility remains that Primus may have even held that position. As will be shown presently, however, the wording of the graffito strongly suggests the office of aedile. Besides, to become a duumvir required the candidate to have served previously as aedile.

<sup>25</sup> Watson (above, note 21) 80.

<sup>26</sup> *CIL* IV. 10488: M(arcus) (alf)ICIVS PA(u)LVS / AEDIL(is)/ (si qu)IS VELIT IN HVNC LOCVM / STERCVS ABICERE MONETVR N(on)/ IACERE SI QVIS AD-VER(sus hoc)/ EDICTVM FECERIT LIBERI DENT / (dena)RIVM N(ummum) SERVI VERBERIBVS / (i)N SEDIBVS ADMONENTVR. The reading of the inscription follows in nearly all respects that given by Konrad Schubring in "Epigraphisches kampanischen Städten," *Hermes* 90 (1962) 242. See also Plautus *Captivi* 803 ff.: *Prius edico, ne quis propter culpam capiatu suam:/ continete vos domi, prohibete a vobis vim meam*. Cf. Macrobius *Sat.* 2.6.1 (above, note 24). See also Watson (above, note 21) 78–80.

<sup>27</sup> Cic. *Att.* 2.3.2; 12.21.5; *Fam.* 1.9.24; 5.20.7. It is not uncommon for a scribbler to speak directly to the object of his scribbling; for example, cf. *CIL* IV. 1690, 1787, 1816, 2015, 4765, 6755, 6817, 7089.

<sup>28</sup> Although future imperatives in the third person may sometimes occur, Watson

except in the sense of “listen up,” still the overall effect of *scito* is one of authority and so strengthens the official character of the graffito. It is true that real edicts, even those concerning gladiatorial games, would hardly make reference to a specific individual. This would be unnecessary in our graffito, since the association of the graffito with a gladiator, the use of the word *edictum*, and the form of the statement, which contained the expression *si quis* with the jussive subjunctive and the additional use of a verb in the second person, future imperative in line six, are sufficient to evoke the idea of the aedile and thus to render an effective parody.

The conclusion of this discussion seems inescapable. In the second part of this graffito Jesus is not, as Della Corte believes, replying to the words of Primus recorded in part one. Both parts are creations of Jesus who merely uses Primus’ name, the term *edictum* and legal forms reminiscent of real aedilician edicts (implying Primus’ official position with respect to the games) to give his pronouncement the authoritative air of a solemn declaration. Primus’ opinion (at least as expressed by Jesus) was not only a strong one but also a decidedly negative one, since his “edict” constitutes a sharp denunciation of the *murmillio*.

The slur on Lucius Asicius resides in the choice by Jesus of the word *muria*. In general *muria* can refer to any saline solution, such as was often used to preserve various foods or to season wine.<sup>29</sup> The word frequently referred to the salty liquid used to prepare the fish sauce *garum* or to preserve salted fish (*salsamentum*). In the latter sense *muria* itself was considered a fish sauce. Pliny (*HN* 31.83), for example, speaks of *muria salsamentorum*, and Columella (*RR* 12.55) states that, *et (sc. sus) tanquam salsamentum in muria sua permanet*.<sup>30</sup> Although *garum* was the more noted fish sauce, for his attack on Asicius Jesus chose instead the sauce *muria*, since this word would allow him to employ the stem *mur-*, and by its sound thereby better

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shows that the second person imperative is the form most suitable for aedilician edicts. See Watson (above, note 21) 78–80.

<sup>29</sup> Preserve foods: Cato *Agri.* 7 (olives); Col. *RR* 12.56.2 (turnips). Season wine: Cato *Agri.* 105; Col. *RR* 12.25. *Muries* was an alternate form of the word *muria*. See Festus *De verb. sign.* p. 158M and Non. Marc. *De comp. doc.* 3, s.v. *salis*. For *muria* see also Aug. Hug, s.v. *muria*, *RE* 31 (1933), cols. 661–62.

<sup>30</sup> For *muria* used to prepare *garum* see *Geoponica* 20.46.5. See also Gargilius Martialis *Curae boum* 4 (*muria salsamenti optima*) and Auctor *De viris illustribus* 66 (*muria de turdis*). In Greek the association of *muria* with salted fish can be seen in the frequently used phrase ἄλμη τῶν ταριχηρῶν ἰχθύων. See also Oribasius *Synopsis ad Eustathium* 2.2; 9.61.5–6; Leo Medicus 2.8 (Ermerins, ed., p. 97); Aëtios 2.151; and Galen *De simplic. med. temp. ac fac.* 11.13 (XII. 377K). Hesychius (s.v. ἄλμη) defines ἄλμη as the “sauce of fish” (ὁ τῶν ἰχθύων ζωμός).

recall the *murmillo*. Della Corte recognizes *muria* as the fish sauce (“salsa da pesci in salamoia”) but prefers to see the word as standing for “a fish” and denoting a “delicious mouthful.”<sup>31</sup> But why should Primus use the fish sauce *muria* when specific fish names existed, such as *murena* and *murex*, which possessed the desired stem? Jesus must have chosen *muria* because its use would connote a strong and unambiguous disapproval of Asicius, not approval as Della Corte thinks. Neither the *murena* nor the *murex* would serve this purpose as well, since both were fish popular with Romans everywhere. The former was raised in large numbers in fish ponds, and the latter was the shellfish which yielded the popular and expensive purple dye.<sup>32</sup> The fish sauce *muria* was the perfect choice for several reasons. First, it served the double function of connoting fish and, by its stem *mur-*, the *murmillo*. Second, *muria* was, as a mere salt solution, common and cheap, and, as a fish sauce, a poor relation to the much sought-after and highly popular *garum*.<sup>33</sup> Third, *muria* added a bonus to the slur on Asicius, since it connoted something with a rancid odor. Horace, for example, in *Satire* 2.4.63–66 says:

Est operae pretium duplicis pernoscere iuris  
naturam. simplex e dulci constat olivo,  
quod pingui miscere mero muriaque decebit  
non alia quam qua Byzantia putuit orca.<sup>34</sup>

Ancient authors also comment upon the strong smell of the other fish sauces and commonly employ the name of a fish sauce to cast aspersions on unpopular people.<sup>35</sup> Martial, for example, uses *garum*

<sup>31</sup> Della Corte (above, note 5) 3.

<sup>32</sup> See Thomas Corcoran, *The Roman Fishing Industry of the Late Roman Republic and Early Empire* (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1957) 48–51, who collects many references to the *murena* and its popularity in Italy. For the fashionableness of fishponds see *Idem*, “Roman Fishponds,” *CB* 35 (1959) 37–39, 43. For the *murex* and purple see Pliny *HN* 9.133; Gossen-Steier, s.v. “Schnecke (Arten),” *RE*, ser. 2, 2A (1921), cols. 599–614; and Meyer Reinhold, *History of Purple as a Status Symbol in Antiquity*, Collection Latomus 116 (Bruxelles 1970).

<sup>33</sup> For the reputation of *garum* and its importance to Graeco-Roman society, see R. Zahn, s.v. *garum*, *RE*, 7 (1912), cols. 841–49.

<sup>34</sup> Pliny (*HN* 9.92) relates the story of a giant octopus at Carteia in Spain which raided the tanks of processed fish. The creature became covered with *muria* and smelled terribly: *muria obliti, odore diri*. Petronius (*Sat.* 70) describes a cook at Trimalchio’s dinner as *muria condimentisque fetentem*. For the strong smell of salted fish see also Aristotle *HA* 4.8 (543a) and Pliny *HN* 10.94.

<sup>35</sup> *Garum*: Pliny *HN* 31.90, 93; Seneca *Ep.* 95.25; Martial 11.27; Plato Comicus fr.



and *allec* to emphasize the vulgarity of Papyllus (7.94), of Baeticus (3.77.5), and of Flaccus and his girlfriend (11.27.6).<sup>36</sup> The Pompeian would readily make the same connection. The production of fish sauce was a major industry in the city, and among the numerous fish-sauce vessels found in Pompeii excavators have identified many as having held *muria*.<sup>37</sup> In short, *muria* was a product with which the Pompeians were familiar and a word which would be readily recognized by them as connoting something disagreeable and second-rate. They would see the association of Asicius, the *murmillo*, with *muria*, the fish sauce, as an unmistakable slur. The adjective *bonam*, by contrast, merely adds a sarcastic note.<sup>38</sup>

After presenting Primus' "declaration," Jesus addresses his own opinion to Asicius: "*Muriola es!*" *Muriola* is a rare word, which Della Corte suggests was a diminutive of *muria*. However appealing this suggestion may be in the context of the graffito, it must remain questionable since no evidence exists to show that the word was ever used in this way.<sup>39</sup> Since *muria* was not a fish, *muriola* could not, as

198 (Edmonds); *Muria*: Pliny *HN* 9.92; Petronius *Sat.* 70; Hor. *Sat.* 2.4.63–66.

<sup>36</sup> Plautus, recognizing the relationship of *allec* to *garum* as the "leftovers" and knowing that his audience would understand the word *hallex* as descriptive of something of low esteem, in *Poenulus* 1310 has Antamonides call Hanno an *hallex viri*, "the dregs of a man." The meaning of "big toe," given for *hallex* in this passage by Lewis and Short (*A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *allex*) is dubious. Antamonides calls Hanno, the Carthaginian, many things which connote foul-smelling foods: *deglupta mena, sarrapis, sementium, manstruca, halagora, sampsa, tum autem plenior ali ulpicique quam Romani remiges*. In addition, Carthaginians were active in the large and prosperous fish-salting industry in the Western Mediterranean. Plautus' audience would, no doubt, recognize this connection. See Miguel Tarradell, "Economía de la colonización fenica," *Estudios de economía antigua de la península ibérica* (Barcelona 1968) 96. *Hallex* is variously spelled *hallec* (Cato *Agri.* 58), *allex* (Pliny *HN* 31.95) and *allec* (Hor. *Sat.* 2.8.9). For *allex* as the dregs of *garum* see Pliny *HN* 31.95.

<sup>37</sup> *CIL* IV. 2609, 5721–27, 9429–34, 10391. Two containers have been found in Herculaneum: *CIL* IV. 10746–47. See also my article, "The *Garum* Shop of Pompeii (Region I. xii. 8)," in a forthcoming issue of *Cronache pompeiane*.

<sup>38</sup> Line five of the graffito is too deteriorated to allow any conjecture on its meaning. It seems likely, however, that the letters *MU* . . . began a word which had as its root *mur-* and so continued the effect of the criticism inherent in the words *muria* and *muriola*.

<sup>39</sup> The derivation of the word is uncertain and few scholars venture to guess its meaning. The author of the article "Muriola" in the *Thes. Ling. Lat.* (vol. 8, col. 1674), although noting the definition of *muriola* found in Varro (see below), ventures no suggestion as to its meaning in *CIL* IV. 4287. A. Ernout and A. Meillet (*Dictionnaire étymologique de la Langue Latine* [Paris 1959] 423 speculate that it may have come from *muria*. Alois Walde (*Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* [Heidelberg 1954] 130) prefers to see it as a sort of wine mixed with salt water (*muria*), but admits the lack of ancient evidence for such an etymology. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (s.v. *muriola*) defines it as a liqueur wine, identified with *murrina* which etymologically

Della Corte believes, refer to a small fish. In any case, a better interpretation presents itself.

Festus (*De verb. sign.* p. 144M) says that *muriola* was the name which women applied to *murrina*:

Murrina genus potionis, quae Graece dicitur nectar: hanc mulieres vocabant murriolam, quidam murratum vinum: quidam id dici putant ex uvae genere murrinae nomine.

*Muriola* apparently designated a sweet drink made from grapes. Plautus includes *murrina* among several sweet products, and Varro in Book One of *De vita populi Romani* (ap. Non. Marc. *De comp. doct.* p. 551M, s.v. *moriolam*) says,

vino addito loram, passum vocare coeperunt; muriolam nominabant, quod ex uvis expressum erat passum et ad folliculos reiculos et vinacia ea dicebant sapam.<sup>40</sup>

But why did Jesus choose this word to characterize Asicius? Festus again provides the clue when he says, “Women call this drink (i.e., *murrina*) *murriola*.” The association of *muriola* with women was a long standing one. Varro, again in Book One of the *De vita populi Romani* (ap. Non. Marc. *De comp. doct.* p. 551M, s.v. *lora*) informs us that,

antiquae mulieres maiores natu bibebant loram aut sapam aut defretum aut passum, quam murrinam quidem Plautus appellare solet.

Aulus Gellius (10.23), citing Marcus Cato as his source, explains that the women of Rome and Latium in ancient times, by law, abstained from wine and drank only sweet drinks:

Qui de victu atque cultu populi Romani scripserunt mulieres Romae atque in Latio “aetatem abstemias egisse,” hoc est vino semper, quod “temetum” prisca lingua appellabatur, abstinuisse dicunt, institutemque ut cognatis osculum ferrent deprehendendi causa, ut odor indicium faceret, si bibissent. Bibere autem solitas ferunt loream, passum, murrinam et quae id genus sapiant potu dulcia.

was an adaptation of the Greek *μυρίνης* (s.v. *murrina*).

<sup>40</sup> Plautus *Pseudolus* 738–42; and *Idem*, *Acharisto* fr. 2. Pliny (*HN* 14.92) defines *murrina* as *vina murræ odore condita*. Cf. Jacques André, “Murrina ‘Vin Myrrhe?’” *Annales de la Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines d’Aix* 25 (1951) 45–62, and Moritz Voigt, “Ueber muriola, murrata und murrina,” *RhM* 28 (1873) 56–64. Whether the word *muriola* (or *murrina*) derives its name from a mixture of wine and *muria* (above, note 39) or wine and *myrrhe*, the conclusion is the same. It apparently referred to a sweet drink prepared from grapes and was not a diminutive form of the word *muria*.

*Muriola* (or *murrina*), therefore, was from early times always seen as a lady's drink. By calling Asicius *muriola*, Jesus intimates that the gladiator lacked the virile qualities associated with his profession. There is no reason to doubt that the Pompeians would immediately make this connection, since Campania was noted for its wines.<sup>41</sup> A people steeped in viticulture would know the many kinds of drinks made from the grape, and a grape drink traditionally consumed by women in lieu of wine would naturally be viewed by them as a lady's beverage.

In conclusion, Jesus casts aspersions on the unpopular Asicius by associating him with a cheap fish sauce and by accusing him of being an unmanly, weak, perhaps even cowardly, fighter. In addition, by carefully choosing his terms and even the forms of the words, that is by parodying the aedilician edict, Jesus conjures up in the reader's mind a formal declaration on the worthlessness of Asicius. The reason for the slur is not hard to find. Gladiatorial games elicited strong emotions among the inhabitants of Pompeii, who no doubt had their favorites. The famous riot at Pompeii in A.D. 59, for example, erupted during the gladiatorial games in the amphitheater.<sup>42</sup> Conversely, the Pompeians would also have their "villains" upon whom they would heap imprecations, particularly if the unpopular gladiator had fought poorly and, perhaps, cost the spectator the loss of a sizable wager. Jesus was perhaps a "victim" of a poor showing by Asicius and so viewed the *murmillo* as a "villain," worthy of contempt and ridicule.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See especially Pliny *HN* 14 *passim*. There have been many modern studies on the Pompeian wine industry. See especially John Day, "Agriculture in the Life of Pompeii," *YCS* 3 (1932) 167–208; and Wilhelmina Jashemski, *The Gardens of Pompeii, Herculaneum and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius* (New Rochelle 1979) 201–232.

<sup>42</sup> Tacitus *Ann.* 14.17. On the popularity of certain gladiators see Henry T. Rowell, "The Gladiator Petraitas and the Date of the *Satyricon*," *TAPA* 89 (1959) 14–24. For a discussion of the riot at Pompeii see Walter Moeller, "The Riot of A.D. 59 at Pompeii," *Historia* 19 (1970) 84–95.

<sup>43</sup> Could Jesus himself have been a gladiator critical of a fellow combatant, or perhaps a slave assisting in the gladiatorial school in some way, such as in the capacity of physician? There is slight evidence for the existence of Jewish gladiators, but the spectacles were abhorrent to orthodox Jews and the *Mishnah* prohibits Jews from assisting in pagan spectacles. Jews of the Diaspora, however, may have been less inclined to adhere strictly to this prohibition. Jews forced to fight as gladiators, a situation not unheard of following the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, is another matter. On the question of Jews and Roman spectacles see Jean Juster, *Les Juifs dans l'empire romain*, vol. 2 (Paris 1914) 239–41.

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