A Reward for Your Toil

Textual Notes on 'Sulpicia' (Epigr. Bob. 37)

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The text of 'Sulpicia's' *fabella* on Domitian's expulsion of philosophers from Rome in 88/89 and 93/94 rests on four direct or indirect copies of a single, highly corrupt manuscript of the late antique anthology known as the *Epigrammata Bobiensia*. This poem has been of relatively minor scholarly interest due to doubts about its authenticity,² and several passages remain very difficult. A minority maintain a possible Domitianic date,³ but the majority date it to the 4th or 5th century,⁴ possibly with a *terminus ante quem* of c. 400, when the Bobbio anthology was assembled, and there was a marked resurgence of interest in Sulpicia's poetry.⁵ It has been given a possible date more specifically in the reign of Theodosius I.⁶

- 1 The majority opinion is that this poem is a late antique forgery. I am using the name only for convenience' sake, without intending to presume the date of composition. Since the date is uncertain, assumptions on the date can prejudice the editor. If the poem is genuine, this is the Sulpicia mentioned by Martial (10.35, 38).
- 2 It is rejected by discussions of Martial's Sulpicia in Merriam 1991, 303-304; Parker 1992, 91-92; and Richlin 1992, 125, 132-134.
- 3 Butrica 2006 *passim*; Butler 1909, 178-179.
- 4 The editors Fuchs 1968, Lana 1949 and Rampioni 1982 all give a late date.
- 5 See Auson. *Cent. Nupt.* 139.5-6; Sidon. *Carm.* 9.261-262; Fulg. *Myth.* 1.4. Mattiacci 1999 considers Sulpicia's poetics in the light of her reception in Martial, Fulgentius, and vv. 1-11 of this poem.
- 6 Smolak 2010, 223-224.

cetera [carmina] quin etiam quondam quae mollia lusi
 primaque Romanas docui contendere Graiis
 et salibus variare modos, constanter omitto⁷

7 cetera] ludicra *Peiper dub.* cetera quin] carminaque *latere facile crediderit Butrica* quondam quae *Heinsius: quod denique Ω: quot denique ed. Lugdunensis an. 1558.* mollia *Burmann: millia Ω* 8 Romanas *Vinetus, Scaliger: Romanos Ω* 9 modos *Butrica: novis Ω*

and the rest in fact that were my tender play,
 and I was the first [woman] to teach Roman women to vie with Greeks
 and to vary their measures with wit, I leave off with equanimity

This is one of the most troubled passages in the poem. The gist of the previous verses (5-6) is that Sulpicia does not want to use the metres she has previously used, but will instead write in hexameters. Butrica punctuates with a comma before *cetera*, but the presence of the conjunction *quin etiam* means that it would be much better to punctuate with a full-stop or semi-colon before it, as for instance in Baehrens and the Loeb edition of Ausonius.⁸ Sulpicia's basic thought in vv. 7-9 is *cetera quin etiam constanter omitto* 'and the rest, indeed, I leave off with equanimity'. The remainder is separate, and should be punctuated as such. The issues in these verses lie in the manifestly corrupt *quod denique milia lusi*. *Quod* may be taken adverbially in apposition to *cetera* and translated as 'everything else, the fact that etc.', but *milia lusi* introduces nothing new, as vv. 8-9 do, and as the reader expects from *cetera*. This problem is neatly fixed with Burman's *mollia*, which introduces elegy, but *denique* is irrelevant no matter how I try to translate it.

So, against the editors, I argue that *quod* is acceptable here, whereas the existing conjectures introduce a solecism, after which we would also need to introduce a lacuna after v. 8, as Butrica originally suggested.⁹ However, Heinsius's *quondam* replaces the irrelevant *denique* with something far more

7 *Epigr. Bob.* 37.7-9. The text, apparatus, and translation are from Butrica 2006, except that I have used the siglum Ω instead of O to represent the agreement of the manuscripts. Other translations are my own.

8 Baehrens 1883, 96; Evelyn-White 1921, 282.

9 Butrica 2000 *ad loc.*

pointed: 'I *once* wrote elegies, now let me write hexameters'. This part of his conjecture can stand, and I would therefore print *quondam quod mollia lusi*.¹⁰

sed virtus, agitata domi [et] Latialibus armis, 18
in freta Sicaniae et Carthaginis exilit arces, 23
ceteraque imperia et totum simul abstulit orbem.¹¹ 24

18 et *del. Baehrens* Latialibus *Butrica*: socialibus Ω 23 artes *V*

But courage, trained at home on wars in Latium,
jumped to the straits of Sicily and the citadel of Carthage
and the other empires as well, and for its prize it took the whole world
together.

Here Sulpicia describes the growth of Rome's geo-political power, in a way that either refers to specific historical accounts (Lana adduces Florus 1.18),¹² or perhaps more likely a common shared narrative of how Romans saw their rise to power.¹³ The transmitted text shows a false distinction between *domi* and *socialibus armis*, and an incompetent chronological error in placing the Social Wars before the Punic Wars. So I accept Butrica's text here, but for me there remains a small inelegance, for which there is a small fix. Here *armis* must mean wars, as it often does, but this is an odd noun to balance *domi*, *freta*, *arces*, *imperia*, and *orbem*, all of which describe the place where *virtus* was trained rather than the means. *Armis* looks very much like a small slip for *arvis*, which will restore the balance I expect here.

deinde, velut stadio victor qui solus Achaeo 25
languet et immota secum virtute fatiscit,
sic itidem Romana manus, contendere postquam
destitit et pacem longis frenavit habenis.
ipsa domi leges et Graia inventa retractans

¹⁰ If *quod* is deemed too loose, we may perhaps substitute a causal conjunction that can stand with both clauses in vv. 7-8. *Nam quondam* gives the necessary sense (*quondam* could have been corrupted to *quod den-*, and *-ique* would then be a metrical interpolation after *nam* was lost after *-etiam*), but it is not the only possible reading.

¹¹ *Epigr. Bob.* 37.18-24.

¹² Lana 1949, 45-50.

¹³ Butrica 2006, 76-77.

61 mene *Withof*: nunc Ω velis *Burmman*: velit Ω : velint *ed. Lugdunensis an. 1558*: velim
Boxhorn 62 ut] tu vel i *Heinsius*: vel tempt. *Butrica* 63 iucundos *BP*: facundos *V*:
iucundes *Kroll*: iucundo tempt. *Butrica*

Muse I should like you to advise
whether you wish me now to emigrate in the very same way or finally
whatever
as goddess seek something else: only for Calenus Rome's
walls pleasant and equally fend off the Sabines.

This is another very difficult and highly corrupted passage, so I have omitted the simile, which I regard as insoluble. *Iucundos* in v. 63 is clearly wrong, as the Sabines were quite the opposite. *Iucundes* (Kroll), is a popular remedy, but if this is accepted the resulting expression is still strange. The gist may be paraphrased with Kroll's emendation as 'Muse, would you please advise me if you want me to migrate, or finally you,²¹ goddess, do something else: just make Rome's walls pleasant through Calenus' presence, and at the same time keep the Sabines away'.

Firstly, *denique* cannot mean 'finally' here unless there is a lacuna after *velis*. Sulpicia has only suggested one possibility to the Muse before *vel denique*, so it can hardly serve as a climax to her thoughts. I do not see what could fill a lacuna here, as migration is an extreme solution, so it is preferable to reinterpret *vel denique* here as 'or at least', as in *Hor. Ep. 2.2.127*.²² Following this, it is apparent that *aliud* is wrong, as the rhetoric demands that Sulpicia say 'at least do something, whatever it is' rather than 'at least do something else, whatever it is'. Faulty logic is an unattractive defence to me in this case; if *denique* means 'at least', *aliud* conceals *aliquid*.

The paraphrase now runs (again with Kroll's emendation) as 'Muse, would you please advise me if you want me to migrate, or at least do something, goddess, whatever it is: just make Rome's walls pleasant through Calenus' presence, and at the same time keep the Sabines away'. Kroll's reading still makes for an incongruous text, but in this case the faulty logic is defensible as suggesting the speaker's exasperation. As a disjunctive *vel* is weak, so the clause beginning with *tantum* should then introduce a proviso for what the Muse advises,

21 I prefer Heinsius' *tu* to the rather weak *ut*, but it does not affect the paraphrase.

22 The parallel was adduced by Fuchs 1968, 46.

including if it is migration. But if it is, how pleasurable Rome is to Sulpicia is irrelevant. Deeper corruption, however, is not impossible.²³

The presence of these Sabines is also potentially a problem. They are renowned for their moral strictness, so the likely sense would be that Sulpicia wishes her Muse to ward off such people from her erotic poetry. It may further be a coded reference to Domitian's perpetual censorship (D.C. 53.18). However, I am not convinced that the Sabines have the necessary status as a byword for the morally censorious type to stand here as a bare generalisation, as for instance Cato can (e.g. Mart. 1 pr.). The generic plural is more suggestive of an individual called Sabinus, but if that is correct his identity is a mystery. Perhaps the text should read *severos*, *Sabinos* having suggested itself from *Romana* in the previous verse.

pone metus caecos, cultrix mea summa. tyranno
ecce instant odia, et nostro periturus honori est:²⁴

65 caecos Hertz: aequos Ω: aegros Peiper sic distinxit Butrica: mea. Summa edd.
aliae 66 ecce Heinsius: haec Ω odia] gladii malit Butrica honori Burmann,
Fuchs dubitanter: honore Ω

Lay aside your blind fears, my supreme devotee. Over the tyrant,
behold, hatred looms, and he is to die to our honour:

This is the beginning of the Muse's response to Sulpicia, and here I will focus on *odia*. Butrica doubts this word, as it "lacks a concrete reference".²⁵ He prefers *gladii*, with reference to the *dolon* in Suetonius' account of Domitian's assassination (restored by conjecture in *Dom.* 17).²⁶ While I agree that *odia* is too vague, *gladii* seems too specific to complement the unspecific *nostro periturus honori*. I would prefer something in between these two, and so suggest *dira*, 'horrors', for *odia*. If the *r* had been carelessly omitted, producing *dia*, *odia* would have been a reasonable guess to restore sense.

23 As a diagnostic conjecture we may perhaps try *delectant* for *iucundos*, taking *tantum ... delectant* as a parenthetic comment meaning 'Rome's walls only delight because of Calenus'. Fuchs 1968, 46 came to the same interpretation (with a much more radical text). For the idea, cf. Prop. 1.8b.31-32.

24 *Epigr. Bob.* 37.65-66.

25 Butrica 2006, 116.

26 *Dolon* might look attractive at first but it will not fit the metre.

vive, vale. manet hunc pulchrum †tua fama dolorem†:
Musarum spondet chorus et Romanus Apollo.²⁷

70

69 sua *Pithoeus*

Live, fare well. Your reputation awaits this catamite pain:
The chorus of Muses pledges it, and Roman Apollo.

The final lines are some of the most difficult of the poem. It ends with the Muses' response to Sulpicia's demands, and they reply with a prediction of Domitian's death (vv. 65-66, discussed above) and some other kind of promise here. Normally Pithoeus' *sua* is read, and the second promise is also connected to Domitian, but this solves nothing, as *pulchrum dolorem* is meaningless to me however I may try to translate it.²⁸

The Muses have already foretold Domitian's death, and any other promise about Domitian's fate other than the tortures of the underworld will be an anti-climax here, which cannot be introduced unless the ending is totally rewritten. The manuscripts' *tua* is therefore secure, and the promise should be one for Sulpicia. As this must be a kind promise, *pulchrum* is also secure in its usual meaning, and the corruption is to be isolated to *dolorem*. Apollo and the Muses, then, say 'your (i.e. favourable) reputation awaits this beautiful †pain†'. For pain, I suggest *laborem*, 'effort'. As I see it this a promise that Sulpicia's poetry will be famous, and a very appropriate one to be given by Apollo and the Muses.²⁹ The error is due to a synonym substitution, for which cf. Ov. *Met.* 9.289, where *M* reads *dolores* for *labores*.

The phrase *pulcher labor* is striking, but not difficult. I have found it in two other places in Classical literature:³⁰ *hunc favor aequus | provehit et pulchro reddit sua dona labori* ('Even-handed favour promotes him and gives him his gifts for his beautiful efforts', Juv. 16.56-57), and *digestaque praeda ... | cetera bellantum dextrae pulchroque labori* ('The booty is distributed ... The rest was for the warrior's strength and beautiful efforts', Sil. 15.264-267). The parallel in Juvenal is particularly interesting. If *laborem* is correct both passages use this term in the same metrical *sedes*, forming a sandwich around the subject, *tua*

27 *Epigr. Bob.* 37.69-70.

28 Fuchs 1968, 37 n. 19 suggests that *pulcher* here is equivalent *exoletus*.

29 The anonymous reviewer reads this as taking up the poem's theme of fame and fortune.

30 That is to say according to the PHI disk, supplemented with a search of the poetic works of Ausonius, Prudentius, Claudian, and Sidonius Apollinaris, given the poem's possible dates.

fama in Sulpicia and *sua dona* in Juvenal.³¹ The context in all three is describing rewards for people's efforts, but in Sulpicia the efforts are poetic, while in Juvenal and Silius they are military. The similarities in Sulpicia and Juvenal are surely not accidental: one is imitating the other, so this is a new piece of evidence to be considered for establishing the poem's date. Indeed, the balance of evidence may even favour Sulpicia's priority. In deciding which of two passages has priority there is a tendency for the original to be more organically embedded in its context, and for the imitation to expand and elaborate on the original. Sulpicia's *pulcher labor* describes her entire poem, and *pulcher* has an obvious point in complimenting the poet's skill. In Juvenal, however, *pulchro* is ironic, and there are no details for what the soldier's *pulcher labor* is. In the second case, Juvenal's phrase is expanded so that the 'rewards' include military promotion as well as booty. On the other hand, these tendencies are not conclusive, and the most commonly accepted date for composition (c. 400), saw a great revival in Juvenal's popularity,³² so it may well be expected for a poet of that period to know and refer to him.

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31 Perhaps Juvenal even wrote *reddit pulchro*, which would then put *pulchro* in the same *sedes* in both passages.

32 R.J. Tarrant *ap.* Reynolds 1983, 200.

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