IGNORANT EUCTUS: WIT AND LITERARY ALLUSION IN MARTIAL 8.6

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Archetypis vetuli nihil est odiosius Eucti
—ficta Saguntino cymbia malo luto—
argenti fumosa sui cum stemmata narrat
garrulus et verbis mucida vina facit:
“Laomedontae fuerant haec poca mensae:
ferret ut haec muros struxit Apollo lyra.
hoc cratere ferox commisit proelia Rhoecus
 cum Lapithis: pugna debile cernis opus,
hi duo longaevo censentur Nestore fundi:
pollce de Pylio trita columba nitet.
hic scyphus est in quo misceri iussit amicis
 largius Aeacides vividusque merum.
hac propinavit Bitiae pulcherrima Dido
 in patera, Phrygio cum data cena viro est.”
miratus fueris cum prisca toreumata multum,
in Priami calathis Astyanacta bibes.

This is an epigram which depends more than most for its full satiric effect on the reader’s recognition of the literary allusions. The subject is the boorish Euctus, who is accustomed to ruin the enjoyment of his invited dinner guests, first by haranguing them at length on the mythical pedigree of his embossed silver cups, and then, ironically, by serving wine of recent vintage in these supposedly ancient vessels.

First, a word about the name Euctus. In line 1 Eucti is the preferred reading of J.H. Izaac in the Budé edition (1933) and of Shackleton Bailey in his recent Teubner (1990) and Loeb (1993) texts; the alternative, Aucti, was printed by W.M. Lindsay (OCT, 2nd ed. 1929) and by W.C.A. Kerr (Loeb ed. 1919 rev. 1968) among others1). A glance at the contexts in which the two names

1) Eucti is the reading of the manuscript family whose archetype is designated B^4 by Lindsay; Aucti is found in F (according to Friedlaender) and was inferred by

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are used elsewhere by Martial supports the reading *Eucti*. The name Auctus appears four times (7.51,52; 9.21; 12.13), in every case with reference to Pompeius Auctus, one of the poet’s patrons, and a keen admirer of his work. Given the possibility of confusion, it seems highly unlikely that Martial would apply the same appellation to the character described in the present epigram. The name Euctus is used only once elsewhere, in Book 11, where it refers to a doctor 2. Kay 3) remarks on the appropriateness in the context of the Greek name, since (apart from the meaning of the word: εὐκτός ‘prayed for’), most doctors in Rome were of Greek origin. I would suggest that the name Euctus was chosen in our epigram for a similar reason: the tedious and ignorant host who makes a display of his wealth is elsewhere often a parvenu (e.g. Trimalchio and Martial’s Zolius); by calling the subject of this piece Euctus, Martial is hinting that he too is of foreign and/or servile provenance 4).

The character Euctus is a combination of two types satirised elsewhere by Martial: 1) the owner of silverware who makes false claims for its antiquity, 2) the boorish and vulgar host.

To understand Martial’s treatment of the first type of character, some background information is necessary. After the second Punic War and throughout the second century BC, the availability of silver in the form of booty and access to silver mines (e.g. in Spain) led to a passion on the part of the wealthy for silver cups and other forms of dinnerware. Often these were custom-made by skilled local craftsmen, but sometimes antique specimens by the best Greek artisans were obtained at enormous expense: for example, L. Licinius Crassus, consul in 95 BC, owned two cups by Mentor (4th or 5th century), the most famous of all the engravers in silver (Plin. *Nat.*

Lindsay from the lemmata in the two other families (*DE AUCTI CRATERA* C and *DE AUTI CRATERA* A); he also suggested that the reading *illo* of C is a gloss on *τιχό* i.e. Aucto. Note also the alternative *Aucti* (C, A), rather than the correct *Eucti*, at 11.28.1.

2) The name is attested three times in CIL 6.


4) The name occurs three times in CIL 6 (10899, 13843 and 17314), in each case with reference to persons of servile or humble origin. Auctus, by contrast, appears very commonly in CIL 6 with reference to slaves or freedmen, but it is not exclusively confined to this class, and is a Roman rather than a foreign name. For Auctus, see I. Kajanto, *The Latin Cognomina* (1965), 350.