

Three notes on Petronius

Abstract: The author discusses, firstly, Petr. 61.7 *benemoria* (a conjectural reading which has won universal acceptance) in connexion with an African inscription in mosaic; secondly, he adduces new parallels to Petr. 43.8 *olim oliorum* “for quite a while”; thirdly, he discusses the form and meaning of Petr. 52.4 and .6 *nugax*.

Keywords: Vulgar Latin, Hapaxes in Petronius.

An inscription in mosaic from Hadrumetum (Byzacena) reads, i.a., *deus odit uxore malmoria* (AE 1960.91). The editors¹ have corrected this to *mal[i] mori(s) a(c)*,² but the correction is unnecessary. The adjective *malimorius* is attested in the Gloss., 3.333.41, .432.4, and this must be another instance of it—interestingly, with a syncope in the intertonic syllable.

A further implication leads to a sentence of Petronius', 61.7 *ego non mercules corporaliter illam aut propter res venerias curavi, sed magis quod benemoria fuit*, where *benemoria* is but the fruit of an old conjecture, by Orellius, for the transmitted *bene moriar*.

The fact of the matter is that the adjective *benemorius* has been attested quite modestly (cf. Heraeus 1937, 104ff.). A couple of Christian epitaphs have it instead of the usual *benememorius* ‘of blessed memory’: ILCV 3952 (Mauretania) *Aurelia Saturina benemoria* .. *Mallius Fidensus (=entius?) una cum filios fecit*; ILJug 3.2675 (Salona) *arca Andreae benemori ca[nc(ellari)] pa<l>ati*, and that is all, unless we count in the curious superlative *benemorientissima* (ILJug 3.1864, Epidaurus), which seems a contamination of the usual *benemerentissima* by the vaguely synonymous *benemoria*.

¹ The first edition is one by L. Foucher in the *Bulletin archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques*, 1955–56, 42 + Pl.1; see also Lassère 2005, 250ff.

² The full text of the inscription according to Lassère is as follows: *Vive* (i.e. bibe) *lude dona*. | *Eustorgius dicit*. | *Deus odit uxore(m) mal[i] | mori(s) a(c) filiu(m) in alogia | et usura, Eustorgius | dicit. Deus amat virgi | [nem v]era(m) et formonsa(m) | et amicos bonos, Eus | torgius dicit. Sic habeto | amicum sperans quia | litigaturus es qu(m) illu, | Eustorgius dicit. Vibi | te ju[venes dum] possel | tis viv[ere], Eus | tor]gius | [dicit ---] vive | [---] Eus | [torgius dicit perge p]rofi | [nus(?), Eustorgius dic]it.*

Under the circumstances, the irrefutable attestation of *malimorius*, which is what the Hadrumentum epigraph amounts to, should be taken as further circumstantial evidence for the existence of *benemorius*.*

One of Petronius's hapaxes is 43.8 *olim oliorum* "for quite a while". This is usually filed together with the relatively many instances of the Genitive Intensive,³ to begin with Petronius' own *nummorum nummos* at 37.8; other examples include Plt. *Trin.* 309 *victor victorum*, Hor. *Ep.* 1.1.107 and Liv. 45.27.10 *rex regum*, Verg. *Cat.* 5.6 *cura curarum*, Sen. *Med.* 233 *dux ducum*, Flor. *Epit.* 2.26 *barbari barbarorum*—not to mention the currency this turn of phrase enjoyed later as it became an earmark of the biblical idiom.

What sets Petronius's phrase apart, though, is the fact that it functions as a time adverbial. In this respect its nearest parallel may be a phrase that is found in Venetian, *ani anoro* (< *anni annorum*), with exactly the same meaning (Beccaria 1999, 75).

The analogy is the closer as *olim* was pronounced and heard as *oli*, cf. *App. Pr.* 224 *olim non oli*. Note that *App. Pr.* contains several other entries dealing with the spelling of the word-final *m*: practically all of these concern uninflected words;⁴ in inflected ones, presumably, rules of thumb were applied.⁵ Epigraphic evidence suggests that substandard spellings without *m* also appeared in uninflected numerals, e.g. CIL 5.1666 *undeci*, 6.9162 *quindecim*. Now this could lead to their being secondarily affected with a declension. In the Greek NT the mention of Judas Iscariot at *Lc.* 22.3 is accompanied with a clarification: ὄντα ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τῶν δώδεκα, and the Vulgate translates this succinctly as *unum de duodecim*, but the Old Latin of the Codex Palatinus has a more literal rendering: *qui erat ex numero illorum duodecorum*.⁶

The instance at Petr. 43.8 looks akin to this—*oli(m) oliorum* broadly analogous to *anni annorum* (or *saecula saeculorum!*) is not unlike the analogy of *duodeci(m) duodecorum* to *ducenti ducentorum* or *multi multorum*. One may even feel tempted to override the reading of the Traguriensis and spell *oli* before *oliorum*, but of course there isn't a proof the author would have it this way.

³ "Genitiv der Steigerung" H/Sz 55f.

⁴ *App. Pr.* 217 *passim non passi*, 219 *numquam non numqua*, 223 *pridem non pride*; 226 *idem non ide* is but an apparent exception, as the tail part of the word remains uninflected; and 143 *triclinium non triclinu* seems rather to concern the spelling of [n] (< *n+yod*; but cf. the doublet in Greek, τρικλινος/τρικλίνιον) than the final *u(m)* itself.

⁵ E.g. write *amare* if Inf but *amarem* if 1Sg, write *pisce* if Abl but *piscem* if Acc, and so on.

⁶ *Evangelium Palatinum*, ed. J. Belsheim, Christianiae 1896, 84.

At Petr. 52.4 Trimalchio speaks to a slave: *cito, inquit, te ipsum caede, quia nugax es*; and then .6 *suadeo a te impetres ne sis nugax*.

Discussing Cael. ap. Cic. *Fam.* 8.15.1 *ecquando tu hominem ineptiorem quam tuum Cn. Pompejum vidisti, qui tantas turbas, qui tam nugax esset, commorit*, Adams 2016, 139f., draws attention to two other phrases, one from Plautus, *Per.* 264 *tuxtax tergo erit meo* “it’ll be swish-swash for my back” (tr. de Melo) and the other from Petronius, 58.7 *qui te primus deuro de fecit* “whoever was the first to make you his *come ‘ere’*”: both these contain exclamations used as nouns (*tuxtax, deuro de*), and *nugas esse* may be another instance of this: “be *n’importe quoi*”, “be a joke”, based on what first was an accusative of exclamation, *nugas!* “rubbish” (Plt., e.g. *Capt.* 612).

In line with this the grammarians would later include *nugas* in their list of indeclinable adjectives, together with the notorious *nequam* and *frugi* (and also *nihili, pondo*).⁷ The instance in the Old Latin 2*Sam.* 6.22 *ero nugas in conspectu tuo* (ap. Ambr. *Exp.Ps.cxviii* 7.27) shows the old colloquialism was alive even then and still colloquial enough to be absent from the Vulgate, which has *ero humilis* instead.⁸

Back to Petronius, “one wonders whether the original reading [at 52.4 and .6] might have been *nugas*” (Adams, reflecting earlier guesses), the more so as two instances of *tu nugax es* (“you’re a joke”) are found in Pompeian graffiti (CIL 4.5279 and .5282). Or rather not. The form *nugax*, which isn’t attested in any source prior to Petronius but is unambiguously transmitted by the Tragiurians, may present us with a case of hypercorrection: in view of *nugor*, the newly produced adjective fitted nicely into the pattern of *loquor~loquax* etc.; cf. also the adjective *praegnans atis* and its subsequent adaptation *praegnax acis*.⁹ Trimalchio’s *nugax* can be the earliest attestation of a word that would later enjoy a certain currency, judging by its appearance in Vulg. *Sap.* 2.16 *tamquam nugaces aestimati sumus*;¹⁰ indeed Plautus had already toyed with the same idea for an ad hoc formation of his own, the superlative adverb at *Trin.* 819

⁷ GL 1.35.21sq (Charisius), .308.17sq (Diomedes).

⁸ True, the Old Latin *nugas* stands for the LXX ἀχρησιος ‘useless’, while Jerome’s *humilis* renders TM לַפָּז ‘low(ly)’; i.e., the difference in Latin isn’t solely one of register but reflects the different source texts.

⁹ As well as *praegnans antis*. For attestations see ThLL 10.2.659.84ff; cf Adams 2016, 274.

¹⁰ LXX εις κίβδηλον ἐλογίσθημεν “we have been esteemed as counterfeits”.

actum reddam nugacissime (“I shall see to it with especial carelessness”).¹¹

Nothing, then, should excuse the editorial introduction of *nugax* at places where *nugas* is transmitted, which is what has happened occasionally at Var. *Men.* 513.3 and in Cael. ap. Cic. as well. The opposite also holds true, and at Petr. 52 it is especially important to read the text as it stands, since Trimalchio’s hypercorrection here may be another vulgarism we hear from his mouth.

Bibliography

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¹¹ De Melo would have it otherwise: “I’ll make sure that the trick is carried out to perfection” (LCL 328, 201). But the notion which is inherent in *nug-* seems to be one of lacking gravity, or acting with none, rather than playing tricks.

ThLL = *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*.

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Апстракт: Аутор разматра, прво, Petr. 61.7 *benemoria* (читање по општепримљеној конјектури) у вези с текстом једног мозаичног натписа из Африке; друго, доноси нових паралела за Petr. 43.8 *olim oliorum* "одавно"; треће, разматра облик и значење Petr. 52.4 и .6 *nigax*.

Кључне речи: вулгарни латински, хапакси код Петронија.