

MARTIAL

SELECT EPIGRAMS

EDITED BY
LINDSAY AND PATRICIA WATSON

Senior Lecturers in Classics, University of Sydney



26 (= 5.24)

Hermes Martia saeculi uoluptas,
Hermes omnibus eruditus armis,
Hermes et gladiator et magister,
Hermes turba sui tremorque ludi,
Hermes, quem timet Heliuss, sed unum, 5
Hermes, cui cadit Aduolans, sed uni,
Hermes uincere nec ferire doctus,
Hermes suppositicius sibi ipse,
Hermes diuitiae locariorum,
Hermes cura laborque ludiarum, 10
Hermes belligera superbus hasta,
Hermes aequoreo minax tridente,
Hermes casside languida timendus,
Hermes gloria Martis uniuersi,
Hermes omnia solus et ter unus. 15

28 (= 10.50)

Frangat Idumaeas tristis Victoria palmas,
plange, Fauor, saeua pectora nuda manu;
mutet Honor cultus, et iniquis munera flammis
mitte coronatas, Gloria maesta, comas.
heu facinus! prima fraudatus, Scorpe, iuuenta 5
occidis et nigros tam cito iungis equos.
curribus illa tuis semper properata breuisque
cur fuit et uitae tam prope meta tuae?

26 (= 5.24)

This epigram, eulogising a gladiator, Hermes, takes the form of a mock hymn which praises its addressee in hyperbolic terms, in some cases so extreme as to belong to the realm of fantasy (cf. 2n.). As hymnal parodies typically do, the poem contains many features of genuine hymns: the anaphora of the god's name (cf. *Anth. Lat.* 389.38–60, an invocation to Sol), the list of his characteristic attributes and accomplishments (ἀρεταί), the use of relative clauses to celebrate his virtues (5–6), the insistence on his uniqueness (ibid.), and the problematical *omnia solus et ter unus* in the final verse. Mock hymns are often for persons of humble status, e.g. Ovid's

address to the slave doorkeeper in *Am.* 1.6. The present piece is a case in point: most gladiators were of servile origin.

The hyperbolic character of the praise lavished on Hermes has led to the conclusion that he is a fiction (Versnel (1974) 403), in which case the gladiator's name was chosen to facilitate the hymnal parody. It is, however, possible that M. had in mind a real gladiator, whose theophoric name suggested the idea of casting the poem in the form of a hymn to a god. Inscriptions confirm that the name Hermes was often adopted by gladiators, but there is no independent evidence for the existence in M.'s day of a famous one of this name.

Although Hermes' prowess is clearly exaggerated, and the majority of gladiators did not survive past the fourth year, it was possible for an outstanding one to enjoy both fame and the reasonably long career which M.'s celebration of Hermes imputes to him. There are funeral inscriptions for comparatively long-lived gladiators, e.g. *ILS* 5098 for one who died at 35 after 20 victories. Cf. Köhne and Ewigleben (2000) 69–70.

Further reading: Köhne and Ewigleben (2000), Robert (1940), Versnel (1974), Ville (1981)

1 Hermes: gladiators usually took a 'stage' name (Ville 1981) 308–10); Hermes was a popular choice. The name might have been thought a good omen. Hermes/Mercury conducted the souls of the dead to Hades; in the same way, a gladiator named Hermes might despatch dead men to Hades.

Martia saeculi uoluptas 'delight of the age in matters to do with Mars' i.e. as a gladiator. As god of war, Mars was honoured by gladiators whose armour and weapons resembled those of soldiers: cf. Kyle (1998) 80–1.

saeculi uoluptas echoes parodically the opening of Lucretius' hymn to Venus, *Aeneadam genetrix, hominum diuinumque uoluptas*.

2 omnibus eruditus armis: an expert in all the various weapons and armour used by gladiators: in M.'s day there were 13 classes of gladiator, distinguished largely by their equipment (Köhne and Ewigleben (2000) 45–64). The statement is hyperbolic: gladiators normally specialised in one type of combat, or at most two (Ville (1981) 307–8). On the level of hymnal parody, the phrase suggests the omnipotence of gods (Versnel (1974) 379).

3 et gladiator et magister: trainers (*magistri*) were often former gladiators, but the two occupations were not usually pursued simultaneously. It was, however, common in hymns to ascribe to a god two qualities which normally exclude each other (Versnel (1974) 380 n.66).

4 turba sui tremorque ludi: he fills the other members of his school with confusion and dread. Members of the same school fought against each other: cf. Quint. *Inst.* 2.17.33. Cf. the Libyan gladiator 'whom all who were matched with him in the stadium feared' (Robert (1940) 303 no.106). Alliteration is a feature of the hymn-style.

5–6 unum | . . . uni: *μόνος*, *solus*, and *unus* are used in hymns to indicate the sphere in which a god has no rival (L. Watson, *Mnemosyne* 35 (1982) 96): even the finest gladiators are no match for Hermes. Invincibility is a theme both of aretalogies and gladiatorial epitaphs: for the latter, cf. Robert (1940) no. 30 'no one gained a victory over me'.

5 Helius is a gladiator's name (Robert (1940) 298 n.5). Helius, like Aduolans (6), is presumably a star of the day. There may be a touch of parody here: Helius, who in religion is the highest of the gods (e.g. *Corpus Hermeticum* 5.3 'the Sun is the mightiest of the gods in heaven, to whom all the heavenly gods submit') nonetheless yields to Hermes.

6 cadit 'falls to the ground' (in defeat, not necessarily in death: cf. 7). **Aduolans:** gladiators frequently bore names suggestive of physical or moral qualities e.g. Celer, Pugnax, Ferox: cf. Ville (1981) 309.

7 uincere nec ferire doctus: *ferire* = 'strike dead': cf. Luc. 5.363–4 *tiro rudis, spectat poenas et disce ferire, | disce mori*. Hermes has the skill to win fights without killing his opponent outright. A victory was gained not only by striking a fatal blow but also by forcing one's opponent to admit defeat by dropping his shield and raising a finger of the left hand: the presiding magistrate then consulted the spectators as to whether the vanquished gladiator should be spared or killed. This procedure explains why the ability to defeat without killing was valued: it endeared the victor to the spectators by affording them the opportunity to influence the outcome of the contest.

8 suppositicius sibi ipse 'himself his own substitute'. *suppositicii*, substitutes (cf. *CIL* IV 1179), were reserve fighters who took the place of a fallen gladiator in cases where the victor was called on to fight a second bout. The phrase apparently means that, because Hermes invariably wins,

he has no need of a substitute. The illogical notion of acting as substitute for oneself may parody the idea of a god taking his own place, which is not unusual in various theologies (Versnel (1974) 403–5).

9 diuitiae locariorum ‘source of wealth to the seat-contractors’. *locarius*, found only here and possibly *CIL* XIII 8183, must refer to entrepreneurs who bought seats in bulk and resold them at a profit. Names of prominent fighters who were scheduled to appear were advertised in advance. A star like Hermes would guarantee good ticket sales, bringing prosperity to the seat contractors.

10 cura laborque ludiarum ‘darling and heart-throb of the gladiators’ women’. Gladiators were notorious for their sexual attractiveness, not only to *ludiae* (see n. below) but to women in general: cf. Petr. 126.6, *CIL* IV 4342 *suspirium puellarum* | *Tr.* | *Celadus*, 4356 *Tr.* | *Celadus, reti.* | *Crescens* | *puparru domnus*. According to Juv. 6.82–113 a senator’s wife, Eppia, was so enamoured of a gladiator as to elope with him.

cura laborque: best taken in an erotic sense (previous n.). *cura* = ‘an object of love’: cf. Ov. *Am.* 1.3.16 *tu mihi, si qua fides, cura perennis eris; labores* is used of the pangs of love (Hor. *Carm.* 1.17.19–20 with N–H, [Tib.] 3.6.7: *ite procul durum curae genus, labores*). Some explain that Hermes is ‘a source of worry and trouble to the gladiators’ women’ because his gladiatorial skill threatens the lives of their partners. But while *labor* can mean ‘a cause of distress’ (cf. Sil. 3.75), *cura* + genitive invariably refers to someone who is the object of another’s care or concern.

ludiarum: not, as often supposed, ‘women attracted to gladiators’, but women attached to the gladiatorial schools who provided for the gladiators’ sexual needs: cf. L. and P. Watson (1996) 588–91.

11 belligera . . . hasta: two types of gladiator carried a lance: the *hoplomachus* (61.1 n.) and the *equus superbus* may suggest that M. has in mind the latter: the *equites*, who fought against each other, were the first pairs to compete: their entrance on white horses like Roman cavalrymen, wielding a lance and carrying the equestrian shield, must have been imposing. Cf. Köhne and Ewigleben (2000) 37, 48.

12 aequoreo . . . tridente: i.e. with fisherman’s trident. The *retarius*, armed like a fisherman with trident, net and dagger, was matched with the *secutor*, whose smooth rounded helmet with its small eye-holes and fin-like crest resembled a fish. Cf. Köhne and Ewigleben (2000) 61.

13 casside languida timendus: probably refers to the imposing helmet with central crest to which was attached a plume of horse-hair or feathers, worn by the *murmillo*, *Thraex*, and *hoplomachus* (cf. Köhne and Ewigleben (2000) 37–8, 45, 49, figs. 21, 49). The crest curved forward, so that both helmet and plume had a drooping appearance. M. may have in mind a Homeric formula: cf. Hom. *Il.* 6.468–70 ‘(Astyanax) distraught at the sight of his dear father, afraid of the bronze and the horse-hair plume, when he saw it nodding terribly from the top of his helmet’, D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford 1955) 210–13, Virg. *A.* 8.620 *terribilem cristis galeam*.

14 gloria Martis uniuersi: having focused on Hermes’ prowess in three types of bout, the poet now reiterates his claim that Hermes is *omnibus eruditus armis*. As in 1, Mars refers to gladiatorial combat.

15 omnia solus ‘alone all things’. The phrase, which reflects the *solus–omnia* polarity in ancient religion (cf. *CIL* x 3800 *te tibi una quae es omnia dea Isis*, Versnel (1974) *passim*) refers parodically to Hermes’ total mastery of the gladiatorial art.

ter unus ‘thrice (i.e. very) unique’. A difficult expression, which works best as a parody of *Trismegistos* ‘thrice (very) greatest’, under which title Hermes was worshipped when synthesised with the Egyptian Thoth. Hermes Trismegistos was omniscient and a teacher of all things (G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Cambridge 1986) 32): this fits well with the nonpareil Hermes of the epigram. On chronological grounds, an allusion to the Christian Trinity is excluded. An attempt to see a reference to Hermes as embodying three things in his one person (e.g. the three types of combat mentioned in 11–13) would be intolerably bathetic after *gloria Martis uniuersi* and *omnia solus*.

28 (= 10.50)

A lament for the death of the famous charioteer Flavius Scorpus, whose passing is also recorded three poems later in the epitaphic 10.53. The epigram contains many features of the poetic epikedion (cf. below), but cannot properly be classed as such, since one of the main elements, consolation, is missing.

Whereas M. on other occasions voices resentment at the large sums of money showered on Scorpus and his kind (cf. on 22), he here expresses, if

not his own, at least the sentiments of the Roman people as a whole on the death of a popular hero. Charioteers were subject to widespread adulation: by way of illustration Cameron (1973) 244–52 cites Plin. *NH* 7.186 about one supporter of the Reds who threw himself on the funeral pyre of his favourite charioteer.

Unlike the possibly fictitious gladiator Hermes (26), Scorpus' existence is confirmed by inscriptional evidence. *CIL* VI 10048.19 records that he won 2,048 victories (cf. 10.53.4 *dum numerat palmas, credidit esse senem*); he is also depicted driving a chariot on the tomb of T. Flavius Abascantus (*CIL* VI 8628). He rode for the Green faction (*CIL* VI 10048.19; cf. 10.48.23), which would explain his popularity: the Greens were supported by the common people, the Blues by the aristocracy. Scorpus was honoured with at least one equestrian bronze statue (22.6n.), and in addition received large sums as prize money (cf. intro. to 22). Since he is mentioned as alive at 11.1.15–16, his death must have occurred between December 96 (the publication date of book 11) and 98, when the second edition of book 10 was published. Although he had not yet reached his 27th birthday (10.53.3), there is no compelling evidence to show that he did not die of natural causes. Kay on 11.1.16 implies that Scorpus was the victim of a racing accident, and such incidents must certainly have been common, given that 'part of the tactics of driving was deliberately to foul an opponent' (Harris (1972) 205–7). Had Scorpus met such an end, however, it seems unlikely that M. would have failed to mention the fact: compare *CIL* VI 10049, a tombstone for two brothers which specifies that they were killed while racing.

Further reading: Cameron (1973), Estève-Forriol (1962), Harris (1972), Lattimore (1942), Syme (1977)

1–4 In the epikedion, appropriate persons or deities are typically invited to join in lamentation for the deceased (Estève-Forriol (1962) 126). Cf. Catull. 3.1, on Lesbia's *passer*, *lugete o Veneres Cupidinesque*, Stat. *Silu.* 5.3.89–90, where the mourners for Staius' father (a poet and orator), include *Pietas*, *Iustitia* and *Facundia*. The deities invoked may be either official objects of cult (e.g. *Venus*, *Pietas*) or personifications (e.g. *Facundia*): *Victoria* and *Honos* fall into the former category, *Fauor* and *Gloria* into the latter.

1 Frangat . . . palmas: as a sign of mourning, Victory is to break the symbol (*palmas* n.) with which she is associated. Cf. Ov. *Am.* 3.9.7–8, on the death of Tibullus, *ecce puer Veneris fert euersamque pharetram | et fractos arcus et sine luce facem*.

Idumaeas . . . palmas: cf. Virg. *G.* 3.12 *primus Idumaeas referam tibi, Mantua, palmas*. Since palm trees grew in southern Italy (Hehn (1976) 204–11), such victory-palms could have been procured locally, but called by the poets 'Idumaeas' because Idumaea (used loosely in poetry for Judaea or Palestine) was famous for them (Luc. 3.216, Plin. *NH* 13.26 *Iudaea . . . inclusa est uel magis palmis*).

Victoria: worshipped as a deity since the early third century BC (Latte, *RR* 235), and often depicted on statues, coins and reliefs holding a crown in her right hand (cf. *AP* 15.46–7, Cameron (1973) 17). The personified Victory was prominent in the Circus, where her figure led the introductory procession of deities (cf. *Ov. Am.* 3.2.44–5, *RE* II 8.2528 s.v. 'Victoria').

palmas: originally the winners of Circus races were presented with palms and crowns, in imitation of the Greek games (Liv. 10.47.3). In later times considerable sums of money were added, but the palm remained the symbol of victory *par excellence*: cf. *Ov. Am.* 3.2.82 *ille [sc. auriga] tenet palmam*. In circus inscriptions *palmam* stands for 'a victory' e.g. *CIL* VI 10049; cf. Cameron (1973) 17.

2 plange . . . pectora nuda: beating the breast – often bared as here – was a standard gesture of mourning: cf. Prop. 2.24.51–2, *CLE* 398.7 *maeret et ad cineres plangit sua pectora palmis*, Toynbee (1971) 45. The so-called 'poetic plural' is particularly common with parts of the body: see E. Löfstedt, *Syntactica* 1 (Lund 1942) 29, 47–50.

Fauor: Popular Support: cf. *Ov. Tr.* 2.506, Tac. *Dial.* 29.3 *peculiaria huius urbis uitia . . . histrionalis fauor et gladiatorum equorumque studia. faueo* is a technical expression for 'being a fan of' a rider: cf. *Ov. Am.* 3.2.2, Plin. *NH* 7.186 *Felice russei auriga elato, in rogam eius unum e fauentibus iecisse se*.

saeua . . . manu: the violence with which *Fauor* is to beat his breast characterises the depth of popular grief at Scorpis' passing.

3 mutet . . . cultus: put on the dark garments of mourning; cf. Prop. 4.7.28, *Ov. Met.* 11.669, Tac. *Ann.* 3.2, Blümner (1911) 497.

Honor: for the word in a similar context, cf. *Ov. Pont.* 2.11.21 *ad palmas per se cursurus honores [equus]*. There was a cult of *Honos* (Latte, *RR* 235–7), though he is mainly associated with *Virtus* rather than the circus.

iniquis . . . flammis: *iniquus* is frequently used, especially in *CLE*, of death, but its application to the *flammae* of the funerary pyre is apparently unique; closest is Stat. *Theb.* 4.673–4 *usque adeone parum cineri data mater iniquo | natalesque rogi?*

munera: the offering of a lock of hair to the deceased is attested first in Hom. *Il.* 23.141. It is questionable whether the practice is authentically Roman. A number of the allusions in Latin texts can be explained by their Greek setting or by their epic milieu which may reflect Homeric usage: cf. Petr. 111.9; *Ov. Fast.* 3.562–3 with Bömer, *Ov. Ep.* 11.116 with Knox. Prop. 1.17.19–21, however, seems to suggest that the custom *was* practised at Roman funerals.

4 coronatas: *Gloria*, which attends victory, wears on her head the emblem by which the latter was symbolised: for a crown given to victors, cf. *AP* 16.336, 340, [*Ov.*] *Hal.* 68 *seu septem spatiis Circo [equi] meruere coronam*, n. on *palmas* above.

Gloria: for the term in a racing context, cf. Virg. *G.* 3.102 *quae gloria palmae*.

5 heu facinus!: *heu*, an exclamation mainly confined to poetry, is particularly common in epikedeia and verse epitaphs. The 'crime' is that of the divine powers responsible for prematurely taking away a life: cf. 11.91.3, *CLE* 1225.3 *heu scelus, heu crudele nefas facinusque tremendum*. Such indignant protestations often occur in cases of *mors immatura*: cf. Lattimore (1942) 183–4, Kay on 11.91.3.

prima . . . iuuenta goes with both *fraudatus* and *occidis*; cf. *CLE* 1232.1 *hic puer octavo fraudatus clauditur anno*. The expression *prima iuuenta*, 'in early youth' is common in verse epitaphs, e.g. *CLE* 1260.1 *hic situs Amphion ereptus prima iuuenta*.

6 et nigros tam cito iungis equos: in the Underworld, Scorpis now drives black horses, an appropriate colour for an infernal *auriga*: cf. *Ov. Met.* 5.360 (Pluto's team). It was thought that the deceased person continued in the world below the activities which (s)he had pursued in life: see 83.7n. The colour of Scorpis' horses is unknown, but while black horses were often employed in the Circus (e.g. *CIL* VI 10047, 10056), the point of line 6 – that the horses which Scorpis now drives are black – would be much diminished if that had also been the hue of his teams in life. There is also a nice irony in a frequently victorious charioteer driving black steeds, white horses being associated with victory (Sauvage (1975) 17–18).

nigros: by the first century AD *niger* had supplanted *ater* as the term for 'black' in funereal contexts: cf. André (1949) 56–9, 362–3.

tam cito: *cito* is common in verse epitaphs lamenting a premature death; e.g. *CLE* 1823.12, *CIL* IX 292.7–9 *iniqua | fata quae nos tam | cito disiunxerunt*.

7–8 ‘Why was that goal, always speedily gained by your chariot and in a brief compass, so near at hand for your life as well?’

7 curribus . . . properata: *curribus* is dative of agent after *properata*. The transitive use of the verb is unusual; the normal construction is *ad metam properare*: cf. *Ov. Ars* 2.727. There is a pun on *properare* with reference to early death (cf. *Ov. Met.* 10.31 *Eurydices . . . properata retexite fata*, *CLE* 1402.8 *quem mihi tam subito mors properata tulit*).

breuis: the turning point is described as ‘short’ because an expert charioteer reached it as quickly and directly as possible by seizing the inside position ahead of his rivals. The unique application of *breuis* to *meta* stems from a play on the adjective in its common meaning of a ‘short’ life: cf. *Hor. Carm.* 4.13.22–3 *sed Cinarae breues | annos fata dederunt*, *CIL* XI 3194.

8 meta: the turning posts (*metae*), at either end of the race-track, consisted of three tall cones crowned with egg-like objects set on a high platform: cf. Humphrey (1986) 255–7. The metaphor of the ‘goal’, i.e. end of life, is common: cf. *Ov. Tr.* 1.9.1 *uitae . . . tangere metam*, *Apul. Met.* 4.20, *CLE* 740.5 *uitae metas*.