

## BELLARIA (XVI)



No image of Martial exists. We shall therefore content ourselves with this wonderful 'Fayum mummy portrait', 2nd c AD, Object #ECM.1473-2010, Myers Collection, Eton College – the wood painted portraits were discovered in the Roman Egyptian Al Fayyum Oasis, buried with their mummified subjects.

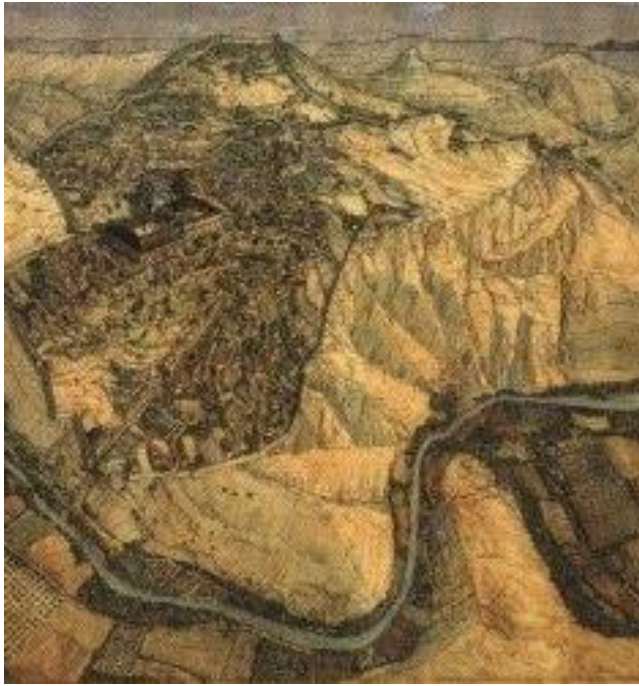
### MARTIAL (1)

#### Brief life

*To judge from his poetry (always a dodgy business with a poet): Marcus Valerius Martialis was a Spaniard with a good Roman name, like his parents, Fronto and Flacilla (5.34). So presumably the family had at some stage in the past held office in the municipium where they lived (Augusta Bilbilis, on a hill near modern Catalayud, 4.55) and as result been given Roman citizenship.*

*Martial was born probably in AD 41 and was apparently educated by his parents (9.73). He tells us that he went to Rome 23 years later in AD 64 (10.103.7), but what he was doing over the sixteen years until his first published work is not known. It is said high-profile Spaniards in Rome such as Seneca and Lucan gave him a warm reception, but there is no hard evidence for that in Martial's poems or elsewhere. That said, as his poems make clear, he made plenty of patrons, friends and acquaintances, some of them Spanish, among the wealthy and senatorial sets. Many of his poems refer in flattering terms to the emperors Titus (AD 79-81), his brother Domitian (81-96) and Nerva (96-98).*

**Note:** where the translation is not acknowledged, it is my attempt at a crib for the Latin.



Augusta Bilibis

### Opening the Colosseum

Martial's first collection of poems—*Liber de spectaculis*, published in AD 80—eulogised the stupendous 100 days' worth of shows put on by the Flavian emperor Titus to celebrate the opening of the 50,000-seater *amphitheatrum Flavium*, as the ancients called it ('Colosseum' was a medieval appellation, used from c. AD 1000). Obviously this involved putting in a good word for the emperor too.

In the following epigram, Martial makes the central point that Titus has built this magnificent public facility over the site of Nero's 'Golden

House', built on the ruins of the fire of Rome in AD 64. That house was certainly a spectacular edifice, set in vast grounds (l. 8, below), but used (it was said) only for Nero's own personal pleasure.

Martial takes us round it, like a tour guide, the first two couplets and the remaining four couplets pointing out what can be seen *now*, contrasted with what it *was* under Nero, the last summarising Titus' achievement—restoring Rome to its proper function, i.e. putting its wealth at the service of the people, not a tyrant.

Here, where the starry colossus† sees constellations too close,  
     and lofty scaffolding soars up in the middle of the road,  
 there used to gleam the hated halls of a barbarous king,  
     and a single house\* was established in the whole of Rome.  
 Here, where the august pile of the amphitheatre in full view         5  
     is being built, used to be Nero's lake.  
 Here, where we admire the public baths—a timely present—  
     a disdainful estate had deprived wretches of homes.  
 Where Claudius' portico\* unfolds its broad shade  
     used to be the outer limit where the palace came to its end.   10  
 Rome is restored to itself and, under your leadership, Caesar,  
     so is wealth to the people, which had been the tyrant's.

† The 116' high statue of Nero, built near his ornamental lake

\*The Golden House; so too 'palace' l.10

\*Where Agrippina had built a temple to Claudius on Mt Caelius

*hic ubi sidereus propius uidet astra colossus,  
 et crescunt media pegmata celsa uia,  
 inuidiosa feri radiabant atria regis,  
 unaque iam tota stabat in urbe domus;  
 hic ubi conspicui uenerabilis Amphitheatri           5  
 erigitur moles, stagna Neronis erant;  
 hic ubi miramur uelocia munera thermas,  
 abstulerat miseris tecta superbus ager;  
 Claudia diffusas ubi porticus explicat umbras,  
 ultima pars aulae deficientis erat.           10  
 reddita Roma sibi est et sunt, te praeside, Caesar,  
 deliciae populi, quae fuerant domini.*

### **de spectaculis 2**

In the next epigram, Martial informs—or reminds—the reader/listener of the sheer number of different nationalities that the tour-guide will have to serve. The whole world was watching, in others words: such were the celebrity and unifying power (v. 11) of Rome and its emperor:

What nation is so remote, so barbarous, Caesar,  
 that no spectator is from your own city?  
 A Bulgarian farmer has arrived from Mt Haemus with its Orphic tablets,  
 a Russian nomad, feeding on draughts of horse's blood,  
 an Egyptian who has tasted the Nile's first waters,           5  
 a Briton whom Tethys' furthest waves beat down.  
 An Arab has hurried in, so have Yemenis,  
 and southern Turks sprayed with their own misty perfumes.†  
 Germans have arrived, hair tied in a knot,  
 and Ethiopians, hair differently tied.           10  
 Their voices all sound different, yet they are one,  
 When you are being declared the fatherland's true father.  
 †saffron, used to scent the water sprayed over crowds to cool them

### **de spectaculis 3**

*quae tam seposita est, quae gens tam barbara, Caesar,  
 ex qua spectator non sit in urbe tua?  
 venit ab Orptheo cultor Rhodopeius Haemo,  
 uenit et epoto Sarmata pastus equo,  
 et qui prima bibit deprensi flumina Nili,           5  
 et quem supremas Tethyos unda ferit;  
 festinauit Arabs, festinauere Sabaei,*

*et Cilices nimbis hic maduere suis.  
crinibus in nodum tortis uenere Sygambri,  
atque aliter tortis crinibus Aethiopes.* 10  
*vox diuersa sonat populorum, tum tamen una est,  
cum uerus patriae diceris esse pater.*

### **de spectaculis 3**

The rest of the collection records the slaughter of men and animals in various imaginative ways (e.g. re-enacting myths) and also a sea-battle in a water-filled arena.

### **Post-entertainment gifts**

In AD 84/5 Martial produced his collection of two-line Xenia (127 'Mottoes', accompanying a gift of food and wine) and two-line Apophoreta (223 'Takeaways', mottoes accompanying presents dished out during the Roman Saturnalia celebrations). These tags make amusing remarks on the gifts, singing them up (if cheap) or otherwise finding something witty to say about them.

These two works are today numbered as Books 13 and 14, a numbering not given to them in antiquity but by a much later edition of his collected works.

### **XENIA ('Mottoes')**

#### **16 Turnips**

*These turnips, rejoicing in the cold of winter,  
which is my gift, Romulus is accustomed to eat in the heavens.  
damus: the royal 'we'*

#### **XVI Rapa**

*haec tibi, brumali gaudentia frigore, rapa  
quae damus, in caelo Romulus esse solet.  
A cheap present, but what's good enough for Romulus...*

#### **29 Jar of damsons**

*Plums, wrinkled by shrivelling from ageing in foreign lands,  
take (as a gift): they usually ease the load of constipated bowels.*

#### **XXIX Vas Damascenorum**

*Pruna, peregrinae carie rugosa senectae,  
sume: solent duri solvere ventris onus.  
These are damson, plums from Damascus (whence the name).*



Liquamen optimum ex officina Scauri ('Best garum from Scaurus' factory', in Pompeii)

### 102 *Garum of the Allies*

*From the first blood of a mackerel, still breathing its last,  
take proud garum, an expensive gift.*

### CII *Garum sociorum*

exspirantis adhuc scombri de sanguine primo  
accipe fastosum, munera cara, garum.

*The most highly prized, and a doubly strong, garum from Carthage (garum is a sauce made from the liquefied entrails of mackerel).*

### APOPHORETA ('Takeaways')

Martial self-deprecatingly introduces this collection by saying that you can stop wherever you like—it's just a string of couplets. But if you want to know why there are headings (*lemmata*), I'll tell you—so you can just read *them*:

ut, si malueris, lemmata sola legas.

### 23 *Earpick*

*If your ear crawls with an irritating itch,  
I give a weapon designed for such urges.*

### XXIII *Auriscalpium*

si tibi morosa prurigne verminat auris,  
arma damus tantis apta libidinibus.

### 93 *Antique cups*

*This ornament of yours is neither modern nor of Roman making:  
Mentor first drank from them as he made them.*

### XCIII *Pocula archetypa*

non est ista recens nec nostri gloria caeli:  
primus in his Mentor, dum facit illa, bibit.

*caelum* 'engraving tool' or 'location'; Mentor was a very famous Greek silversmith.

### **83 Ivory backscratcher**

*This [ivory] hand will protect you, when an irritating flea bites  
your shoulder blades—or something fouler than a flea.*

### **LXXXIII Scalptorium eboreum**

defendet manus haec, scapulas mordente molesto  
pulice, vel si quid pulice sordidius.

*'Something fouler' would be lice, bed-bugs etc.*

### **94 Rough-and-ready cups**

*We are plebeian cups of rough-and-ready glass,  
And our fine crockery is not cracked by boiling water.*

### **XCIV Calices audaces**

nos sumus audacis plebeia toreumata vitri,  
nostra neque ardenti gemma feritur aqua.

*All very ironical: cheap glass became available in the 1st CAD with the development of glass-blowing. Toreumata are classy embossed ware, and gemma is used of expensively decorated ware. Romans regularly mixed wine with hot water.*

### **98 Arretine ware**

*I warn you not to become too dismissive of Arretine pottery:  
Porsena luxuriated in his Tuscan earthenware.*

### **XCVIII Vasa Arretina**

Arretina nimis ne spernas vasa monemus:  
lautus erat Tuscis Porsena fictilibus.

*Arretium (modern Arezzo) in Etruria was a major centre for the production of this very popular matt-red pottery. Lars Porsena from Clusium was the famous Etruscan who failed to take Rome.*



Arretine drinking vessel

### **99 Basket**

*I, a foreign basket, have come from the painted Britons;  
but Rome already prefers to call me its own.*



Medieval basket

### **XCIX Bascauda**

barbara de pictis veni bascauda Britannis;  
sed me iam mavolt dicere Roma suam.

*This is clearly an exotic and expensive import from a country which at this time the Romans were trying to subdue under Agricola.*

### **119 Earthenware chamberpot**

*When I am summoned by a click of the fingers and the slave lingers,  
how often a pillow is turned into my rival!*



Roman chamberpot, with ledges for comfy seating

### **CXIX Matella fictilis**

dum poscor crepitu digitorum et verna moratur,  
o quotiens paelex culcita facta mea est!

*paelex is a rival mistress: the user is presumably envisaged ejaculating or urinating into it.*

Martial's major works are the epigrams to be found in books 1-12. To these we will turn in the rest of this sequence.



Classics for All

This is an extract selected for you as part of Classics for All's 'Bellaria' series to cheer us up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The full series of weekly instalments may be found on our website [classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/](https://classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/)