

Hungry for Sin: Stomachs in Persius

The stomach was something that assailed Persius throughout his entire life. He wrote on it in his satires, mentioning it in his prologue and repeatedly in *Satura* III; the stomach was the seat of sin, the origin of base desires, and what he considered to be the central problem with Neronian Rome. This can be seen in the usage of the word *venter* in his poems as the antithesis of the ideal Stoic philosophy which he sought to expound. This Stoic influence is evident throughout his small collection of *saturae*. Ironically, it would be the *venter* that eventually killed Persius, as Suetonius relates to us.

We see the life and work of Persius as related to the stomach; from a Stoic standpoint, it is the great enemy, the tempting influence which must be locked down and controlled. Persius, said to have been unimpressed with the great Stoic Seneca, in actuality heavily borrows from him: I seek to highlight this through analysis of both their works and other scholarship (Dessen), in contrast to Suetonius' statement. Also, the very idea of the use of *venter* has been debated: Peter Nani argues that it has become a Muse of its own, a simple desire for socio-economic advancement; Kirk Freudenberg advances a similar viewpoint, that Neronian poets are like so many young birds waiting to fill their stomach with pre-chewed worms from their mother, Nero.

I seek to clarify this notion of the *venter*, and demonstrate it as an antithesis to Stoicism by relating it to the works of Seneca. This will both disprove the ancient notion that Persius was unimpressed by Seneca, and illustrate the *venter* as the villain to Stoic ideals.

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